


Reconsidering the measurement of country image - theory and practice

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The concept of country image has been under constant attention of academic research in marketing, however the focus has been aimed much more at investigating country of origin image than country image.

Researchers agree that a strong theoretical background to country image would be necessary and proper measurement instruments should be developed, as this field of study is not as well developed as the country of origin image studies.

*Recent publications look to a new approach and consider country image related to **country branding** and use the concept of “country value” in a similar way to “brand value”.*

The country brand images are very complex and multidimensional, they consist of more dimensions than classical consumer brands. In the same way as brands are measurable, the country image can be measured as well.

The main aim of our research is to construct a new, alternative measurement for country image, examining the answers to open-ended questions and testing previously developed scales for this purpose and brand image scales simultaneously.

*In order to develop our **new multidimensional country image scale** we reviewed relevant literature from both marketing and non-marketing fields, analysed previously developed scales by identifying their strengths and weaknesses. As a result of this process we choose three different measurements and carried out field research among 400 Hungarian university students to test these instruments simultaneously.*

In this study we present our findings and the results of the open-ended questions and one of the applied scales. Our aim is to identify the cognitive and affective dimensions of country image, to test the reliability and variability of the measurements, and to provide applications for marketing, tourism and public policy strategies.

Keywords: *country image, country branding, scale test and development*

1. Theoretical Background

1.1. Definition of Country Image

Image as related to countries is less frequently mentioned in literature than more widely-known classical image types. According to Roth and Romeo (1992, p. 480.) **country image** is "the overall perception of the products from a given country based on the previous perception of the country's production and its strengths and weaknesses in marketing". Martin and Eroglu (1993, p. 193.) argue that "**country image** is the complete set of descriptive, inferential and informational beliefs about that given country". Kotler (1993, 141.) suggests that **country image** is "the sum of people's beliefs, ideas and impressions about a certain country."

Interpreting different authors' definitions, we may recognize that some concepts tend to be mixed up. Basically, we have to differentiate three main concepts: **product image** (PI), **country image** (CI) and **country of origin image** (COO). These three types of image are closely related (especially from our marketing perspective) and somewhat overlapping, influencing each other both directly and indirectly.

The confusion about the concepts partly results from several authors considering **country of origin image** to be the same as **country image**. For example, Balabanis et al. (1996, p. 1398.) defines country of origin as "a marketing concept that captures consumer's differentiated attitudes towards different nations".

In contrast to that, we consider **country of origin image** to be that part of a product's overall image which is based on where the product comes from. Thus country of origin image is the result of stereotypes linked to a certain product merely because it originates from a given country. Accordingly, in this context country of origin image relates to the product (service), that is: the country of origin image of a certain product. On the contrary- as previously was mentioned – Roth and Romeo define **country image** to be the same as what we consider country of origin image.

Country image, just like any other image-types, *is not one-dimensional*. Researchers have found / investigated several, often overlapping dimensions, although far less attention was given to measuring attitudes towards countries and their inhabitants than towards country of origin image. Papadopoulos et. al. (1990) found the following **dimensions of country image**: *industrial development, affect, industrial orientation, closer ties*. Berács and Malota's (2000) results are based on a Hungarian database, the dimensions are: *cognitive*

evaluation, affective evaluation, knowledge about the country (experience), country links (ties).

As previously being mentioned, **country image** is a *multidimensional* term. "The '**identity prism**' of the country (like the concept of corporate identity) consists of *physical* (geography, natural sources, demography), *cultural* (history, culture), *personal* (name, flag, celebrities), *relational* (with governments, international organizations) and *controlled* (conscious formation of country image) elements", says Graby (1993, p. 262).

According to literature, **country image** might be considered a *special type of image* which covers the country's products, brands, companies and much more. **Country image** is formed on the basis of experience and opinions about the nation or country and on, primarily, information received through the various channels. Possible *channels* are politics (internal affairs and foreign policy), telecommunication, entertainment (movies) and rumor. **Country image** comprises many elements: national symbols, colors, clothing, typical buildings, objects, tunes, pieces of literature, specialties of the political system, customs, historical heritage and many more (Jenes, 2005).

Regarding its direction, the **country image** can be *internal image* (self image) and *external image* (mirror image), similarly to the classification of **product image**. This kind of interpretation is hardly acceptable bearing on product. Talking of that, the **internal country image** means 'what citizens think about their own country', and the **external country image** is 'what others/foreigners think about our country/other countries'. (Jenes 2007, p.40.)

The **concept of country image** has two common interpretations, leading to heavy debates amongst professionals. The first approach ascribes a so-called '*umbrella function*' to *country image*, as its elements are made up of the totality of the country's specific products, brands and various organizations and their images. According to the second approach, *the country itself is a complex product*, made up of a large number of elements. (Thus **country image** is considered a normal **product image**, yet with more diverse, complex and complicated characteristics.)

The expression country marketing has already been present in literature for a couple of years. (Szeles, 1998)

1.2. Country Image as Brand Value

On the contrary, the '**country as a brand**' approach and '**country branding**' is only mentioned in a couple of works, some of them being rather confusing (and non-scientific). Branding, however, is a much wider concept. There is a so-called spontaneous image to each country, which can be turned into a consciously

shaped image to be positioned and valued in the marketplace. This latter process is called **country image building, country branding** or country rebranding. According to Anholt (2002), **country branding** does not only stand for creating a new logo, slogan or brand name but rather for a comprehensive process including positioning and various communication methods. The objectives of **country branding** are primarily of economic nature. ‘Selling’ the country basically covers three aspects: fostering tourism, attracting tourists, fostering foreign investments and improving exports.

A **classic brand** and a **country brand** have a lot in common, but there are important differences, too. Thus a **country brand** needs special management. Just like normal **product brands**, it does have a name, a logo and some further identifiers. Its name, however, has a special origin, and owners are hard to identify, as well. Selling a country brand is not possible, either. Thus valuation becomes questionable, which provides the basis for debates between researchers concerning the scientific background and the validity of **country branding** theories.

2. Research Methodology

Our ‘**internal country image**’ survey was conducted among the Hungarian students of Corvinus University of Budapest in March - April 2008, using self-reported questionnaires, sample size being 399. The structure of the questionnaire was as follows: similar to international studies, the first set of questions dealt with country image in general, employing open-ended questions. Positive and negative views on both the country and its people were collected. The second set of questions tested an internationally well-known and frequently applied scale - Papadopoulos (1993) – which was also employed in a number of Hungarian country image related surveys. The third set of questions was also aimed at country image in general, using a country image scale developed by the Hungarian Gallup Institute. Demographic information was covered in the last set of questions.

Statistical analysis of the data was performed using the SPSS 14.0 suite.

In this study we present our **findings on country image regarding the open-ended questions and the country image scale developed by the Hungarian Gallup Institute**. We examined the answers of respondents from the open-ended questions and divided them into categories. According to these categories we developed *dimensions* that can be suitable for measuring country image.

By examining the results of the Gallup scale, we can analyse the *reliability and validity* of this instrument and survey the *general image of Hungary and the Hungarians*.

3. Research Findings

3.1. Open-ended Questions about Views on the Country and its People

The **open-ended questions** of the first set attempted to survey **people's views on Hungary and Hungarians**. We have already tested these questions among foreign students a few years ago (as a part of a wider research; the sample size was 457), therefore we have two databases to make a comparison between the Hungarians' views (internal country image) and the foreign students' views on Hungary and Hungarian people (external country image). (Jenes, 2005, pp. 18-29.) At the same time we try to identify the real dimensions of country image (regarding both the *internal* and *external* country images as well).

The first question aimed at exploring respondents' *first thoughts on Hungary*. (see Table 1a. and 1b.)

The majority of the Hungarians (51%) associates Hungary with concepts like **home** in the first place. Responses related to **natural endowments** were also very popular. **Budapest, gastronomy, Hungaricums and society-related feelings** were also relatively frequent.

In addition, the foreign students associate Hungary with friendly/unfriendly **Hungarian people, gastronomy, history and popular sights**. Responses related to the economical development and the beauty of Hungarian women were also relatively frequent.

| Descriptives | Frequency | (%) |
|----------------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Home | 201 | 51,0 |
| Natural endowments | 50 | 12,7 |
| Budapest | 20 | 5,1 |
| Gastronomy, Hungaricums | 17 | 4,3 |
| Society-related feelings | 15 | 3,8 |
| Ibolya Oláh: Magyarország (song) | 15 | 3,8 |
| Symbols of the country | 14 | 3,6 |
| Sights | 12 | 3,0 |
| Political condition | 12 | 3,0 |
| Economy | 6 | 1,5 |
| Celebrities | 4 | 1,0 |
| Corruption, Crime | 2 | ,5 |
| Public sanitation | 2 | ,5 |
| Sports | 2 | ,5 |
| Science, education | 1 | ,3 |
| Other | 21 | 5,3 |
| Total | 394 | 100,0 |

Table 1.a
Hungarians' first thoughts on Hungary (internal country image)

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1 Country | 150 | 4 Tourism | 47 |
| Budapest | 63 | Weather | 21 |
| Danube | 22 | Balaton | 14 |
| Hortobágy, the Plain | 8 | Spas | 12 |
| Other | 77 | Hungaroring | 3 |
| 2 People | 118 | Other | 3 |
| Hungarian people | 90 | 5 Economy | 58 |
| Hungarian women | 23 | Development | 31 |
| Friends | 7 | EU | 12 |
| Family | 4 | Bureaucracy | 5 |
| Other | 6 | Economy | 3 |
| 3 Culture | 135 | Other | 18 |
| Gastronomy | 73 | 6 Sg negative | 59 |
| History | 48 | 7 'Nothing' | 20 |
| Cultural elements | 19 | 8 Beauty | 36 |
| Language | 18 | 9 Other | 47 |
| Traditions | 7 | 0 No response | 111 |
| Other | 12 | | |
| | | Number of respondents | |
| | | Number of references | |

Table 1.b
Foreign students' first thoughts on Hungary (external country image)

The second question explored positive thoughts on both the country and its people. (see Table 2a. and 2b.)

The most popular amongst positive *country characteristics* were **natural endowments** by the Hungarian respondents. **Feelings** (social belonging, friendships, kindness) scored high once again, so did **home** and **popular sights** (Hortobágy, Heroes' square etc.). The most frequent positive *traits of people* were related to **emotions** (friendship, feeling of community, togetherness, kindness, helpfulness etc.). Responses from the category **science and education** were also frequent (scientific achievements, quality education, scientists, talent etc.).

The most popular amongst positive country characteristics were **friendly Hungarian people, culture** and **gastronomy** by the foreign respondents' point of view. The foreign students' responses related to **natural endowments** and **amusement, nightlife** were also frequent.

| Descriptives | 1st place mentioned | | 2nd place mentioned | | 3rd place mentioned | | Total |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | |
| Natural endowments | 149 | 39,6 | 60 | 33,3 | 13 | 18,3 | 222 |
| Home | 56 | 14,9 | 16 | 8,9 | 4 | 5,6 | 76 |
| Society-related feelings | 52 | 13,8 | 22 | 12,2 | 10 | 14,1 | 84 |
| Sights | 30 | 8,0 | 20 | 11,1 | 6 | 8,5 | 56 |
| Budapest | 20 | 5,3 | 13 | 7,2 | 3 | 4,2 | 36 |
| Gastronomy, Hungaricums | 15 | 4,0 | 14 | 7,8 | 12 | 16,9 | 41 |
| Sports | 8 | 2,1 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 8,5 | 14 |
| Economy | 6 | 1,6 | 3 | 1,7 | 3 | 4,2 | 12 |
| Science, education | 5 | 1,3 | 6 | 3,3 | 1 | 1,4 | 12 |
| Symbols of the country | 2 | ,5 | 1 | ,6 | 1 | 1,4 | 4 |
| Political condition | 0 | 0 | 1 | ,6 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Other | 33 | 8,8 | 24 | 13,3 | 12 | 16,9 | 69 |
| Total | 376 | 100,0 | 180 | 100,0 | 71 | 100,0 | 627 |

Table 2.a.1

The Hungarians' positive thoughts on Hungary (internal CI)

| Descriptives | 1st place mentioned | | 2nd place mentioned | | 3rd place mentioned | | Total |
|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | |
| Feelings | 218 | 63,4 | 86 | 74,8 | 20 | 66,7 | 324 |
| Science, education | 41 | 11,9 | 9 | 7,8 | 3 | 10,0 | 53 |
| Other | 85 | 24,7 | 20 | 17,4 | 7 | 2,3 | 112 |
| Total | 344 | 100,0 | 115 | 100,0 | 30 | 100,0 | 489 |

Table 2.a.2

The Hungarians' positive thoughts on the Hungarians (internal CI)

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1 Country | 97 | 3 School | 40 |
| Culture,gastronomy | 77 | Students | 14 |
| Beauty, endowments | 36 | Teachers | 5 |
| Cheapness | 20 | Quality | 4 |
| Transportation | 17 | System | 1 |
| Weather | 10 | Other | 4 |
| Atmosphere | 5 | | |
| Economy, development | 2 | 4 'Nothing' | 22 |
| Services | 1 | 5 Other | 45 |
| Environment | 0 | 0 No response | 130 |
| 2 People | 173 | | |
| Hungarian people | 119 | | |
| Amusement, nightlife | 34 | | |
| Friends | 26 | | |
| The youth (girls, boys) | 19 | | |
| Language | 5 | | |
| Other | 1 | | |
| | | Number of respondents | |
| | | Number of references | |

Table 2.b

The foreign students' positive thoughts on Hungary and the Hungarians (external CI)

The third question was related to negative views on Hungary and Hungarians. (see Table 3.a and 3.b)

It is apparent that characteristics related to **economic state** (bad economic situation, underdevelopment, deteriorating indices, low wages, poverty etc.) and **political situation** (political battles, conflicts, discredited politicians/parties etc.) were the most often mentioned ones by the Hungarian respondents. The **emotional level** of negative views also became obvious (malaise, social dissension, pessimism, hostility, envy, narrow-mindedness etc.). The majority of negative thoughts about Hungarian people were related to **negative feelings** (e.g. lack of belonging/dividedness, wickedness, narrow-mindedness, envy, lack of culture, pessimism, dissatisfaction etc.).

The majority of negative thoughts about Hungarian people were related to **people** (unfriendly, pessimistic people) by the foreign students as well. The respondents seem to be divided into two different groups regarding to their opinions: some of them like the Hungarians and others dislike. It is apparent that characteristics related to the lack of public safety (**crime, violence**) were often mentioned by the foreigners. In addition, responses from the category '**bureaucracy**' and (the low quality of) **services** were also frequent.

| Descriptives | 1st place mentioned | | 2nd place mentioned | | 3rd place mentioned | | Total |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | |
| Economy | 109 | 29,2 | 29 | 20,9 | 12 | 27,3 | 150 |
| Political condition | 71 | 19,0 | 29 | 20,9 | 5 | 11,4 | 105 |
| Society-related feelings | 47 | 12,6 | 31 | 22,3 | 10 | 22,7 | 88 |
| Public sanitation | 40 | 10,7 | 7 | 5,0 | 2 | 4,5 | 49 |
| Natural endowments | 17 | 4,6 | 5 | 3,6 | 0 | 0 | 22 |
| Corruption, crime | 14 | 3,8 | 8 | 5,8 | 2 | 4,5 | 24 |
| Sights | 5 | 1,3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Budapest | 2 | ,5 | 1 | ,7 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Celebrities | 0 | 0 | 1 | ,7 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Other | 68 | 18,2 | 28 | 20,1 | 13 | 29,5 | 109 |
| Total | 373 | 100,0 | 139 | 100,0 | 44 | 100,0 | 556 |

Table 3.a.1
The Hungarians' negative thoughts on Hungary (internal CI)

| Descriptives | 1st place mentioned | | 2nd place mentioned | | 3rd place mentioned | | Total |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | |
| Feelings | 287 | 74,2 | 166 | 84,7 | 56 | 77,8 | 509 |
| Economy | 14 | 3,6 | 2 | 1,0 | 4 | 5,6 | 20 |
| Corruption, Crime | 14 | 3,6 | 11 | 5,6 | 6 | 8,3 | 31 |
| Political condition | 11 | 2,8 | 1 | ,5 | 1 | 1,4 | 13 |
| Other | 61 | 15,8 | 16 | 7,2 | 5 | 6,9 | 74 |
| Total | 387 | 100,0 | 196 | 100,0 | 72 | 100,0 | 655 |

Table 3.a.2
The Hungarians' negative thoughts on the Hungarians (internal CI)

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| 1 Country | 68 | 3 School | 22 |
| Services | 33 | System | 10 |
| Economy, development | 15 | Quality | 5 |
| Weather | 10 | Students | 4 |
| Environment | 9 | School | 3 |
| Culture, gastronomy | 3 | Teachers | 0 |
| Transportation | 3 | | |
| Cheapness | 2 | 4 Crime, | 60 |
| Beauty | 0 | 5 Bureaucracy | 50 |
| Atmosphere | 0 | 6 'Nothing' | 27 |
| 2 People | 119 | 7 Discrimination | 10 |
| Hungarian people | 64 | 8 Other | 33 |
| Language | 40 | 0 No response | 145 |
| Amusement, nightlife | 1 | | |
| The youth (girls, boys) | 1 | | |
| Friends | 0 | | |
| Other | 32 | | |
| | | Number of respondents | |
| | | Number of references | |

Table 3.b

The foreign students' negative thoughts on Hungary and the Hungarians (external CI)

3.1.1. Implications of the scale results, further research possibilities

Regarding the results of our examination it is apparent that the above seen types of dimensions of both external and internal country image - considering the responses in isolation from the numerical, real results - are closely related and somewhat overlapping.

To sum up the above seen types of responses we can state the following. It seems that the **aspects** that respondents take into account when judging a country's image, **can be grouped into four- five dimensions.**

The **dimensions** can be the followings:

- 1st group of dimensions named '**Tourism**':
Nature/ natural endowments, atmosphere, sights, services
- 2nd - 3rd group of dimensions named '**Economic/Political situation/Public safety**':
Economy, politics, corruption-crimes (it can be divided into 1 or 2 more factors)
- 4th group of dimensions named '**Culture**':
Sports, science, education, culture, traditions, history
- 5th group of dimensions named '**People**':
People, celebrities, hospitality

All elements correspond to the country image dimensions already known from literature.

In our following study we will develop and test a scale that contains statements about these dimensions.

3.2. The Gallup Country Image Scale

The next **scale** we tested was used by Papp-Váry in his 2004 PhD dissertation and was originally developed by **the Hungarian Gallup Institute**. This scale measures *24 statements* about a country on a *4-point scale* (not at all typical, not typical, typical, very typical). Only the following 7 statements were found to be typical or very typical: Country with a glorious and rich history; Much-suffered country; Depressed, pessimistic country; Country with great sports achievements; Country with great scientific achievements; Country with great culture; Country rich in beautiful landscapes. These results confirm the findings of our open-ended questions. The remaining 17 statements were found to be not typical or not at all typical of Hungary, e.g. successful country. According to the statements we can reveal the respondents' pessimistic way of thinking on Hungary and the Hungarians.

| 'Typical' or 'Very typical' aspects | 'Not typical' or 'Not at all typical' aspects |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country with a glorious and rich history • Much-suffered country • Depressed, pessimistic country • Country with great sports achievements • Country with great scientific achievements • Country with great culture • Country rich in beautiful landscapes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful country • Decent, clean country • Cheerful country • Country with a bright future • Country of human freedom • Country of fair and honest people • Etc. |

Figure 1
The results of the Gallup scale

According to the in-depth analysis we can conclude that *males seem to have significantly more positive views than females in some aspects*; such statements were: Successful country; Decent, clean country; Cheerful country; Country with a bright future. *No significant differences were found* for any of the statements between those *who had lived abroad for a longer period* and those who had not.

There were, however, *three questions where responses significantly differed by income category*. Students were asked to indicate whether the income of their

family is far below average, somewhat below average, average, somewhat above average or far above average. The higher the income category, the more people agreed to the statement „country of human freedom”, and the higher the income, the less they agreed to „country rich in beautiful landscapes”. The statement „decent, clean country” is most accepted in the lowest income category, then it decreases and after a while increases again with increasing incomes. This might be explained by the degree of freedom to decide and the opportunities to get along in life being dependent on income.

According to Malota's (2001) work we found that there is a hypothesized relationship between the respondent's self-confidence and their view on a country image. Regarding this assumption the *level of self-confidence* was also measured on a *five-point scale*, with the following categories: far below average, somewhat below average, average, somewhat above average and far above average. Here we found four significant relationships. The higher the level of people's self-confidence the more they agreed to three of the statements (Successful country, Country with great culture, Decent, clean country), while one statement (Country of fair and honest people) yielded fluctuating results depending on the level of self-confidence.

Factor analysis was completed using principal components analysis and VARIMAX rotation, while the correlation of variables was confirmed by calculating KMO values. The number of factors was determined on the basis of the 'eigenvalue greater than 1' criterion. Following the first factor analysis at a KMO value of 0.801, the software produced seven factors which explained 56 percent of total variance (24 variables). Finally, having excluded 4 variables (these variables reduced the conformance of the results), we had a *KMO value of 0.799* and five factors explaining 52,6 percent of total variance (20 variables). The five factors altogether explain 52.6 percent of total variance, and the elements correspond to the country image dimensions already known from literature. Sample data yielded a *Cronbach's alpha of 0.791* as an indicator of the scale's reliability.

The first factor, called '**description of human relationships and feelings**' included the variables related to pessimism, care for each other, fairness, cheerfulness. This factor explained 21 percent of sample variance. The second factor was called '**description of success**', with variables related to economic performance, rapid growth and successfulness. Interestingly, the variable Decent, clean country also belongs here. Explained variance was 11 percent. The third factor was named '**description of democracy**', its variables expressing human freedom, democratic country, rule of law and social justice. The factor explained 9 percent of the variance. The fourth factor, '**description of culture**', includes elements related to talent, great culture, literacy and civilization. It is interesting that the variable rich in beautiful landscapes is also a part of this factor. Explained variance was 6 percent. The last, fifth factor was called '**description**

of performance' and included variables related to scientific achievements and sports achievements; it explained 5 percent of the variance.

According to the results of the factor analysis we can declare that **all elements/factors correspond to the country image dimensions already known from literature** and the results of the open-ended questions as well.

3.3. Summary of the scale tests

All the Gallup scale elements correspond to the country image dimensions and aspects known from the results of open-ended questions. Responses significantly differed by demographic categories (e.g. income, male-female, self-confidence etc.). We can declare that the results confirmed the usability and reliability of the scales, and all elements correspond to the country image dimensions already known from literature

4. Limitations of the Study, Further Implications

Results confirmed the usability and reliability of the applied scale, that it produces consistent factors. Yet the first and most important limitation of our study being the *very homogenous student sample*, these scales *must also be tested on a representative sample* later on. Even in our present sample, *varying demographic characteristics produced several significant differences*, which might be unquestionably confirmed using a representative sample.

Developing the scale questions through the simultaneous application of the scales and through analyzing typical responses to our open-ended questions is an important task, too, as some parts of the scales overlap and findings imply the existence of some potential new variables, as well.

A positive country image having manifold advantages, there are several opportunities for the practical application of these findings by marketing professionals dealing with tourism and country image matters. Amongst direct political and economic benefits are the expansion of tourism, a better position in privatization transactions, foreign investors' increased interest, improved image and competitive position of our entrepreneurs abroad, a more positive external attitude to governmental credit and loan applications, stronger support and international reactions to foreign policy efforts, the strengthening of the national ties and the national consciousness of Hungarians living abroad. In an indirect way, these advantages do actually appear in almost all areas, in citizens' environment, in the way they feel, and in the treatment and the abolition of hungaro-pessimism, as well.

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