THE EFFECTS OF NATIONAL CULTURE DIMENSIONS AND ONLINE MEDIUM TYPE ON DECISION CONFIDENCE: A STUDY BASED ON US AND CHINA

Xiang Fang, Miami University (OH), fangx@miamioh.edu
T.M. Rajkumar, Miami University (OH), rajkumtm@miamioh.edu
Mark P. Sena, Xavier University, sena@xavier.edu

ABSTRACT

In an increasingly global economy, it is important to understand the norms that accompany interactions between employees with different cultural backgrounds. Organizations also rely on technology that allows decisions to be made based on different types of data. Perceptions of cross-cultural interactions could potentially differ depending on the online medium types used. Although computer supported decision making has been extensively studied, cross-cultural studies on decision confidence is limited. This experimental study examines national culture, cultural dimensions, and online medium type effects on decision confidence. The results of the study show that national culture and its dimensions (such as in-group collectivism and power distance) have a significant impact on decision confidence. However, the results do not show a significant difference between text and multimedia in terms of affecting decision confidence.

Keywords: National Culture, Online Medium Type, Decision Confidence, In-group Collectivism, Power Distance

INTRODUCTION

Decision confidence denotes the feeling of having done something either correctly or incorrectly (Insabato et al, 2010). The strength of decision makers' preference for the chosen option (Chernev 2009) reflects decision confidence. It also affects decision fulfillment, implementation effort, outcome success (Petrocelli & Sherman, 2010), decision accuracy (Bonaccio & Dalal 2006) and satisfaction with a decision (Kamis & Stohr, 2006). Decision confidence can also influence people's behaviors, sense making, and their task performance (Yang et al., 2017; Cunningham & Anderson, 2018). Decision confidence reveals both the quality and quantity of the evidence (Yeung & Summerfield, 2012). With the proliferation of multimedia, decision makers are increasingly able to examine and search for information in formats other than text. The online medium type adopted in the decision process has been shown to affect decision making (Dennis & Kinney 1998). In the only known study examining decision confidence and online medium type, Lim et al, (2000) did not firmly establish a relationship between online medium type and decision confidence. One objective of this study is to investigate the influence of online medium type on decision confidence.

In today's global workplaces, individuals involved in decision making are increasingly likely to come from different national cultures. Firms look for talent across the globe, while companies' market are expanding worldwide. National culture has been found to affect the evaluation of job applicants' profile (Ourirdi et al., 2016). Employees from different national cultures tend to have different confidence in their investment decisions (Chang & Lin, 2015). Consumers from different national cultures have shown varying level of decision confidence in conducting e-commerce (Sun, 2011). Asians tend to be more overconfident on the decisions than Americans and Europeans. Overconfidence impairs the effectiveness and efficiencies of auditing decision making (Hardies et al, 2012).

National culture has been categorized in several dimensions, such as collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance (Hofstede, 1991; House et al., 2004). While culture's influence on decision making has been studied extensively in the literature (Choi & Geistfeld, 2004), we could not find any study that examined the relationship between decision confidence and individual dimensions of national culture. Hence, the second objective of this study is to investigate the influence of national culture and cultural dimensions on decision confidence.

HYPOTHESES

Results show that multimedia improves the retention and subsequent recall of explanative information (Wetzel et al, 1994). The ability to retain and recall explanative information, in turn, produces a great ability to make correct inferences (Lim & Benbasat, 2002). Multimedia can be used as an aid to provide more vivid and detailed explanative information, corresponding to different decision options under consideration by the user. Such explanative information helps a user learn which option might be better suited for him, leading to a higher degree of decision confidence (Tan et al, 1998). Users might have different decision confidence associated with information coming from each type of media (text, audio, and video) (Hossain et al, 2011). For example, users have been found to prefer to obtain advice from a video-based advisor as opposed to a text-based advisor (Riegelsberger et al, 2005). Users may have a higher decision confidence when they use multimedia as opposed to text, however, multimedia might lead the person to focus on vivid nonverbal explanatory information and put less emphasis on other key information. As a result, the use of multimedia does not guarantee improved decision confidence (Tan et al, 1998).

Multimedia may better convey information and improve understanding of unstructured tasks. With rich information from multimedia, individuals could enhance their understanding about the localization of relevant cues (Kelton et al, 2010). We expect that the richer information and multiple cues from multimedia will make the users perceive that they have a better understanding and therefore will be more certain and confident about their decisions than those who use text-based media (Würtz, 2005). Based on discussion above, we hypothesize the following: **H1: Use of multimedia rather than text medium leads to greater decision confidence**.

Another construct that may affect decision confidence is national culture. Values are the core of most definitions of culture (Luna et al, 2002). National culture refers to the values, beliefs and assumptions learned in early childhood that differentiates one group of people from another (Hofstede, 1991). Individuals from different national cultures may have dissimilar personal values. Such different values could impact the strength of preference for the decisions. An individual's confidence in the decision reflects the strength of their preference for the chosen option (Chernev, 2009).

One explanation for the relationship between national culture and decision confidence is based on the probabilistic mental model theory that states that the decision to choose one option over another is based on the testing of contextual relevant cues (Gigerenzer et al, 1991). Each cue's contextual validity may impact decision confidence (Baranski & Petrusic 2001). Chinese tend to think more holistically, and conceive things in terms of wholes (Monga & John 2007). Such a paradigm may cause Chinese to ignore cues that do not fit the holistic worldview even though those cues may be valid. When the cues are brought to the decision maker's attention, variations exist between Americans and Chinese in how they utilize the cues leading to differences in decision confidence. (Yates et al, 1998).

Another explanation is based on the decision making processes used by Chinese. Chinese construe decision problems in a manner that is not necessarily congruent with Western decision schemas (Yates et al, 1997). Chinese rely more on prior beliefs and experience-based strategies than do Americans (Nisbett et al. 2001). Researchers (Weber & Morris, 2010; Yates et al, 1996) argue that Chinese educational practices do not encourage critical thinking as a mental habit. The reliance on prior beliefs and lack of critical thinking might lead to overconfidence in his or her decisions.

Acker et al. (2008) and Yates et al (1997) find that Asians have a higher level of confidence compared with British because Asians under weigh the potential for downside risk (or have a higher unrealistic optimism). Chinese tend to expect support from their groups even if there are economic and financial setbacks (Chua et al, 2009). The potential support that Chinese might obtain from their extended network could make them feel more confident in their decision making (Weber & Morris, 2010). Based on discussion above, we hypothesize the following: **H2: When given the same information, Chinese managers have more decision confidence than American managers have**.

Literature shows that the national culture construct includes multiple dimensions. For example, Hofstede (1991) pioneered national culture research that identifies five national culture dimensions: power distance, uncertainty

avoidance, masculinity–femininity, individualism–collectivism, and long-term orientation. In the GLOBE study, House et al. (2004) extend national culture research by identifying nine national culture dimensions and by distinguishing each in terms of values (i.e., the way things should be) and practices (i.e., the way things are).

Table 1 lists the culture dimensions addressed in the GLOBE study (Javidan et al, 2006). Collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and power distance are the top three national culture dimensions studied in the information systems literature (Leidner & Kayworth 2006). Since the GLOBE study extended Hofstede's dimensions, we decided to focus on in-group collectivism, uncertainty avoidance and power distance. Moreover, in-group collectivism and uncertainty dimensions may have greater influence as evidenced by the large difference between Americans and Chinese practice scores in the GLOBE study.

Table 1. US and China practice scores on Culture Dimensions from the GLOBE study

	US	China	Absolute Difference
In-group Collectivism	4.25	5.80	1.55
Uncertainty Avoidance	4.15	4.94	0.79
Assertiveness	4.55	3.76	0.79
Institutional Collectivism	4.20	4.77	0.57
Future Orientation	4.15	3.75	0.40
Gender	3.34	3.05	0.29
Human Orientation	4.17	4.36	0.19
Power Distance	4.88	5.04	0.16
Performance Orientation	4.49	4.45	0.04

In-group collectivism refers to how strongly individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in the organizations they work for (Javidan et al. 2006). People in collectivistic cultures tend to emphasize context more than those from individualistic cultures (Triandis 2004). Collectivists place more values on relation information and social networking than individualists (Lehman et al, 2004) and prefer indirect communication (Atwater et al, 2009).

Collectivists are more attentive to relationships in the environment than individualists (Ji et al, 2000). For collectivists, contextual cues are more salient, and more likely to be noticed (Branzei et al, 2007). Thus, collectivists tend to collect and have more information than individualists. This increased amount of information could provide them with greater decision confidence than individualists. Specifically, for collectivists, obtaining more relational and social networking information are essential in decision making, and can enhance decision makers' confidence (Farh et al,1998). In contrast, individualists attribute the causes of social events to their own internal factors, and are less influenced by relational information (Lehman et al. 2004). Compared to collectivists, individualists' lighter emphasis on relational information or even completely ignoring it could potentially reduce confidence as the relational information might be essential to decision making. Collectivists are more willing to share information resources among group members (Shin et al., 2007). Such information sharing could enhance collectivists' understanding of both relation information and context cues, which might help them gain more decision confidence. Based on discussion above, we hypothesize the following: **H3: Decision makers with higher scores on in-group collectivism are more confident in decisions than those with lower in-group collectivism scores.**

Uncertainty avoidance is another dimension of national culture that could affect decision confidence. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree that a society, organization, or group depends on social norms, rules, and procedures to reduce the unpredictability of future events (Hofstede 1991; Javidan et al. 2006). Managers with high uncertainty avoidance might have lower assurance and confidence in making decisions such as entering new foreign market and adopting new technology (Nielsen & Nielsen, 2011). Specifically, individuals in countries with high uncertainty avoidance were less likely to adopt new technologies (Im et al, 2011).

Decision makers often face deadlines or time pressures to make a decision. Individuals with high uncertainty avoidance tend to be more worried about ambiguity and may desire more time for the decision making process compared to individuals with low uncertainty avoidance. Attitude towards ambiguity has been found to affect

decision confidence (Harding & Ren, 2007). Decision makers try to establish additional rules and procedures and attain more expertise as a solution to cope with uncertainty and ambiguity (Lebas & Weigenstein 1986). The desire to reduce ambiguity motivates individuals with high uncertainty avoidance to seek and obtain additional information. With relevant new information, individuals are more likely to have a feeling of possessing sufficient information, and therefore have higher decision confidence (Zinkhan & Balazs, 1998). Following the above theoretical discussion, we hypothesize the following: **H4: High uncertainty avoidance individuals have lower decision confidence than those with low uncertainty avoidance.**

Power distance is another cultural dimension that can possibly affect decision confidence. Power distance refers to the unequal distribution of power in a society (Javidan et al. 2006). High power distance is characterized in firms by less participation by subordinates in the decision-making processes, and rely more on one-way communication. Managers expect subordinates to follow their decisions and comply with their orders without questioning their authority. People with high power distance scores are more willing to accept power inequality in their society, and willing to accept decisions made by their superiors or more powerful party (Zhao et al, 2008). They also tend to accept the imposed work roles (Kirkman et al, 2009), and even coercive autocratic power; they obediently follow orders more easily than those with low power distance orientation (Merkin, 2006).

Managers with high power distance orientation expect subordinates not to challenge their decisions and voice different opinions. Additionally, these managers desire to make a strong and confident impression to their superior and peers. Expressing a high confidence in their decisions may convey a sense of strong impression (Greer & Stephens, 2001). A manager with high power distance orientation is more likely to treats all subordinates homogeneously resulting in less need to respond to each subordinate individually (Antonakis & Atwater, 2002). Hence, the interaction tends to be more homogenous and less open to different or conflicting viewpoints that might be against the decision. Such interaction might not necessarily increase decision accuracy, but could lead to higher decision confidence (Heath & Gonzalez, 1995). The potential homogenous and supportive interaction between managers and their subordinates might lead managers to more easily obtain and feel they have sufficient information in support of their decisions. People with high power distance scores tend to willingly accept their managers' guidance, and cooperate with managers (Halevy et al, 2011). Managers with power have better grasp of big pictures, and can process information at higher levels of abstraction (Smith & Galinsky, 2010). Therefore, managers are more likely to focus on decision related information (Overbeck & Park, 2001) and direct their subordinates to conduct corresponding searches. Based on the above four theoretical viewpoints, we hypothesize the following**: H5: Managers with high power distance scores have a higher decision confidence than managers with low power distance scores.**

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Because internal validity is a critical concern when testing theories, laboratory experiments were used to attain precision of measurement and control over extraneous variables (Tan et al., 1998). Part-time MBA students from two American universities and two Chinese universities participated in this lab experiment study. All the participants completed a performance appraisal of a manager in a Sino-American joint venture. The participant's decision confidence on the above appraisal was measured. Performance appraisal and confidence measurement followed Lim et al.'s study (2000).

All participants used information from a job interview in which the manager had discussions and answered a series of questions related to different aspects of leadership in the company. The discussion ranged from a macro view such as his vision of the company to micro issues such as how he would motivate and deal with conflicts and unproductive employees. The manager took the job interview before he started his work in the company. The job interview was presented in one of two types of media (text or video) to each participant. The video clip includes the physical appearance of the interviewee and the verbal conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interview questions and answers were taken from another study (Fang & Rajkumar, 2013).

The participants followed the task and viewed the job interview of the manager either via a text transcript or a video clip. Based on the job interview information, participants completed a performance appraisal of the manager. Participants then answered questions about the confidence of their appraisal decision. All participants were

required to provide a written justification regarding his/her appraisal decision. The written justifications were used to ensure that participants took the experiment seriously. Figure 1 depicts the design of the experiment.
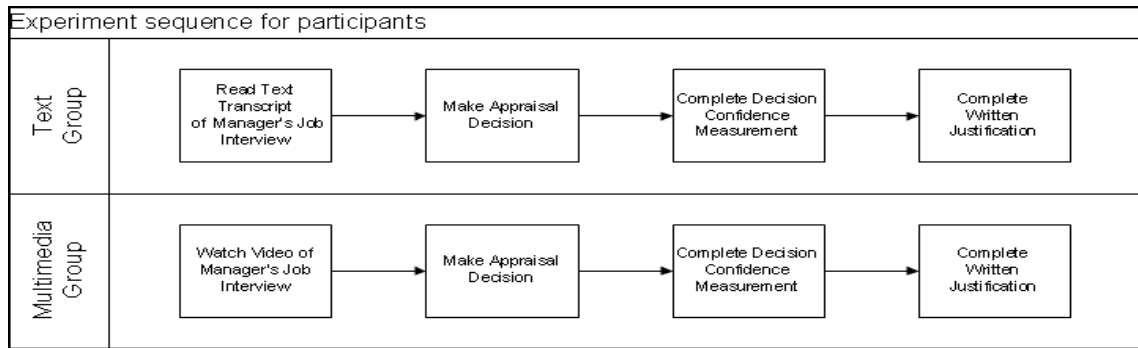

Figure 1. Experimental Design

Online medium type is one independent variable for this experiment. Two online medium types (text and multimedia) are compared to assess the online medium type's impact on decision confidence. In particular, some experimental participants viewed a job interview video clip. Other participants read a text transcript of the job interview. In both cases, participants were allowed to reexamine the information. Evaluators' national culture, uncertainty avoidance, in-group collectivism and power distance are the other independent variables for this experiment. Uncertainty avoidance, in-group collectivism and power distance were measured using the GLOBE scale in terms of practice score. The dependent variable is the level of confidence in the appraisal decision. The appraisal decision and the corresponding confidence measurement used for this study are adopted from Lim et al.'s study (2000). The reported reliability of the instrument was 0.84.

Part-time MBA students with full-time work experience were recruited from two business schools in the US and two business schools in China. Ideal participants would be real-world business professionals from a random sample. However, the demographic profile is hard to control and could possibly cause confounds. In contrast, using MBA students allows us to control confounds. The demographic information depicting mean age, mean years of work experience, and gender of participants is summarized in table 2. Participation in the experiment was completely voluntary. The participants were allowed to discontinue their participation in the experiment at any point of time during the experiment. Experiment participants were randomly assigned to two experiment groups (either multimedia or text interview). No collaboration was allowed.

The participants evaluated either the U.S. manager who is Caucasian and a native English speaker or a Chinese manager who is Han and a native Mandarin speaker. Both managers are bilingual and had work experience in both the U.S. and China. Participant were randomly assigned the U.S. or Chinese manager. Chinese participants always accessed the Chinese version of the interview (text or multimedia) either with the Chinese manager or with the U.S. manager. Similarly, U.S. participants used the English version of the interview with either manager. The pilot study indicated that participants understood the manager's conversation in the interview video. All instruments and supporting documents in the study were translated from English into Chinese and pilot tested. The translation was conducted by following the back-to-back approach as suggested by Steensma et al (2000).

Table 2. Summary of Demographics

	Female %	Male %	Age	Full Time Work Experience
US	35.3	64.7	30	7
China	35.1	64.9	32.3	8

RESULTS

The Cronbach's Alpha value for confidence is 0.761. The national culture dimensions of in-group collectivism; uncertainty avoidance and power distance have alpha values of 0.624, 0.447 and 0.685 respectively. Because of the

low alpha score for uncertainty avoidance, we could not test its related hypotheses (H4). Low alpha values are not uncommon in cross-cultural studies (Bertsch, 2012). In the cross-cultural setting, an interviewee (e.g., a Chinese manager) is from a different national culture than the evaluator (e.g., the U.S. evaluators). In a uniform cultural setting, both the interviewee and evaluator are from the same national culture. The culture setting, cross or uniform, is a potential confound. However, the results show that the cultural setting does not affect decision confidence (F-value 0.26 and P-value 0.612).

Hypothesis H1 states that use of multimedia rather than text media leads to greater decision confidence. Hypothesis H2 says that when given the same information, Chinese managers have more decision confidence than American managers have. Table 3 reports the means and standard deviations for confidence score, corresponding to different national cultures and online medium types. The ANOVA analysis results are summarized in Tables 4 and 5. The results indicate that national culture's main effect was significant, but online medium type was not. There was no significant difference in the decision confidence regardless of what media was used.

Table 3 reports the means and standard deviations for confidence score, corresponding to different national cultures and online medium types. The ANOVA analysis results are summarized in Tables 4 and 5. The results indicate that national culture's main effect was significant, but online medium type was not. There was no significant difference in the decision confidence regardless of what media was used.

Hypothesis H3 states that decision makers with higher scores on in-group collectivism will be more confident in decisions than those with lower in-group collectivism scores. The regression analysis results are summarized in Tables 6 and 7. The results indicate that in-group collectivism effect on decision confidence was significant, supporting Hypothesis H3.

Hypothesis 5 states that managers with high power distance scores have a higher decision confidence than managers with low power distance scores. Table 8 and 9 show the regression analysis results regarding power distance on confidence. The results indicate the effect of power distance on decision confidence was significant, supporting Hypothesis H5. As discussed previously, Hypothesis H4 was not tested due to the low Cronbach's Alpha score for uncertainty avoidance.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Decision Confidence

	Mean (Decision Confidence)	Std. deviation
Text (N= 67)	13.463	3.624
Multimedia (N= 91)	13.538	4.418
Chinese (N=95)	14.242	3.709
American (N=63)	12.397	4.401

Table 4. Model Statistics for ANOVA Analysis (Decision Confidence)

F Value	P Value	Sample Size
4.01	<.020	158

Table 5 Variance Statistics in ANOVA (Decision Confidence)

Source	DF	Type III SS	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F	Related Hypotheses
Media	1	0.008	0.008	0.00	0.982	H1 (Not supported)
Culture	1	128.769	128.769	8.00	<.005	H2 (Supported)

Table 6. Model Statistics for Regression Analysis

F Value	P Value	Sample Size
8.93	0.0033	158

Table 7. Parameter Estimate for In-group Collectivism

Source	Parameter Estimate	T Value	Pr > |t|	Related Hypotheses
INGRCOL	0.230	2.99	0.0033	H3 (Supported)

Table 8. Model Statistics for Regression Analysis

F Value	P Value	Sample Size
4.77	0.030	158

Table 9. Parameter Estimate for Power Distance

Source	Parameter Estimate	T Value	Pr > |t|	Related Hypotheses
Power Distance	0.178	2.18	0.0304	H5 (Supported)

CONCLUSIONS

Though multimedia could assist managers in many ways, managers do not have to view information in multimedia format to gain decision confidence when assessing job applicants. Textual information enables managers to gain as much decision confidence as multimedia information does. Practically speaking, text files are easier to transmit and read, if not easier to understand, compared to multimedia files. While the nature of multimedia is continuously changing, our findings indicate that organizations do not have to use multimedia information to evaluate job applicants unless they have reasons other than enhancing decision confidence.

We found that decision confidence could vary across national cultures (holding other things constant). When decisions are being made in a global environment, people must realize that the decision maker's national culture could matter. Organizations should recognize the potential for the inflated confidence of decision makers based on cultural backgrounds as overconfidence could be detrimental to decision making. To offset the overconfidence of the decision makers, perhaps organizations could focus on decision makers' commitment to the decisions and implementation efforts.

Extracting relational and implicit information from text and multimedia could make Chinese managers realize they have sufficient information. This realization contributes to their higher decision confidence. Hence, organizations should caution and train US managers to value and obtain sufficient information, such as utilizing implicit (tone, body language) and relational information. These types of information could be useful to enhance US managers' decision confidence. Chinese managers may be advised not to ignore critical information against their decision or information that may not fit their holistic view to avoid a biased or overconfident decision.

Our study indicates that, compared to individualistic managers, in-group collectivistic managers have stronger sense of decision confidence. Managers with strong individualistic orientation might be encouraged to value indirect communication and contextual cues. Individualistic managers should actively engage in social networking to search for relevant contextual cues, which may exist in indirect communication, and facilitate information sharing and increase decision confidence.

Managers with higher power distance should recognize that they might gain higher confidence at the cost of not receiving different and conflicting opinions from their subordinates. Those opinions could have empowered the managers to make more accurate decisions. When subordinates cooperate with those managers, they can identify and obtain sufficient information. Organizations need to train their managers especially those with high power distance scores to facilitate cooperation across various power hierarchies for the purpose of getting sufficient information and encourage subordinates to voice diverging opinions. Hearing divergent opinions may reduce the chance that managers become too confident.

Additionally, organizations could encourage employees with low power distance scores to realize that managers generally have good grasp of big pictures. Gaining such realization can foster cooperation between managers and their subordinates. With the cooperation, managers may find it easier to guide their subordinates to obtain information related to the decision, which eventually helps managers to improve decision confidence.

Compared to power distance, in-group collectivism has higher parameter estimate and smaller P value. It is possible that collectivism dimension is more important than power distance dimension in terms of influencing decision confidence. We therefore should be cautious when assessing each dimension's effect on decision confidence.

A criticism of many information technology research has been the use of undergraduate students, limiting the generalizability of the research findings. Relying on individuals with full time employment experience, this study was conducted in the context of performance appraisal and personnel decision. We thus expect the findings from the study to be generalizable to similar business contexts. The study sample is intended to represent the work force in multinational corporations that recruit globally and facilitate the generalization of the findings to the organizations that have employees with various national culture backgrounds.

Research is particularly scant on the effects of recruiters' national culture on the evaluation of job applicants (Ouirdi et al., 2016). Our study contributes to the literature and attempts to fill the gap in this area by examining the national culture of the managers conducting performance appraisal and making retention decisions. Furthermore, this study not only examines the national culture as a whole but also national culture's dimensions influence on decision confidence, which contributes the literature by shedding light on in-group collectivism and power distance's impact on decision confidence. Therefore, researchers studying decision confidence may need to consider including national culture dimensions in their theoretical models.

The findings of Lim et al. (2000) on online medium type and decision confidence reveal that online medium type has no significant effect on decision confidence. Not only does our study confirm these findings but also provides evidence of external validity for their study, using participants with full time employment experience in two countries that have distinctive national cultures.

There are inherent limitations in studies with experimental or empirical methodologies. This study limits itself to the inclusion of a few widely studied national culture dimensions. Including other dimensions (such as assertiveness) could provide additional insights. Moreover, our study includes just one sample application of text and video. Differences in presentation attractiveness and effectiveness (in both formats) and the specific actors and information included could produce confounding results.

In our study, uncertainty avoidance, exhibited low Cronbach's alpha values, resulting in its exclusion from the analyses. We encourage future scholars to reexamine the impact of uncertainty avoidance and examine the relative importance of each cultural dimension's impact on decision confidence. This study was conducted in two national cultures (US and China) only. The applicability of the findings is limited to just these two national cultures unless similar studies are replicated in other national cultures. Future studies could include subjects from additional national cultures in order to validate and extend the scope of the research questions examined in this study.

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