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Investigating the Impact of Religious Identity Formation on Strategic Green Marketing Orientation in Major Mining Companies of Kerman Province

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the impact of religious identity formation on strategic green marketing orientation in major mining companies located in Kerman Province. Methodologically, this study is classified as descriptive-survey research (using a standardized questionnaire) and is applied in nature. The statistical population of this research includes the board of directors, CEOs, senior managers, and employees of the production, marketing, finance, and research and development departments of major mining companies in Kerman Province, such as Shahr-e Babak Copper, MIDHCO, Sarcheshmeh Copper, and Gohar Zamin, which collectively employ tens of thousands of personnel in 2024. Sampling was conducted randomly among senior managers and employees of these large-scale mining enterprises. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated at 0.899, and its validity was confirmed by experts and academic faculty members. A total of 263 responses were collected through an in-person survey and subsequently analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 24 and SmartPLS version 3 software. The results revealed that religious identity formation significantly influences subjective norms, personal norms, and the strategic green marketing orientation of managers and employees. Furthermore, both subjective and personal norms were found to have a significant impact on attitudes toward environmental activities among managers and employees. Ultimately, attitudes toward environmental activities demonstrated a significant effect on the strategic green marketing orientation of personnel in large mining companies. The findings of this study suggest that religious identity formation contributes to shaping attitudes and behaviors of senior managers and employees under current competitive conditions, thereby enhancing business performance.

Keywords: Religious identity formation, subjective and personal norms, attitude toward pro-environmental activities, strategic green marketing orientation, large-scale mining companies, Kerman Province.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, companies have come under increasing pressure to adopt green business practices due to climate change, resource scarcity, and shifting consumer demands. A recent report by First Insight (2022) reported a 42% increase in consumer willingness to pay for green alternatives since 2020. In particular, large corporations play a significant role in the green economy. Due to their considerable environmental footprint, studies show that large companies are responsible for nearly 50% of global commercial greenhouse gas emissions (First Insight, 2022). Against this backdrop, many small and medium-

sized enterprises (SMEs) have recently adopted green marketing practices to reduce their environmental impact. For instance, in the United Kingdom, Ecoalf invests in low-carbon technologies to manufacture its fashion items locally using environmentally friendly materials such as recycled polyester, organic cotton, or hemp. In Australia, Hero Packaging continually invests in research and development to offer fully compostable, eco-friendly packaging for small businesses to help reduce environmental waste (OECD, 2022).

On the other hand, studies have also shown that many large corporations engage in greenwashing—branding themselves as "green" without making significant investments to reduce their environmental footprint (Sun & Zhang, 2019). Researchers have sought to investigate the drivers of green marketing adoption by SMEs to encourage wider adoption of green business practices in this sector (Carfora et al., 2022; Hoogendoorn et al., 2015). In a large-scale study involving over 8,000 SMEs, Hoogendoorn et al. (2015) identified company size, product types, market characteristics, and financial support as antecedents of green marketing (Hoogendoorn et al., 2015). More recently, Carfora et al. (2022) identified aspirations for improved economic performance, networking capabilities, and internal competencies as drivers of environmental innovation in large firms (Carfora et al., 2022).

The review of the literature reveals a growing body of research that highlights the strategic and multidimensional impact of green marketing, particularly in the context of religious identity, social responsibility, and innovation. Asgarian et al. (2022) found that while social responsibility significantly influenced green marketing performance in Tehran's municipal sports programs, environmental attitudes did not show a meaningful impact, emphasizing the importance of institutional responsibility (Asgarian et al., 2022). Cassidy et al. (2024) explored the internal drivers of green marketing, particularly the role of religious identity among senior managers in SMEs, showing that religious identification significantly influences strategic green marketing orientation, moderated by political ideology. This internal motivator fills a gap in the literature, which has traditionally focused on external environmental triggers (Casidy Riza et al., 2024).

Since over 84% of the global population identifies with a religion (World Population Review, 2023), it is likely that most CEOs and senior executives in large companies also identify with a religion that influences their decision-making. Previous studies have shown a significant correlation between religious identity and green consumption behavior (Davari et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2020). These findings led us to pose a critical research question:

Does religious identity among senior and executive managers of large mining companies influence the adoption of a strategic green marketing orientation in their firms?

This study seeks to answer that question. We adopt a "top-tier paradigm" approach (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) by examining the impact of religious identity in senior executives of large firms on the adoption of strategic green marketing orientation. Drawing upon the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Social Identity Theory, we hypothesize that religious identity influences strategic green marketing orientation through subjective norms, personal norms, and attitudes toward environmental practices. In doing so, we address a critical research gap, as past studies have largely focused on macro-level and/or external drivers of green marketing rather than its micro-level underpinnings. For example, Iguchi et al. (2021) noted that "the values and ethical beliefs of CEOs could potentially be drivers of corporate social responsibility (Iguchi et al., 2021), but previous studies have rarely explored this aspect." Specifically, our findings suggest that religious identity influences strategic green marketing orientation through subjective norms, personal norms, and environmental attitudes among senior executives of both SMEs and large enterprises. Therefore, efforts to promote broader acceptance of strategic green marketing orientation among top managers could be optimized by framing such adoption as a way to align with their perceived normative expectations.

Accordingly, to address the gaps in the current research, we pose the following research question:

Does religious identity influence the strategic green marketing orientation of senior and executive managers in large mining companies in Kerman Province?

2. Methods and Materials

This study is applied in terms of its objective and, given its focus on describing the status of the target population through field survey methods, it is categorized as a descriptive-survey research. To collect data and measure various dimensions of the model, a standardized questionnaire developed by Cassidy et al. (2024) was employed. Considering the topic of the research—examining the impact of religious identity formation on norms, attitudes, and strategic green marketing orientation—the statistical population consisted of board members, CEOs, senior managers, and staff members from production, marketing, finance, and R&D departments of large mining companies in Kerman Province. These include Shahrebabak Copper, MIDHCO, Sarcheshmeh Copper, and Gohar Zamin, each employing roughly 200 individuals in the relevant departments, forming a total statistical population of approximately 800 individuals in the year 2024.

Participants were selected from among those managers and employees who were present in the relevant departments at the time of questionnaire distribution. Using Cochran's formula, the sample size was determined to be 260 based on simple random sampling. Since the statistical population in this study is considered infinite and a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error was applied, the sample size was adjusted to 270 to ensure sufficient questionnaire completion. Accordingly, 270 questionnaires were distributed in person. Of these, 268 were returned, and 263 valid questionnaires were ultimately used for analysis. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale.

To confirm the adequacy of the sample for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was conducted. A KMO value above 0.5 indicates that the data are suitable for analysis, while values above 0.9 reflect excellent adequacy (Verma, 2013, p. 365). The KMO value in this study was 0.91, indicating an excellent sample size for factor analysis.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, calculated using SPSS software. Table 1 presents the Cronbach's alpha values, as well as convergent and discriminant validity (AVE and CR) for each variable in the study.

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha, Convergent Validity (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) for the Study Variables

Variable	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	CR
Religious Identity Formation	1–2	0.724	0.781	0.877
Subjective Norms	3–5	0.749	0.667	0.857
Personal Norms	6–8	0.749	0.663	0.854
Attitude Toward Environmental Actions	9–10	0.728	0.782	0.877
Strategic Green Marketing Orientation	11–19	0.944	0.709	0.955
Total	1–19	0.899		

The total Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was 0.899. Since all values exceeded the 0.70 threshold, the instrument demonstrated strong internal consistency. To test the research hypotheses and fit the proposed model, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) were conducted using SmartPLS version 3.

3. Findings and Results

Demographic characteristics of the study sample in terms of gender, age, and education level are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Percentage	Frequency	Description
Gender	18.6%	49	Female
	81.4%	214	Male
Education	19.4%	51	Associate Degree
	29.3%	77	Bachelor's
	43.7%	115	Master's
	7.6%	20	Doctorate
Age	19.8%	52	Under 25
	27.8%	73	26–35
	26.6%	70	36–45
	25.9%	68	Over 45

According to the demographic findings, the majority of respondents—comprising board members, CEOs, senior managers, and personnel from production, marketing, finance, and R&D departments of large mining companies in Kerman Province—were male, between the ages of 26 and 35, and held a master's degree.

To examine data normality in SmartPLS 3 software, skewness and kurtosis values were assessed. If these values fall between -3 and +3, the data are considered normally distributed; otherwise, the data are non-normal. The results for skewness and kurtosis of the data collected from board members, CEOs, senior managers, and employees in the various departments of large mining companies are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Normality of Existing Variables Using PLS Software

Items	Skewness	Kurtosis	Items	Skewness	Kurtosis
Q1	0.566	0.242	Q11	0.352	-0.131
Q2	0.490	-0.032	Q12	0.562	0.223
Q3	0.545	0.159	Q13	1.073	1.306
Q4	0.555	-0.071	Q14	1.322	1.476
Q5	0.584	0.310	Q15	1.404	2.348
Q6	0.550	0.044	Q16	0.726	0.550
Q7	0.534	-0.048	Q17	0.953	0.500
Q8	0.508	0.177	Q18	0.780	0.392
Q9	0.491	0.107	Q19	0.160	0.620
Q10	0.429	0.151			

As shown in Table 3, all skewness and kurtosis values fall within the acceptable range of -3 to +3. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data used in this study are normally distributed.

Table 4. Normality of Research Variables Using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test

Dimension	K–S Statistic	Sig. Level	Test Result
Religious Identity Formation	0.086	0.000	Not Normal
Subjective Norms	0.073	0.000	Not Normal
Personal Norms	0.083	0.000	Not Normal
Attitude Toward Environmental Activities	0.109	0.000	Not Normal
Strategic Green Marketing Orientation	0.136	0.000	Not Normal

As indicated in the table above, the significance level for the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test is 0.000 for all research variables, which is below the 0.05 threshold. Therefore, the distribution of the research variables does not follow a normal distribution within the study population.

To compute the model fit and reliability indices, the full model including all constructs and items was executed using SmartPLS 3. The results, including standardized coefficients, are presented in Figure 1. As demonstrated in the figure, all factor loadings exceed 0.40, which means there is no need to remove any items.

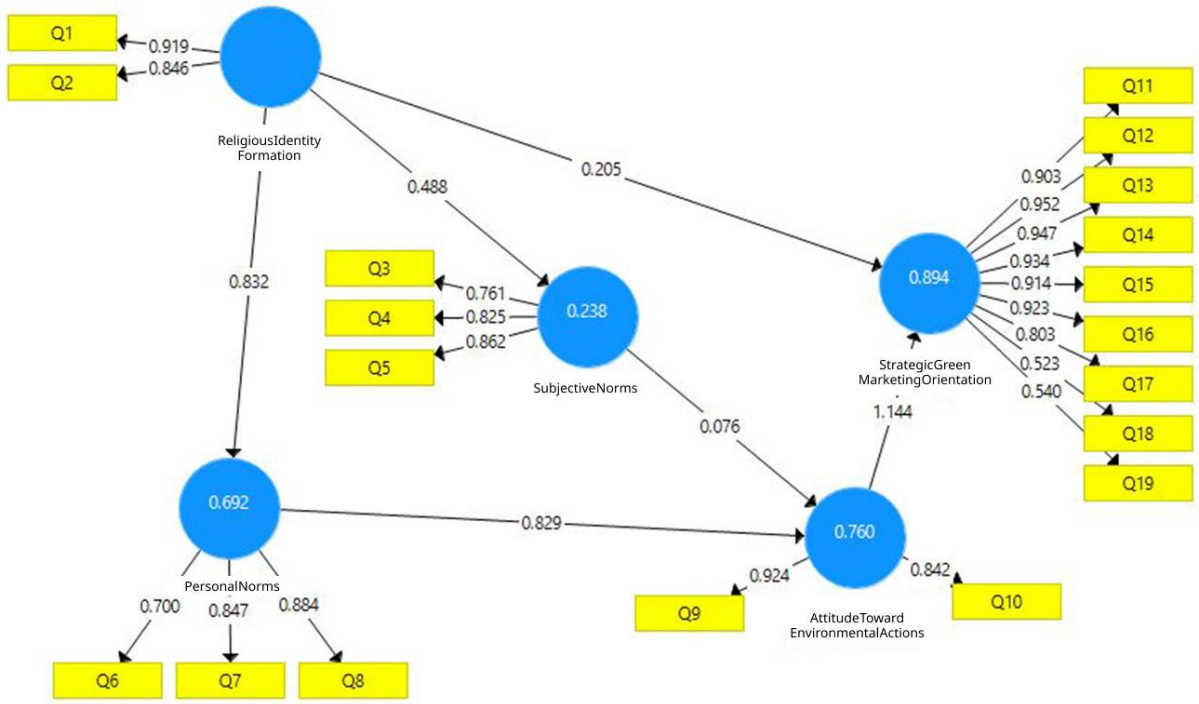

Figure 1. Research Model with Standardized Coefficients

To assess the goodness of fit of the structural model, the significance of *t*-values is used. The primary criterion for examining the relationship between constructs in the structural section of the model is the *t*-value. A *t*-value greater than 1.96 indicates a significant relationship between constructs and thus confirms the research hypotheses. Figure 2 displays the *t*-values for the relationships between constructs. As seen in the figure, *t*-values greater than 1.96 confirm the hypotheses and indicate a good fit for the structural model.

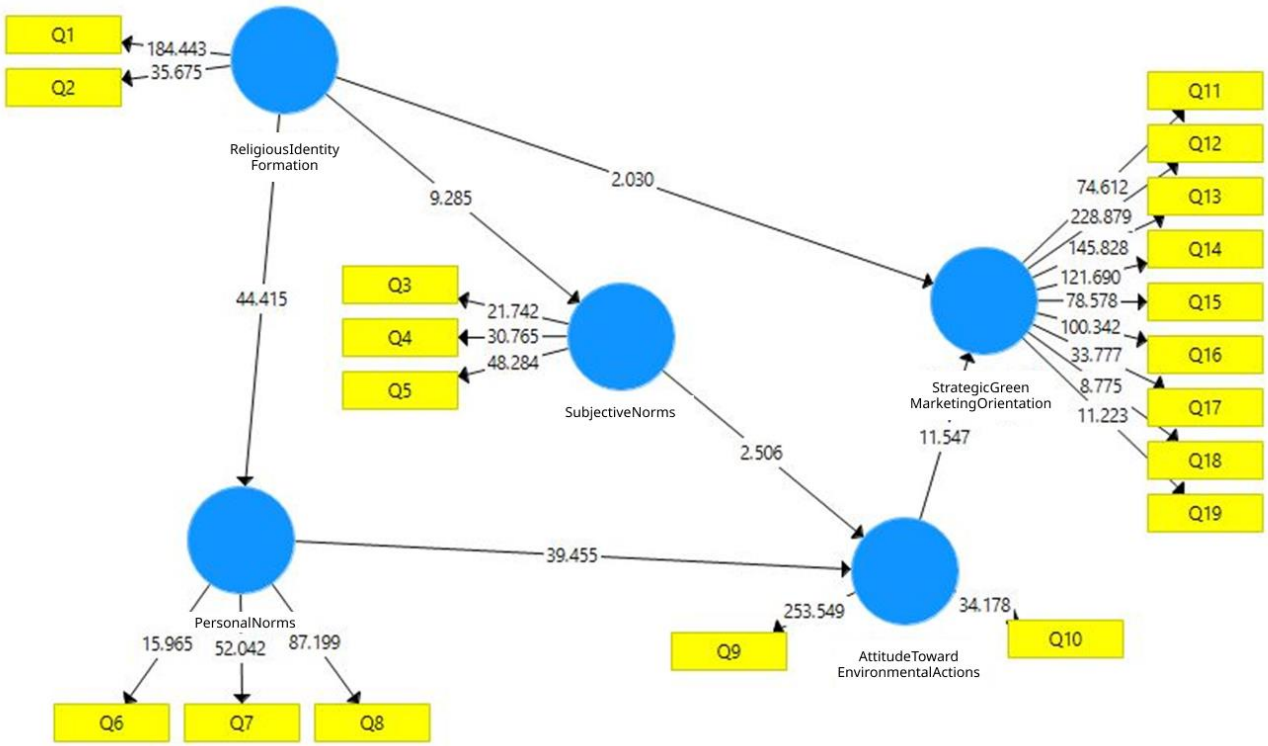

Figure 2. Research Model Displaying Significance (*t*-values)

After assessing model fit, we proceed to test the research hypotheses. The significance of path coefficients is evaluated using *t*-values. If a *t*-value exceeds 1.96, the corresponding path is considered statistically significant, and the hypothesis is accepted. Otherwise, it is rejected. Based on the path coefficients, *t*-values, and significance levels shown in Figures 2 and 3, the summary of hypothesis testing results is provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Using PLS Software

Pathway	Path Coefficient	*t*-value	Result
Religious Identity → Strategic Green Marketing Orientation	0.205	2.030	Confirmed
Religious Identity → Subjective Norms	0.488	9.285	Confirmed
Religious Identity → Personal Norms	0.832	44.415	Confirmed
Subjective Norms → Attitude Toward Environmental Activities	0.760	2.506	Confirmed
Personal Norms → Attitude Toward Environmental Activities	0.829	39.455	Confirmed
Attitude Toward Environmental Activities → Strategic Green Marketing Orientation	1.144	11.547	Confirmed

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to examine the impact of religious identity formation on the strategic green marketing orientation in large mining companies located in Kerman Province. Given that religious identity formation among managers is a key concern in the economic structures of many countries, understanding how environmental norms and attitudes are shaped—and assessing the influence of each factor on strategic green marketing orientation—can inform policies, programs, and strategies that guide leading businesses toward sustainable practices. These businesses hold potential to become top-tier global green innovators. Despite the growing relevance of religious identity formation in today's hypercompetitive environments, there remains a notable lack of empirical research on this topic in Iran. The present findings confirm the significance of this issue and highlight the importance of exploring the impact of religious identity formation on strategic green marketing orientation within Kerman's large mining companies.

Hypothesis 1: Religious identity formation has a significant effect on strategic green marketing orientation among senior managers and employees in large mining companies in Kerman. The path coefficient was estimated at 0.205. These findings are consistent with prior studies (Asgarian et al., 2022; Carfora et al., 2022; Ćorić et al., 2020; Dang & Wang, 2022; First Insight, 2022; Iguchi et al., 2021; Obregon et al., 2022; OECD, 2022; Vesal et al., 2021). The role of religion in influencing consumer behavior has been well documented (e.g., Alsad et al., 2021; Arli, 2017; Cassidy & Arli, 2018; Gatch, 2019; Kilbourne, 2014; Obregon et al., 2022). However, researchers have reported mixed findings regarding the effect of religiosity on green behavior. Some studies show a positive correlation between religiosity and pro-environmental attitudes (Arbuckle & Konisky, 2015; Arli et al., 2018). On the other hand, Kilburn (2014) noted that the influence of religiosity on environmentally friendly behavior is not always consistent (Kilburn, 2014). Martin and Bateman (2014), for example, found no significant behavioral differences between religious and non-religious consumers (Martin & Bateman, 2014). This inconsistency suggests that other moderating variables—such as political ideology (Peifer et al., 2016)—may mediate the religion-green behavior relationship.

Hypothesis 2: Religious identity formation significantly influences subjective norms among senior managers and employees in large mining companies in Kerman. The path coefficient was estimated at 0.488. This finding is in line with prior findings (Arli et al., 2018; Asgarian et al., 2022; Carfora et al., 2022; Casidy Riza et al., 2024; Chung, 2020; Ćorić et al., 2020; Dang & Wang, 2022; Davari et al., 2017; First Insight, 2022; Iguchi et al., 2021; Lockwood, 2018; Obregon et al., 2022; Papadas et al., 2017; Sharma, 2020; Sun & Zhang, 2019; Vesal et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020).

Hypothesis 3: Religious identity formation significantly influences personal norms among senior managers and employees in large mining companies in Kerman. The path coefficient was estimated at 0.833. This aligns with prior findings (Arbuckle & Konisky, 2015; Arli et al., 2018; Casidy Riza et al., 2024; Chung, 2020; Lash & Wellington, 2007; Lockwood, 2018).

Hypothesis 4: Subjective norms significantly influence attitudes toward environmental activities among senior managers and employees in large mining companies in Kerman. The path coefficient was estimated at 0.076. In this regard, Papadis et al. (2019) and Chung (2020) showed that stakeholder pressure positively impacts strategic green marketing orientation (Chung,

2020; Papadas et al., 2017). Iguchi et al. (2021) found that religious CEOs initiate more green corporate practices due to their heightened awareness of fulfilling religious role expectations (Iguchi et al., 2021).

Hypothesis 5: Personal norms significantly influence attitudes toward environmental activities among senior managers and employees in large mining companies in Kerman. The path coefficient was estimated at 0.829. Referencing the Theory of Reasoned Action, Cassidy et al. (2024) concluded that religious executives demonstrate greater moral and personal commitment to their firms' environmental initiatives (Casidy Riza et al., 2024).

Hypothesis 6: Attitudes toward environmental activities significantly influence strategic green marketing orientation among senior managers and employees in large mining companies in Kerman. The path coefficient was estimated at 1.144. Drawing on Social Identity Theory, Peifer et al. (2016) argued that executives who identify with a religion are more likely to engage in strategic green marketing initiatives to affirm their religious identity and align with their values and strategic orientations (Peifer et al., 2016).

Based on the confirmation of relationships and hypotheses, the following practical recommendations are proposed:

- **Training and Awareness**: Conduct educational workshops to raise awareness among employees about environmental issues and the importance of sustainability.
- **Employee Participation**: Create opportunities for employees to engage in environmental decision-making and reward green initiatives.
- **Collaboration with Religious Institutions**: Partner with religious organizations to promote sustainability and social responsibility principles.
- **Development of Green Performance Indicators**: Establish metrics to evaluate environmental performance in alignment with strategic goals.
- **Creating a Green Organizational Culture**: Foster an organizational culture where sustainability and social responsibility are core values.
- **Environmentally-Informed Decision-Making**: Ensure that all decisions in areas such as production, HR, and development are evaluated from an environmental perspective—for example, selecting green technologies, reducing energy consumption, and using renewable resources.
- **Environmental Management as a Strategic Priority**: Integrate environmental norms across all organizational functions including production, logistics, sales, and marketing so that environmental attitudes become part of organizational identity.
- **Establishing Environmental Assessment Systems**: Implement mechanisms such as surveys and environmental performance evaluations to track attitudes and behaviors within the organization.
- **Periodic Environmental Impact Assessment**: Regularly evaluate the environmental impact of operations and revise strategies as needed.

No research is without its limitations, and this study is no exception. The following suggestions are offered for future research:

First, the focus on large mining companies in Kerman Province limits generalizability; future studies should include larger samples from diverse regions across Iran and internationally.

Second, future studies should analyze different types of businesses in various industries to determine if significant differences exist across sectors.

Third, the findings provide a standardized pathway for understanding how religious identity influences environmental norms and attitudes, aiding in the strategic development of green marketing strategies.

Given the significance of the topic, further research using qualitative methods is necessary to comprehensively examine the role of religious identity in shaping environmental norms and attitudes across various domains.

This study also faced limitations. First, as a cross-sectional study, the use of structural equation modeling does not establish causality. Longitudinal designs are recommended for future studies to better explore causal relationships.

Second, participants' awareness of religious identity constructs and environmental attitudes—as well as their honesty in responding—could affect results.

Third, because the study was conducted via a self-administered electronic questionnaire, participants may not always behave in ways that align with their stated responses.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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