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ADVANCES IN GLOBAL SERVICES AND RETAIL MANAGEMENT

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## Brand New Leisure Constraint: COVID-19

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### Abstract

The recent pandemic caused serious losses in the leisure industry worldwide. The recreation facilities and event management companies have suffered the negative economic impact of the pandemic, and some of them even went bankrupt. Due to facility closures and lockdowns people have no choice to spend their leisure time at home and engage in home-based leisure activities. The leisure time activity participation was already low among Turkish people before the pandemic. The fear of getting infected with COVID-19 led people to stay at home even during the summer times when the lockdown was paused. Families have to spend more time together and share leisure activities. The research on family leisure among the Turkish population is limited. There is a need for understanding leisure activity participation and the constraints that families experience to participate in leisure activities. The purpose of this study was to detect the decrease in participation in leisure activities before and after COVID-19 and to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 as a leisure constraint among Turkish families. The data were collected from 65 individuals from 20 families in January 2021. The results showed that the physical activity has decreased after COVID-19, as it is perceived as the strongest leisure constraint. The government should increase the number of parks and outdoor activity spaces to allow people to both perform physical activities and socialize.

**Keywords:** leisure constraints, Turkish families, COVID-19, leisure activity participation

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### Introduction

The leisure industry is one of the most negatively affected industries from COVID-19. The cancellation of events, closure of recreational facilities, lockdowns, and restrictions led to a decrease in participation in leisure activities worldwide. One of the reasons for the decrease in participation in leisure activities is the fear of getting infected with COVID-19. For example, recreational facilities reopened during summer in Turkey. However, some people were still reluctant to use recreational facilities due to the possibility of physical contact among people in these types of facilities. During 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 become the strongest leisure constraint.

The economic conditions of people living in Turkey are not good as the people living in the Western developed countries. Therefore, access to recreational facilities was limited for the majority of the population. The government schools do not have enough funding to build recreational facilities. As a result, children cannot gain the habit of performing a leisure time activity in their free time. Studies showed that Turkish people usually prefer sedentary activities in their free time (Erkip, 2009; Hacıoglu, Avcikurt, Ilban, & Sapar, 2005). The leisure time

activities are limited to watching TV, going to shopping malls and coffee shops for middle-income people. Their leisure time activity is limited to home-based activities due to the restrictions and closures. On the bright side, families have started to spend more time together and share leisure time. However, there is no empirical evidence that families engage in leisure time activities at home. It is important to evaluate the impacts of COVID-19 on leisure activity participation for the future of the recreation and leisure industry. The purpose of this study was to detect the decrease in participation in leisure activities before and after COVID-19 and to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 as a leisure constraint among Turkish families.

## Literature Review

The theory of leisure constraints is developed by Crawford and Godbey (1987) almost four decades ago. Since then, the theory has received a lot of attention from scholars around the world. According to the theory people experience three types of barriers to participate in leisure activities; intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. 'The intrapersonal barriers involve individual psychological states and attributes which interact with leisure preferences rather than intervening between preferences and participation' (Crawford & Godbey, 1987, p.122). The lack of interest or low self-esteem can be some examples of intrapersonal barriers. 'Interpersonal barriers are the result of interpersonal interaction or the relationship between individuals' characteristics.' (p. 123). The lack of social relations or the difficulty in finding a partner to engage in leisure activities can be some examples of interpersonal barriers. 'Structural barriers represent constraints as they are commonly conceptualized, as intervening factors between leisure preference and participation' (p.124). Lack of money or equipment to engage in leisure activities are some examples of structural barriers. The leisure constraints are not always an impediment to the participation in leisure activities. According to Hubbard and Mannell (2001), individuals with high motivation are better at overcoming the constraints and managing to participate in the activities. The theory of constraints was tested in many studies in different parts of the world and it is empirically supported that people experience all three types of constraints depending on their gender, age, location, and ethnicity (Alexandris & Carroll, 1997; Uvinha, Pedrão, Stoppa, Isayama and de Oliveira, 2017; Stodolska, Shiness, & Camarillo, 2019).

The sedentary nature of Turkish people reflects in their choice of leisure activities. As Erkip (2009, p 280) states 'Recreation involving the arts, music, and sport appears to be an under-developed aspect of leisure in present-day.' The role of constraints in the non-active lifestyle of Turkish people cannot be overlooked. The economic conditions, the pressure of the society on women, the lack of facilities, family duties can be some examples of constraints that Turkish people go through in participating in a leisure time activity (Çetinkaya, Yıldız, & Özçelik, 2018; Gürbüz & Henderson, 2014). The constraints were seen in different populations, such as women (Kara & Özdeğlü, 2017), college students (Gürbüz & Henderson, 2014), high school students (Ayhan, Ekinci, Yalçın, & Yiğit, 2018) and teachers (Ustun, Ersoy, & Bisgin, 2017). The students in lower-income level families and students in Eastern regions experience more constraints than their counterparts (Ayhan et al., 2018). Also, many studies showed that women experience more constraints than men (Albayrak, Caber, & Crawford, 2007; Kara & Özdeğlü, 2017; Koca, Henderson, Asci, & Bulgu, 2009).

The recent pandemic has reinforced virtual identities, as people have to blend work and play in a virtual environment. The eight-hour rule was recently overruled. The distinction between work

and leisure is getting more blurred every day. The online working environment allowed people to travel and work at the same time (Reichenberger, 2018). Canceled events, closed recreational facilities, and lockdowns forced people to spend their leisure time at their homes. Online recreational courses, seminars, events, zoom meetings, and binge-watching have become major leisure activities for average people. Boredom at home led people to engage in some activities such as leisure crafting at home (Chen, 2020). The scope of activities that Turkish people perform in their leisure time was already limited before the pandemic has started. During the pandemic, the number of leisure time activities that one can engage in has seriously decreased.

Leisure Constraints research among the Turkish population is relatively new compared to the Western countries. The majority of the papers either focus on students or specific groups such as gym members. Also, geographical representation is limited, as most studies were conducted in Western Cities. Besides, there is no study examining family leisure among the Turkish population. The current study will contribute literature by providing a descriptive analysis of family leisure and leisure constraints that they experience.

## **Methods**

The quantitative research methods were used for this study. The researcher has developed a survey and conducted among Turkish families during the pandemic. SPSS 21 data analyses software was used to analyze the data.

### ***Measurement Tool***

The survey instrument consists of 3 sections. The first section was composed of screening questions about the participation in leisure activities among families before and after COVID-19. The questions are 'Before COVID-19, did you use to engage in any physical activity in your leisure time outside of your home?', 'Before COVID-19, during a typical 7-day period (a week), in your leisure time, how often did you use to engage in any physical activity?'. The responses range from '1-2 times' to 'more than 6 times'. The following question is 'Before COVID-19, how many hours on average did you use to spend on the physical activity each time?'. The responses range from 'less than one hour' to 'more than 5 hours'. The same questions were repeated for the COVID-19 period, such as 'During COVID-19, did you engage in any physical activity in your leisure time inside of your home?' Questions were repeated for social activity as well. The second part consists of the questions regarding perceived leisure constraints. The leisure constraints scale was adapted from Alexandris and Carroll, (1997), Hubbard and Mannell (2001), and White (2008). Four more questions regarding COVID-19 were added to the scale to test the impact of COVID-19, such as; 'I am scared of getting infected with COVID-19'. Responses were measured on a seven-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). The third section consists of demographic questions.

### ***Data Collection***

Data were collected among recreation management department students and employees and their families from different regions in Turkey in January 2021. Due to the limited time and budget convenience sampling is used. The sizes of the families ranged from 2 to 6. In total 65 questionnaires were received from 20 families. 3 cases were deleted due to the missing data and normality issues.

## Findings

### *Demographics*

61% of the sample was female and 38% of the sample was male. 51% of the respondents are married and 51% stated that they have kids. While both the average and the median age of the respondents is 33.5, the mode is 20. The education level of the respondents was fairly low, 33% has only a middle school degree and 56% has a high school degree. Regarding the occupation, 42% of the respondents are students, 19% is a worker and 19% is a homemaker. Since the majority of the respondents are students or homemakers, 58% stated that they do not work at all. The income level is also at a lower range. 54% has no income at all and only 13% has an income level of over 5000TL. The demographic information is demonstrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographics

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Female	38	61.3
Male	24	38.7
Marital Status		
Single	30	48.4
Married	32	51.6
Age		
12-18	7	11.3
19-24	23	37.2
25-40	4	6.4
41-50	22	35.4
51 and over	6	9.7
Highest Level of Education		
Less than high school	21	33.9
High school	35	56.5
College Graduate	3	4.8
Graduate Degree	3	4.8
Weekly Working Hours		
0	36	58.1
Under 10 hours	4	6.5
11-20 hours	1	1.6
21-40 hours	4	6.5
41-60 hours	16	25.8
Individual Income (Monthly)		
None	34	55.7
Under 1,999TL	10	16.3
2,000-2,999	4	6.6
3,000-4,999	5	8.2
5,000-7,499	4	6.6
7,500-9,999	3	4.9
10,000 and more	1	1.6

*Note.* As of April 2021 1 USD= 8.07 TL, 1 EURO=9.71 TL

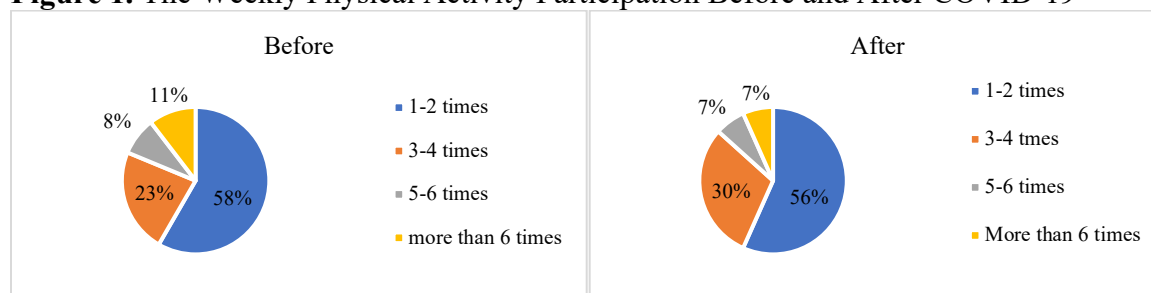
### *The Participation in the Leisure Activities*

74% of the respondents stated that they used to participate in some kind of physical activity outside of their home environment before COVID-19. On the other hand, only 46% has engaged in some sort of physical activity in their home during COVID-19. While 43% of the participants who engage in physical activity outside of their home engage in a physical activity one or two times a week, 16% used to participate three to four times. 37% of them spend one to two hours on the activity each time. During COVID-19, 27% of the respondents who engage in physical activity in their homes perform this activity one or two times a week. 24% of them spend less than one hour each time they engage in physical activity.



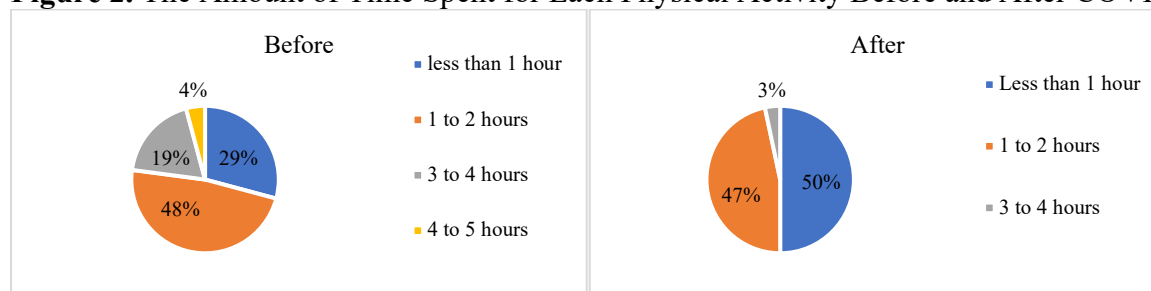
With regards to social activity, 80% stated that they engage in some sort of social activity outside their home before COVID-19. This percentage drops to 63% during COVID-19. 40% of the respondents, who engage in some sort of social activity outside their home, perform this activity one or two times a week and 29% spend one to two hours each time, while 29% spend three to four hours. During COVID-19, 25% of the respondents who engage in a social activity in their homes, perform this activity one or two times a week, 21% of them spend one or two hours each time. Figures 1 to 4 demonstrate the descriptive statistics of leisure activity participation before and after COVID-19. The open-ended question results showed that before COVID-19 the most common leisure activities were going to the gyms, parks, swimming, bowling, movies, shopping malls, community centers, coffee shops, and restaurants. While young people and males stated that they were engaging in some sort of physical or social activity outdoors, mothers usually prefer to stay at home or spend time in their neighbors' and relatives' homes. On the other hand, during COVID-19 most respondents stay at home or spend time with their neighbors. The most common activities during COVID-19 were walking around, watching TV, movies, documentaries, or TV series, playing computer games, playing with smartphones. Very few of the respondents have mentioned that they engage in some sort of physical activity at home.

**Figure 1.** The Weekly Physical Activity Participation Before and After COVID-19

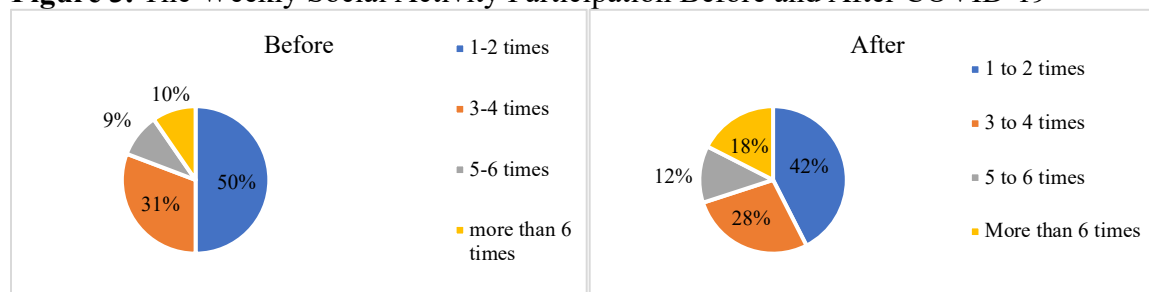


The above figures show that the frequency of physical activity participation was decreased after COVID-19. It seems that responses have shifted from 5-6 and more than 6 times to 3-4 times a week.

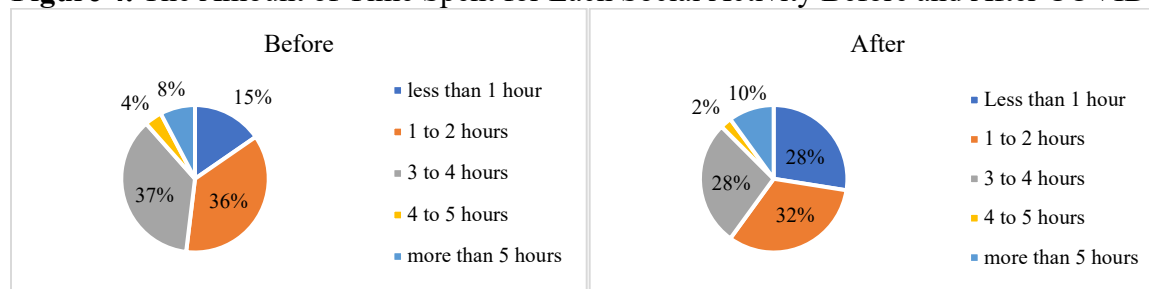
**Figure 2.** The Amount of Time Spent for Each Physical Activity Before and After COVID-19



The decrease in the time spent for each physical activity after COVID-19 can be observed in the figures above. Interestingly, while almost half of the respondents spend 4 to 6 hours before COVID-19, no one spends that much time for physical activity after COVID-19.

**Figure 3.** The Weekly Social Activity Participation Before and After COVID-19

The increase in the weekly participation in social activities is obvious. The number of respondents who participate in social activities more than 6 times a week has increased, while respondents who participate 1-2 and 3-4 times have decreased.

**Figure 4.** The Amount of Time Spent for Each Social Activity Before and After COVID-19

The decrease in the time spent for each social activity after COVID-19 can be observed in the figures above. The most significant increase is observed in the response 'less than 1 hour'. It seems that people participate in social activities more often with shorter durations.

### *Leisure Constraints of the Participants*

Principal component analysis was conducted to measure the dimensions of the leisure constraints scale among Turkish families. Principal Component Analysis and Varimax with Kaiser Normalization were conducted. 2 items were excluded from the analysis due to low factor loading; less than .5 and the loading to more than one factor. As a result of repeated analysis, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity showed that the relationship between variables is at a sufficient level to conduct factor analysis ( $p=.000$ ,  $\chi^2=712.861$ ,  $005$ ,  $df= 136$ ). Furthermore, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (.648) supported the use of factor analysis on the collected data. The result of the factor analysis indicated that there are 4 factors measuring leisure constraints with an Eigenvalue of over 1. These 4 factors explain 71.3 % of the variance and the Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) of the scale is .840 (Table 2).

Factor 1, intrapersonal constraints, consists of 5 statements and explains 32.74 of the variance and Cronbach's Alpha is .89 and the loadings to this factor are all over .7. The mean values of the statements are lower than 3, which indicate that the respondents do not experience intrapersonal constraints severely. Factor 2, interpersonal constraints has 3 statements and explains 9.3 % of the total variance, Cronbach's Alpha is .736 and the loadings are all over .5. The mean values of interpersonal constraints are also lower than 3. Respondents experience interpersonal constraints

also on a minimum level. Factor 3, structural constraints, has 3 statements and explains 10.1% of the total variance; Cronbach's Alpha is .736 and the factor loadings are all over .6. The mean values for two items are lower than 2 and one item is lower than 3. The lowest mean values show that Turkish families do not experience many structural constraints to participate in leisure activities. On the other hand, factor 4, COVID-19, has the highest mean values. The mean values are all over 5. Factor 4 has 4 statements and explains 18.9% of the total variance. The Cronbach's Alpha for this factor is .905 and it has the highest factor loadings which are all over .8. Results indicate that while Turkish people experience intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints on a minimum level, the fear of COVID-19 is a strong constraint that impedes their participation in leisure activities.

**Table 2.** Factor Analysis

Leisure Constraints	$\bar{x}$	Std. D.	Eigenvalue	Factor Loading	Variance explained	$\alpha$
Intrapersonal			5.56		32.74	.890
Not interested	2.17	1.74		.820		
Too shy to participate	2.08	1.53		.869		
Don't feel welcome	2.01	1.56		.794		
Don't have enough information	2.29	1.79		.744		
Don't have skills or physical ability	2.00	1.58		.703		
Interpersonal			1.58		9.3	.736
My friends do not want to do leisure activities	2.12	1.66		.825		
Don't have companions to go with	1.79	1.59		.917		
People I know live far away	2.43	1.96		.540		
Structural			1.73		10.1	.736
Afraid of getting hurt by other people	1.54	1.11		.809		
Cannot afford it	2.08	1.55		.653		
Don't have the right equipment or clothes	1.74	1.51		.712		
COVID-19			3.21		18.9	.905
I am scared of getting infected with COVID-19	5.50	2.30		.842		
I am concerned to contact people physically	5.38	2.17		.848		
No social distance in recreation facilities	5.56	2.09		.934		
No Hygiene in recreation facilities	5.43	2.11		.890		
Cumulative % of Variance			71.3			
Scale Cronbach's Alpha			.840			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy			.648			
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square			712.861			
df.			136			
Sig			.000			

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to detect the decrease in participation in leisure activities before and after COVID-19 and to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 as a leisure constraint among Turkish families. The study has supported that COVID-19 is a strong leisure constraint among Turkish families. It is not known when life will return to normal if it ever will be. Therefore, home-based leisure will become part of our lives and this subject will be one of the important research areas in leisure literature. This study has attempted to contribute to the leisure literature by providing a piece of descriptive and exploratory information on family leisure among Turkish families.

The items loading COVID-19 has the highest loading and reliability and also explains the almost 19% of the factor. While the respondents experience intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints (Crawford & Godbey, 1987) on a minimal level, the fear of COVID-19 is a strong obstacle to participate in leisure activities. Previous research supported that leisure constraints do not necessarily prevent people to participate in leisure activities (Hubbard & Mannell, 2001;

Jackson, Crawford, & Godbey 1993). However, current research shows that the fear of COVID-19 stops people to participate in leisure activities outside their home environment. Interestingly, the engagement in leisure activities at home is also lower than the participation in the leisure activities outside the home before COVID-19. Previous research shows that motivation is an important factor to negotiate constraints (Hawkins Peng, Hsieh, & Eklund, 1999; Jackson & Rucks, 1995; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997). The current environment may have led to a decrease in the motivation to engage in leisure activities among Turkish people, therefore negotiation is out of the question in this specific pandemic situation. Previous research shows that Turkish people experience all three types of constraints (Ayhan et al., 2018, Gurbuz & Henderson, 2014. Ustun et al., 2017). The current study contradicts the results of previous studies, as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints are not important for Turkish families as much as COVID-19.

The sedentary nature of Turkish people was supported in previous studies (Erkip, 2009; Hacıoglu et al., 2005). This study showed that the physical activity among Turkish families was high before COVID-19, but this ratio significantly dropped during the pandemic. People do not prefer to engage in physical activity at their homes, or they do not know any physical activity that can be done at home. Also, the amount of time that people engage in physical activity at their home is lower than the amount of time they spend for physical activities outside. On the other hand, the social activity level also dropped during the pandemic. Turkish people usually engage in social activities in their free time rather than physical activities (Erkip, 2009). This study also revealed that the preference for social activities is higher among Turkish families before and during the pandemic.

### ***Implications***

The results of the current study supported that COVID-19 is a serious leisure constraint among Turkish families. This study enhanced the Theory of Leisure Constraints (Crawford & Godbey, 1987), by adding COVID-19 as a leisure constraint. The pandemic was unexpected and affected leisure activities more than any other type of activity in human life. Therefore, by analyzing the difference in the leisure activities before and after the pandemic, this study showed the concept of leisure constraints is dynamic. The theory needs to be evolved to adapt to the changing environment. This study took an initial step to advance the Theory of Leisure Constraints.

During the pandemic, recreation facilities were closed and there were severe restrictions to go outside. However, the constraints Turkish families experience is not limited to such structural ones, the high level of fear of getting infected with COVID-19 and distrust of the hygienic condition of recreational facilities are the major obstacles they experience. The recreational facilities need to be very careful about the cleanliness of the environment and the social distancing rules must be followed to attract people back. Also, the government should increase their inspections to make sure the facilities follow the rules and give feedback to the facility owners. The trust of Turkish people in the recreational facilities should be regained. The increase in the number of people engaging in recreational activities is necessary for the facilities to survive the economic crisis led by COVID-19.

The results showed that the engagement in the home leisure activities is low due to a lack of knowledge or access to the programs. Staying indoors and a sedentary lifestyle will eventually

weaken the immune system and increase disease among society. Private recreational facilities, NGOs, and the local government could organize online physical activity classes to encourage people to be active inside their home environment. The government should take serious initiatives to encourage an active lifestyle. The number of parks and outdoor activity spaces should be increased so that people can both perform physical activity and socialize. The online school programs should include physical activities for both children and parents. The leisure time activity is a must for sustaining a healthy lifestyle. The privation of socialization led to an increased level of depression among people. The leisure activities will help to alleviate the negative impacts of the COVID-19.

### ***Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

The one main limitation of this study is the limited number of respondents. Due to time and budget limitations, the sample was composed of students and their families. Future studies are recommended to evaluate the impacts of COVID-19 as a leisure constraint among different populations such as women, seniors, middle school students. Another limitation of the study is the descriptive nature of the study. Future studies may conduct a causal study to explore the reasons behind the decrease in participation in leisure activities.

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