



## The Evaluation of the Perceptions of Tourists Participated in A Package Tour within the Scope of Tourist Guide Performance

\* Eda AVCI <sup>a</sup> 

<sup>a</sup> Dokuz Eylul University, Efes Vocational School, Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, İzmir/Turkey

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### Abstract

Although package tours include many products and services, the presentation and management of these products and services are mostly done with tourist guides. With this aspect, the performance of tourist guides, which is one of the key points of package tours is very important in success. When the literature is examined, it is noteworthy that many studies reveal the role and effect of the tourist guide on the success of the package tour. The main purpose of this study is to determine the evaluations of the foreign tourists traveling in the scope of package tour regarding the performance of the tourist guide. For this purpose, the research was carried out by using qualitative research methods. The sample of the study consists of 19 foreign tourists traveling in the same group. The package tour selected within the scope of the research conducted in May 2018 starts in Istanbul and the tourists visit different tourist destinations of Turkey during 15 days. Within the scope of the research, participants were asked to evaluate the first half of the tour on the seventh day, which is the middle of the 15-day tour and to express what they expect from the other half of the tour. The structured questionnaire forms, which consist of expressions that the participants fully reflect with their own free will, were examined by the content analysis method and the findings obtained as a result of the analysis were collected under three dimensions as positive expressions, negative expressions, and suggestions. The positive expressions dimension consists of the personality traits, knowledge level, communication ability, presentation ability, organizational ability, and guide-group interaction themes. Under the negative expressions dimension, there are themes of program management and guide-group interaction and extra activities, giving information and guide-group interaction themes are included under the dimension of suggestions. In the conclusion part of the study, the suggestions for effective guidance services in package tours were discussed within the framework of the related literature and recommendations of the participants.

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\* Corresponding Author

E-mail: [eda.avci@deu.edu.tr](mailto:eda.avci@deu.edu.tr) (E. Avci)

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## INTRODUCTION

Package tours are formed by combining many products and services and are sold to consumers at a single price (Sheldon & Mak, 1987). As one of the basic building blocks of the travel sector, package tours are generally preferred because of the advantages of containing all the products and services needed during the journey, providing savings and detailed information about touristic products and services (Titanont, 2004). Package tours, which started with the Grand Tour organized for educational purposes during the Renaissance period (Walton, 2011), gained another form with the first travel agency founded by Thomas Cook (Colakoglu, Epik & Efendi, 2007, p.13). Package tours, which continue to develop in parallel with technology, constitute an important place in the industry where 1 billion 323 million people travel today (unwto.org, 2017).

In package tours that are realized with the cooperation of many service providers such as accommodation, food, and beverage, travel and transportation due to its nature, another factor that is as important as these enterprises is the tourist guide (Beritelli, 2011). A successful package tour organization develop depending on many factors such as accommodation, food, and drink, transportation services, features of destinations, attitudes and behaviors of the members of the group, communication between the local community and the members of the group but the guiding service that mediates the access of these elements to consumers is the key point of the package tour (Avci, 2018). Therefore, it will not be wrong to say that the qualifications of the tourist guide are an important factor that directly affects the success of the package tour. When the literature on the subject is examined, it is noteworthy that many studies are supporting this view.

In this research, it is aimed to determine evaluations of foreign tourists traveling in Turkey within the scope of package tours, on the performance of tourist guides. The research consists of three main sections. In the first part, the literature review about the characteristics of the tourist guides, the attitudes and behaviors of the tourist guides during the tour, importance, and role of the tourist guides in package tours takes place. The methodology where the aim, method, sample and analysis technique of the research are explained in the second part of the study. In the third part, the findings obtained from the analysis of the research data are presented. The research is completed in the conclusion part where the findings are evaluated, and the recommendations are presented.

## Literature

The movement of travel, which started with the relocation of people for religion, health and trade after the establishment of the settled life and whose history dates back to the invention of the wheel, became widespread in parallel with the development of human beings in the historical process. The Egyptian priests' guidance to the Roman Emperor Hadrian and his wife was the first guiding act in written sources. Later, with the Grand Tours that became popular in the 17th century and the first package tours organized by Thomas Cook the foundations of the profession of guiding were laid (Colakoglu et al. 2007, p.128). The steps taken towards the development of professional tourist guidance in the 19th century intensified as of the first years of the Republic and became legal in the Tourist Guiding Profession Law No. 6326 which entered into force in 2012 (iro.org.tr).

While there are many definitions related to the profession of tourist guiding, Tourist Guiding Profession Law which is determining the scope and limitations of guiding services offered in Turkey, provides the most comprehensive definition of the subject (Resmi Gazete, 2012). The International Tour Managers Association defines

tourist guidance as directing individual or group tourists to monuments, historical sites and museums in the city/region, and providing inspiring and entertaining information about cultural and natural heritage and environment using the language of the visitor (Wong, Ap, & Sandiford, 1998). As can be clearly understood from the definitions, tourist guides are not only translators who are responsible for providing all kinds of services during travel, leading the group and creating free time for group members as much as the tour program allows (Chiang & Chen, 2014) but also the ones who provide information about cultural, folkloric and social values in the destinations and thus mediate the enrichment of tourists' holiday experiences (Dahles, 2002). Tourists build their experiences on explanations and interpretations of the tourist guide (Schmidt, 1979).

Olcay, Bozgeyik, Akoz and Surme (2015) state that the features that a professional tourist guide should have are abilities of communication, speaking, knowledge, equipment, leadership, planning, coordination, supervision, and physical competence. Zhang and Chow (2004) describe the professional roles of tourist guides as actors, intermediaries, balance elements, caregivers/supervisors, teachers, cultural brokers, and information transmitters. Black and Weiler (2005) emphasize that these roles improve the quality of the tour. According to Zengin and Eker (2014), guides are cultural ambassadors who create important links between different societies, countries, and cultures in addition to their professional roles during the tour. Tourist guides are responsible for providing services in accommodation, transportation, food and beverage businesses and for solving the problems experienced during the tour, as well as providing solutions for the problems that may arise between local people and tourists due to lack of foreign languages (Geva & Goldman, 1991). Therefore, tourist guides serve as a mediator between the tourists and the social environment on solving problems and providing to ensure a safe environment for tourists (Pearce, 1982; Schmidt, 1979).

When the literature is examined, it is noteworthy that many studies are showing that the performance of tourist guide and behaviors during the tour affect the perception and satisfaction level of tourists (Mossberg, 1995; Grabowski & Genge, 2000; Zhang & Chow, 2004; Black & Ham, 2005; Chang, 2006; Huang & Kao, 2011; Hu & Wall, 2013; Weiler & Walker, 2014; Lin, Ting, Hsu, & Wu, 2014; Chan, Hsu & Baum, 2015). The attitudes and behaviors of the tourist guides, who are representative of the travel enterprises, during the tour are considered as an important factor affecting the quality of service perceived by the consumer. Because the tourist guide on behalf of the travel business provides communication in all processes from the beginning to the end of the package tour (Wang, Hsieh & Chen, 2002; Wang, Hsieh, Yeh, & Tsai, 2004). In this respect, the tourist guide is one of the key factors in the positive development of the package tour experience (Schmidt, 1979; Quiroga, 1990; Wang, Hsieh & Huan, 2000; Chang, 2006).

According to Chiang and Chen (2014), there is an important link among the quality of communication developed between the tourists and the service providers and the re-purchase. The positive attitudes and behaviors of the guides emerge as an important factor in gaining loyal customers for travel enterprises (Zhang & Chow, 2004). The performance of the tourist guide during the tour can have positive effects even on tourists who have had a negative tour experience before and therefore have prejudices and negative thoughts (Mossberg 1995; Yale 1995; Enoch 1996; Hanefors & Mossberg 1999; Bowie & Chang, 2005; Cook, Yale & Marqua, 2005; Ahipasaoglu 1996, cited by Karamustafa & Çesmeçi, 2006; Chiang & Chen, 2014). The communication skills of the tourist guide affect the

socialization and communication between the group and himself as well as creating positive interaction between group members (Holloway, 1981; Ryan & Dewar, 1995).

On the other hand, while the quality of the tourist guide is the key to the success of the package tour, package tour providers who try to reduce the tour costs can be mistaken in the employment of tourist guides. They employ more inexperienced guides to make them work cheaper, and the services provided by those who do not have sufficient experience may be weak in quality. Consequently, package tour providers trying to keep the tour prices low, make profits in the short term and suffer losses due to unsatisfied consumers in the long term. Again, the suggestions in a direction that the tourist guides force the group to contracted shopping points to increase the rate of profit are considered as another mistake made by package tour providers during the tour management process. According to Yu and Weiler (2000) and Wang, et al. (2000), the negative opinions of the tourists about the guides mostly occur when they keep the group wait at the shopping points for a long time or force the group to shop in places where they receive a high commission. The pressures of the package tour providers to direct the group to the contracted shopping points remove the guides from their main duties and make them the ones representing the interests of third parties and trying to earn commissions by unethical methods. However, tourist guides are the basic elements of package tours that affect consumer satisfaction, loyalty, intention of re-purchase, word of mouth communication, the image and reputation of the travel business with the service quality and performance they offer (Mossberg, 1995; Wang, et al., 2000; Ap & Wong, 2001; Heung, 2008).

## **Methodology**

The main purpose of this research on tourist guides who are one of the important elements of the package tour is to determine the assessments of foreign tourists traveling in Turkey within the scope of package tours, about the performance of tourist guides. The research question determined for this purpose as “What are the experiences and impressions of the foreign tourists participating in the package tour, about the tourist guide during the tour?” and the literature review and the professional experience of the researcher as a tourist guide were effective in determining the research question. The research was carried out in order to examine a research question in-depth and, therefore, the research data was collected using qualitative research methods that allow in-depth research of the research question.

The population of the research consists of foreign tourists traveling to Turkey to participate in package tours. The sample of the research was formed by the non-probability sampling technique due to the use of an in-depth research model with small groups. In line with the main purpose and the question of the research, 19 foreign tourists traveling in the same group were reached through purposive sampling. The package tour selected within the scope of the research conducted during May 2018, starts from Istanbul and the tourists accompanied by the same guide, visit different tourist destinations of Turkey during 15 days.

In order to collect the research data, the structured questionnaire forms that the participants were asked to evaluate the first half of the tour with their guide on the seventh day and to express what they expect from the other half of the tour, were used. The forms, which consisted of expressions that the participants reflected completely with their own free will, were examined by the content analysis method in accordance with the research question. In the first stage of the analysis, the perceptual and the reflected expressions showing the participants' inner worlds but not directly related to the research question were identified and reserved for exclusion from the analysis. Then, the

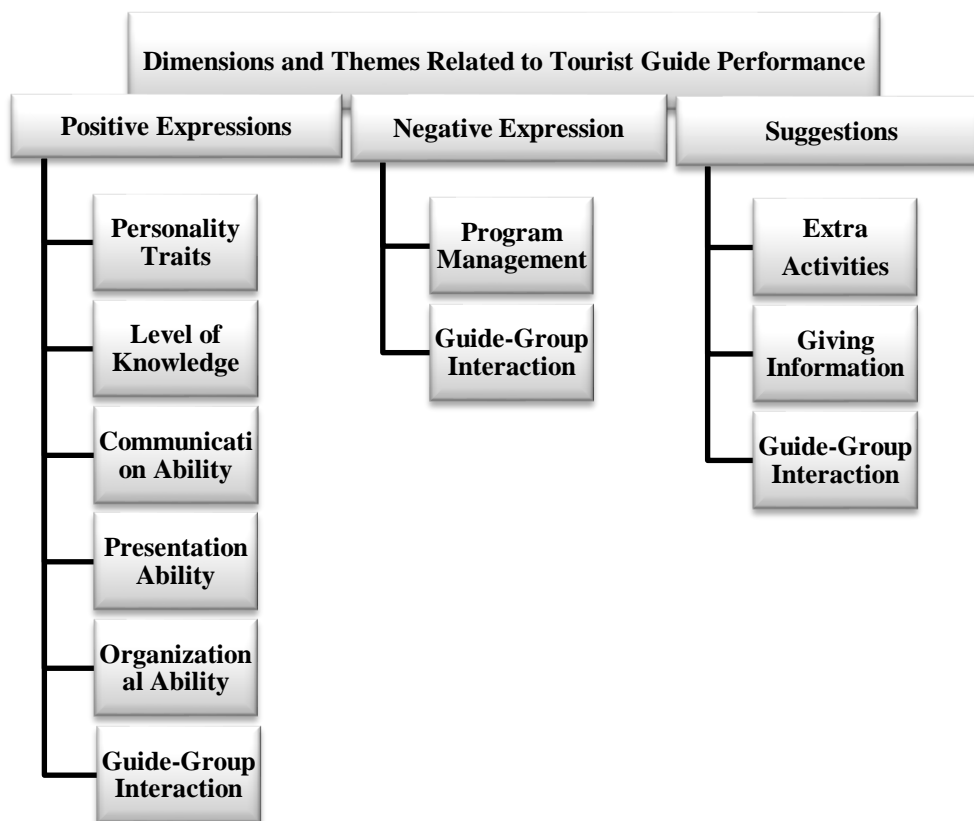
statements directly related to the research question were analyzed and the findings were gathered under three dimensions as positive statements, negative statements, and suggestions. In the analysis of the research data, the fact that the researcher is a professional tourist guide has shaped the point of view, but the themes and dimensions have formed their final shape in line with the consensus of the experts in the field.

In addition to the evaluations of the experts, the expressions of the participants were shown in the tables to ensure the credibility of the research. As for the transferability, the findings were tried to explain in detail to enable the readers to decide whether the research is compatible with their environment. Also, in order to increase the reliability, it was ensured that the data be collected systematically and comprehensively, to be dealt with in detail while being analyzed, to show the themes and the relations between them while transferring the results. Although the professional experience of the researcher as a tourist guide was effective, the prejudices or the assumptions of the researcher were tried to be kept away from the research for the confirmability.

On the other hand, as the sample of the research which is conducted to examine a research question in-depth, is evaluated as sufficient for the research data, the fact that the research reflects the experiences of a single group with the tourist guide, constitute the limitation of the research.

**Findings**

The findings, which were determined as a result of the analysis of the data obtained within the scope of the research by content analysis method, were collected under three dimensions as positive expressions, negative expressions and suggestions and are presented in Figure 1. under the name of the dimensions and themes related to the performance of the tourist guide.



**Figure 1.** Dimensions and Themes Related to Tourist Guide Performance

As shown in Figure 1., the positive expression dimension is composed of 6 themes: personality traits, level of knowledge, communication ability, presentation ability, organizational ability, and guide-group interaction, the negative expression dimension consists of 2 themes: program management and guide-group interaction and the suggestions dimension consists of 3 themes: extra activities, giving information and guide-group interaction.

**Table 1.** Themes Related to Positive Expression Dimension

<b>Personality Traits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a good personality</li> <li>• Showing no negative emotions</li> <li>• Having reliable recommendations on food and beverage</li> <li>• Being quite entertaining</li> <li>• Being moderate</li> </ul>
<b>Level of Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a great knowledge of history and culture</li> <li>• Giving detailed information about Turkish culture and traditions</li> <li>• Having detailed information on many subjects</li> <li>• Providing information on many different topics during the tour</li> </ul>
<b>Communication Ability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a flexible sense of humor</li> <li>• Having good communication skills</li> <li>• Being open to communication</li> <li>• Being very successful in answering the questions asked</li> </ul>
<b>Presentation Ability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having an impressive presentation of his/her country</li> <li>• Reflecting his/her love of history</li> <li>• Being passionate about explaining Turkish culture, historical structures, environment, and people</li> <li>• Making the tour interesting with explanations</li> <li>• Reflecting pride with his/her country</li> <li>• Giving quite enjoyable information in the vehicle</li> <li>• Being successful in sharing and presenting Turkish culture</li> <li>• Having high knowledge and desire to share</li> <li>• Having a very entertaining and informative narration</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational Ability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following the tour program successfully</li> <li>• Being sensitive to the tour Schedule</li> <li>• Taking a decisive stance while guiding the group</li> <li>• Being capable of keeping the group together</li> <li>• Being successful in time and group management</li> <li>• Preparing each day of the tour as a new adventure</li> <li>• Being a good leader</li> <li>• Having useful restaurant and shopping recommendations</li> <li>• Making useful warnings during the tour</li> <li>• Creating free time for the group</li> </ul>
<b>Guide-Group Interaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assisting group members to meet specific dietary needs</li> <li>• Giving pleasant surprises to group members</li> <li>• Ensuring that all members of the group have a good experience</li> <li>• Trying to answer every question (including nonsense) of group members</li> <li>• Being a mediator for group members in the confusion caused by language and cultural differences</li> <li>• Trying to integrate group members</li> <li>• Treating all group members equally</li> <li>• Making the group have an enjoyable time</li> <li>• Having a pleasant time by singing in the car</li> </ul>

When the themes below the dimension reflecting the positive statements of the participants about the performance of the tourist guide are examined, it is seen that the most expressions are under the presentation and organization ability. The guide was evaluated positively by the participants the fact that guide follows the program designed by the travel agency, his/her time management and leading group.

The participants also positively evaluated the fact that the guide creates free time for the group to spend on their own, designs every day of the tour as a new adventure, provides useful information to the group members about food and beverage, and warns the group against the dangers when it necessary. Besides, the fact that the guide has detailed information about many subjects such as culture, history, geography and conveying this information in an exciting, entertaining and remarkable manner also affects the participants' positive experience.

On the other hand, the fact that the guide has a harmonious, calm, reliable personality, has positive communication with the group members, has a humorous side, creates a strong communication environment by closely dealing with the group members, and strives for each of the group members to have positive experiences are among important findings positively evaluated by the participants.

**Table 2.** Themes Related to Negative Expression Dimension

<b>Program Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not spending enough time in places visited apart from the Topkapi Palace</li> <li>• Presenting inadequate information at the welcome meeting</li> </ul>
<b>Guide-Group Interaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying to play games to make group members remember each other's name</li> <li>• Treating the group members as children</li> </ul>

Findings related to the negative statements obtained within the scope of the study were found to be related to the problems experienced during the implementation of the tour program and the interaction of the guide with the group members. It is noteworthy that the short duration of the visits of the cultural assets during the tour program was criticized by the participants. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the guide's efforts to communicate with the group members both him/herself and the other group members are not always perceived correctly and are criticized.

**Table 3.** Themes Related to Suggestions

<b>Extra Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less activity during the day of the balloon tour in Cappadocia</li> <li>• To continue suggestions on days when food is not included</li> </ul>
<b>Giving Information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drawing more attention to the interesting details on the tour routes</li> <li>• Talking less in the car with the microphone</li> <li>• Further guidance on the country's recent political developments</li> </ul>
<b>Guide-Group Interaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being more understanding about people repeating some questions because of being elderly</li> <li>• Remembering that the members of the group are adults and should not force to communicate with each other</li> </ul>

As a result of the research, it was determined that the participants had remarkable suggestions about extra activities in the program, information presentation of the guide and the guide-group interaction. It is seen that suggestions that will affect the success of the tour concentrated on subjects such as having less activity during busy days within the program, continuing to provide information on services not included in the program, drawing more attention to the interesting details that appear on the tour route and giving more detailed information about the politics of the country. It is also noteworthy that there are suggestions for the communication of the guide with the group members such as being more understanding about people repeating some questions because of being elderly and not forcing group members to communicate with each other.

On the other hand, as a result of analyzes, it was found that the participants made evaluations about the other important components of the package tour: food and beverage, accommodation, transportation, visited destinations and group members as well as the performance of the tourist guide. The participants evaluated the accommodation

and catering facilities used during the tour as clean, tidy and well qualified. The participants' expressions that it is quite enjoyable to experience local delicacies are among the important findings found in the research.

In terms of the means of transportation, it is seen that the vehicle is clean and comfortable, the driver does his job well and that there is continuously drinking water in the vehicle. The participants also describe the destinations visited during the tour as very impressive and beautiful. Particularly, the fact that each destination visited reflects its own local culture and it is an unforgettable experience to discover local cultures is among the remarkable statements of the participants.

The other expressions that the participants reflected in the package tour evaluations were related to the interaction of group members with each other. While the participants evaluated positively the harmony of the group members and having a pleasant time together, the negotiation of the group members' conversations among themselves during the presentation of the guide evaluated as selfish and disrespectful behavior.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

This research whose main goal is to determine the evaluations of foreign tourists traveling in Turkey within the scope of the package tour about the performance of tourist guides was carried out by using qualitative research methods that allow in-depth exploration of the question. Within the scope of this research, 19 foreign tourists traveling in Turkey as part of a package tour were reached and on the seventh day of the 15-day travel time, the participants were requested to express impressions they gained about the tourist guide during six days they spent and their expectations about the rest of the tour. The forms, which consist of all the participants' free expressions, were analyzed by the content analysis method and the findings were collected under three dimensions as positive expressions, negative expressions, and suggestions.

The positive expressions dimension consists of the personality traits, level of knowledge, communication ability, presentation ability, organizational ability, and guide-group interaction themes. Under the negative expressions dimension, there are themes of program management and guide-group interaction. The fact that the themes under the dimension of positive expressions are more than the themes of negative expressions shows that the participants perceived the tourist guide performance positively in general. The participants find the information level of the guide, communication-presentation and organizational ability to be sufficient, and indicate that the guide group interaction positively takes place.

On the other hand, the participants criticize spending a quite short time in archeological sites. The fact that every detail of the package tour programs are organized according to a specific plan and the responsibility of the guide to implement the whole program leads to this criticism. Therefore, it is thought that it is beneficial for travel agencies to pay attention to this issue when designing tour programs. Another issue that was criticized by the participants is the fact that the guide makes the group play a game to know each other and the game is perceived as "being forced to communicate" by some participants. It is noteworthy that the guide's efforts to communicate with the group members are not always perceived correctly and that such interactions should be shaped in the direction of the group's reactions. Extra activities, giving information and guide-group interaction themes are included under the dimension of suggestions that the participants' statements about the discontinuity of these negativities. According to the findings



obtained from the research, the features that tourist guides should have for successful tour management can be listed as follows.

- To show an enjoyable, moderate and reliable personality,
- To have a flexible sense of humor,
- To reflect his/her pride with his/her country,
- Not to reflect the negative feelings to the group,
- To have good communication skills,
- To have the narration quality,
- To be a good leader,
- To have a determined stance while guiding the group and have the ability to hold the group together,
- To be sensitive to follow the tour program,
- To spend enough time in places visited within the scope of the tour program and to inform the group about the places where the visit time is short due to disruption of the program,
- To provide information not only on historical sites but also on all the interesting details on the route,
- To have a good knowledge of history and culture, as well as detailed information on many subjects,
- To be successful and patient in answering the questions asked,
- To plan the conversations in the vehicle in line with the interests and wishes of the group,
- To provide reliable advice on issues such as restaurants, shopping,
- To make environmental warnings to group members if necessary,
- To create free time for the group to spend on their own,
- To help group members with specific dietary needs,
- To make pleasant surprises for group members,
- To treat equally to all group members
- To be an intermediary for group members in the confusion caused by language and cultural differences,
- To try to integrate group members without forcing people to communicate.

According to the data obtained from the research, it is possible to say that the professionalism of the guide during the tour also affected the participants' positive evaluation of the tour program formed by the travel agency. It is noteworthy that as a result of the positive attitudes and behaviors of the guide, the participants considered the tour to be much better organized than expected, satisfactory and enjoyable. Therefore, as a result of the research findings, it will not be wrong to say that the package tours, whose details are planned by the travel agencies or tour operators, are shaped by the success of the tourist guide and deeply affect the perception of the participants.

With this research, it has been tried to discover how the performance of the tourist guides during the tour is perceived by foreign tourists. Although it is seen that there are many research about service quality, perception, value, and satisfaction, it is thought that the exploratory studies that address these issues will contribute to the related literature when considering that consumers' wishes and expectations are constantly changing.

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