

Internship Impacts on Career Intention: A Qualitative Study of Hospitality Students at UiTM Permatang Pauh

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Abstract: *This study investigates the impact of internships on career intentions among hospitality students at UiTM Permatang Pauh, Malaysia, using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Despite the recognized importance of internships in undergraduate education, limited research explores how they shape career decisions in the hospitality industry, which faces persistent labor shortages and high turnover rates. A quantitative approach was employed, with data collected via an online survey from 113 hospitality students who completed internships. The survey measured three TPB constructs—attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—and their relationship with career intention. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 26, with Pearson correlation tests revealing significant relationships: a moderate positive correlation between attitude and career intention ($r^* = 0.476$), a strong positive correlation between subjective norms and career intention ($r^* = 0.700$), and a moderate positive correlation between perceived behavioral control and career intention ($r^* = 0.513$). The findings highlight the critical role of internships in shaping students' perceptions of the hospitality industry, particularly the influence of social expectations (subjective norms) on career decisions. This study contributes to the literature by empirically validating TPB in the context of hospitality internships and offers practical insights for educators and industry stakeholders to design internship programs that foster positive career intentions. Limitations include the single-institution sample and self-report bias, suggesting the need for future research with larger, diverse populations and longitudinal designs.*

Keywords: Theory of Planned Behavior, Attitude, Subjective Norm, Perceived Behavior Control, Career Intention, Internship

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, nearly every undergraduate student participates in an internship during their final year. This is a formal requirement, as confirmed by Mohamad et al. (2020). An internship is typically an organized program in which students join an employer to deepen their understanding of their major. Sides and Mrvica (2017) describe internships as structured, supervised, pre-occupational experiences that enable higher-education students to apply classroom learning to real-world tasks. By bridging theory and practice, students reinforce concepts learned during lectures and confront challenges they could not encounter in a classroom. Internships are particularly valuable for students deciding if a particular career is

the right fit; the direct exposure to daily responsibilities and workplace culture provides insights that academic counselling cannot. Increasingly, Malaysian universities are making internships a non-negotiable step toward graduation, viewing them as a critical way to enhance graduates' employability in a competitive labor market.

Research consistently shows that students who complete internships secure jobs at higher rates than their peers who do not participate in these programs. In today's competitive job environment, it is essential for students to seek internships aligned with their academic disciplines. Colleges and employers alike have long viewed internships as transformative educational opportunities because they ground learning in real-world practice (O'Neill, 2010; Grillo, 2023).

This study investigates internship programs' influence on hospitality students' career decisions. Specifically, we explore how students' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control during their internship experience shape their intention to pursue a career in hospitality. Our objective is to clarify the mechanisms by which internships inform and motivate students to enter the field, thereby guiding program design and career-support services within hospitality education.

Despite the well-established view of internships as essential components of undergraduate education (Rothman & Sisman, 2016), empirical studies examining their effects on students' career plans remain scarce. This oversight is troubling in light of the substantial time, tuition, and institutional resources spent on these placements. In Malaysia, Aun and Chee (2020) report that the unemployment rate for graduates aged 20 to 24 is threefold the national figure, underscoring the urgency of understanding internship outcomes. The present research therefore investigates how internships steer students' choices regarding specific job roles and the industry sectors they pursue. A further research gap exists in the field of hospitality studies, where the relationship between internship experiences and career intentions has not been systematically linked to the theory of planned behavior. This study, accordingly, examines how students' attitudes, perceived social pressures, and beliefs about their control over career decisions, as shaped during the internship, ultimately influence their commitment to hospitality careers.

This investigation begins with the observation that, while internships are widely recognized as vital to undergraduate programs, little empirical evidence exists about how they actually shape students' career pathways (Rothman & Sisman, 2016). Such knowledge gaps are concerning, given the substantial personal, financial, and institutional resources that internships demand. The issue becomes more pressing in Malaysia, where the youth unemployment rate for those aged 20 to 24 is still triple the national average and is particularly pronounced among graduates (Aun & Chee, 2020). Against this backdrop, the present study aims to clarify how internships steer students' choices regarding specific job functions and industry sectors. An additional justification for this research is the scarcity of studies examining the career intentions of hospitality students within the framework of the theory of planned behavior. Addressing this gap is important: the findings will illuminate how students' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, as shaped during the internship experience, ultimately inform their intentions to pursue careers in the hospitality sector.

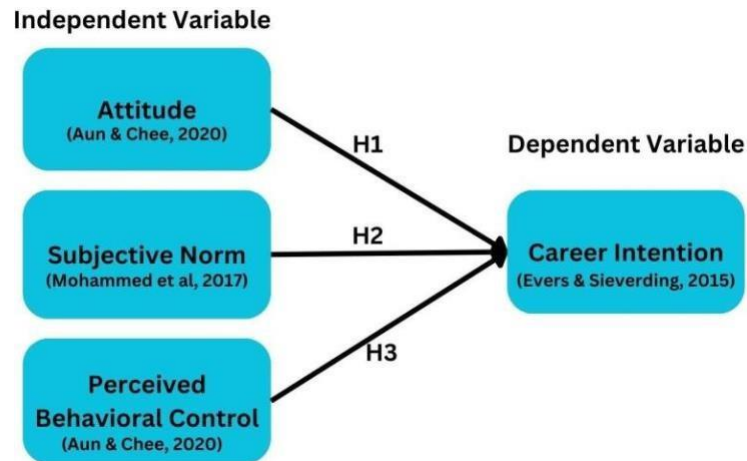


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

2. Literature Review

2.1 Attitude

Within the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), attitude refers to the degree to which an individual evaluates a specific action positively or negatively. When a person anticipates that an action will yield favorable outcomes, their attitude toward that action turns favorable. Conversely, anticipated unfavorable results breed negative evaluations. Such attitudes are essentially products of underlying beliefs: individuals who foresee advantageous consequences tend to accumulate beliefs that reinforce their positive evaluations, while those who foresee drawbacks cultivate beliefs that solidify their negative views (Aun & Chee, 2020). Among students in internship programs, each participant confronts a distinct set of day-to-day encounters. These encounters, whether rewarding or discouraging, color their perceptions of the profession and the sector, and in turn, feed into the judgement that will ultimately guide their career choices. Research conducted by Yongmei Liu, Jun Xu, and Barton A. Weitz (2011) corroborates this: a well-structured internship can foster a favorable attitude toward a profession, while a poorly matched, misaligned, or unsatisfying placement can lead individuals to perceive the job and the sector negatively, especially when discrepancies between their personal values, competencies, interests, or anticipated lifestyles are pronounced.

Working from two different reviews, Sanahuja Velez and Ribes Giner (2015) identified four forces that tilt the scales for internship success: how keen the student is on the program, the freedom the student has, the rigor of the tasks, and the quality of the supervisor. A later study by Pusiran, Janin, Ismail, and Dalinting (2020) confirmed that the list of internship perks is substantial, yet students remain sharply divided. The same student may emerge from the experience feeling uplifted in one region of the country and jaded in another. The imprint is durable: the internship shapes the student's picture of the professional world, and the same picture, whether encouraging or discouraging, tends to linger. When students finish their degree, those who found the internship rewarding often keep their first employer, while those who encountered a poor fit may turn their backs on the company.

2.2 Relationship Between Attitude and Career Intention

Obschonka et al. (2015) established a positive linkage between the attitudes of entrepreneurs and their career intentions. Utami (2017) later demonstrated that university students' attitudes substantially shape both their career intentions and their motivation to launch their own ventures. A parallel investigation of Algerian students reaffirmed that attitude serves as the

dominant predictor of career intention within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Mohammed, Fethi, & Djaoued, 2017). Furthermore, research by Tsang, Wang, and Ku (2015) found that job seekers' favorable attitudes toward Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) significantly elevated their intention to submit applications for positions within those firms.

H1: A significant relationship exists between attitude and career intention among students undertaking hospitality internships.

2.3 Subjective Norm

The TPB model defines subjective norm (SN) as an individual's impression of social pressures or expectations from significant others to engage in a particular behavior or not, and whether those actions will be accepted or disapproved by those individuals (Goh, 2015). This shows that people often base their decisions about whether to engage in a behavior on the perceived social pressure from friends, family, coworkers, siblings, and other significant people to support the behavior (Aun & Chee, 2020). Individuals' desires to conform to social pressure and engage in certain behaviors will be influenced by the values, beliefs, and standards that they deem significant. According to Xu et al. (2021), people view the nature of hospitality and tourism work with perception such as low financial compensation, seasonality, low skill requirements, unsociable working hours, limited opportunities for career progression and poor physical work environments. This tendency will further lead to low commitment and high turnover among employees and somehow affect students' career decisions.

2.4 Relationship Between Subjective Norm and Career Intention

There are a few studies that claim the subjective norm has a positive relationship with career intention. In a study of Indonesian university students, Yakasai and Jusoh (2015) discovered that social influence had a considerable impact on behavioral intentions. Furthermore, according to Mohammed, Fethi, and Djaoued (2017), subjective norms strongly impact the career intentions of Algerian university students. However, in Aun and Chee's (2020) research, it was found that the Subjective norm is not significantly influencing post-study career choice. Based on a survey from Kuslivan and Kuslivan (2009) towards fifty (50) students majoring in the hospitality and tourism industry who had finished their internship program, it is found that 50 percent of respondents agree that working in the hospitality industry is looked down upon by society. According to the students' opinion, society generally thinks that to be a servant in a restaurant, for example, does not require high academic qualifications. Students also express their opinions that working in the hospitality industry conflicts with religious values and causes the collapse of individual moral values due to a work environment exposed to free association, extreme entertainment and serving liquor to customers.

H2: There is a significant relationship between subjective norm and career intention among hospitality internship students

2.5 Perceived Behavioral Control

Aun and Chee (2020) explain that in the TPB model, perceived behavioral control (PBC) refers to the individual's perception of how easy or difficult it is to carry out a behavior. This perception is based on their views about their own capacity, including the availability of resources, skills, and abilities. Furthermore, people's perceived behavioral control and will to engage in certain behavior increase with the perceived availability of resources and decrease in challenges. In addition, people often base their decisions on whether to act on previous experiences, which helps them foresee potential obstacles. In addition, Aiman-Smith et al., (2001) suggest that interns' impressions of their ability to pick up new skills will positively

impact their attractiveness to the company, which is measured by their affective responses to the organization as a possible employer. According to Shin and Hancer (2016), there are two components to perceived behavioral control: perceived power and control beliefs. Perceived power refers to an individual's level of confidence in their ability to carry out or refrain from carrying out a behavior, whereas control beliefs refer to how much control an individual feels over their behavior given opportunities or resources.

2.6 Relationship Between Perceived Behaviour Control and Career Intention

According to Aun and Chee (2020) in their research, it was found that a person's attitude and PBC both significantly affect their career intention. Similarly, in their study on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Taiwan, Tsang, Wang, and Ku (2015) also found that job searchers' intentions to apply for jobs at small and medium-sized businesses increased with their PBC. However, there are researchers who claim that Perceived Behavioral Control has a negative influence on career intention. According to Mohammed, Fethi, and Djaoued's (2017) research of Algerian university students, perceived behavioral control has a negative effect on entrepreneurial career intentions. Similarly, Tan, Johari, and Sukery (2015) found that perceived behavioral control has a negative influence on the intention to work among secured Malaysian employees.

H3: There is a significant relationship between perceived behavioral control and career intention among hospitality internships students

2.7 Career Intention

Numerous factors have been shown to influence career intention in previous studies. According to Murphy & Lambrechts (2015), family participation has a significant impact on career ambition. They also addressed the impact of schooling on profession choices in their research. According to Gati, Levin, and Landman-Tal (2019), choosing a career is one of the most important decisions one will ever make in life. Hays et al. (2015) discussed how career intention is influenced by both internal and external factors. In the case of medical students, they found that the more intense training periods, the more competitive selection, the higher income, and the perception of greater societal status, the higher the perceived prestige of the speciality choice. In a different study focused on female students' career intentions, Azis, Haeruddin, and Azis (2018) found that education has a significant impact on these intentions among Indonesian female students, concluding that higher education moves the career intention among female students. Flinkman and Salanterä (2015) also highlighted the significance of early career intention by speculating that early career intention has an influence towards employee turnover intention.

2.8 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

In 1991, Ajzen developed the theory of planned behavior (TPB), which was derived from the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1991). According to Ajzen (1991), the theory of planned behavior predicts an individual's intention to engage in a behavior at a specific time and place, and it aims to explain all behaviors over which people could exert self-control. In addition, the difference between theory of reasoned action (TRA) and theory of planned behavior (TPB) is that intentionality is the immediate antecedent and perceived behavioral control is an additional factor (Ahmad, et al., 2014). According to Buhmann and Brønn (2018), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is one of the most effectively applied theories that is frequently utilized in the study of human behavior, especially when it comes to predicting an individual's intention to behave and their actual behavior. Not just that, according to the theory, three fundamental factors which include attitude toward behavior (AB), subjective norm (SN), and perceived

behavioral control (PBC) that determine an individual's desire to carry out a behavior (Yakasai & Jusoh, 2015). It was made evident how human behavior is driven by linking the three explicit determinants in TPB, which may be used to predict the occurrence of a certain conduct (Ahmad et al., 2014). Based on the results, the Theory of Planned Behavior can account for more than 50% of the variation in students' behavioral intention to leave a UK university on their own (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018). Other than that, according to Yakasai and Jusoh (2015), an individual's perceived behavioral control and intention to undertake a behavior are positively correlated with their favorable attitude toward behavior and subjective norms.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research design is a descriptive study. This method is used to analyze variables and describe significant features of a present scenario. We identified three elements (attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control) that impact Career Intention according to Theory of Planned Behavior. In our study, we used a quantitative research strategy for data collecting. We collected our data by using an online questionnaire through Google Form application from Google Inc. Then, we distributed our questionnaire to our participants through social media such as WhatsApp and Telegram. By using this method, researcher managed to collect data from 113 respondents. The population for this study is the hospitality diploma and undergraduate students in UiTM Penang Campus that consist of three courses which are Tourism, Hotel Management and Culinary Arts. For this study, sampling is drawn from students in the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Penang branch who go for an internship. The type of sampling that we used is non-probability sampling by using a method called stratified random sampling. The targeted sample were students who are now doing internships when we distribute our questionnaire to them.

The instrument that we used to collect data is an online questionnaire using Google Form application. This online questionnaire has five (5) sections which are section A, B, C, D and E. In section E, ask our respondents about their demographic profile. In section A, B, C, and D we will ask our respondents questions related to attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavior control and career intention. There are five (5) questions for each section in section A, B, C and D. Seven (7) point Likert scale is used in section A, B, C and D with one (1) representing strongly disagree and Seven (7) representing strongly agree. Our Instrument is adapted from a study by Kuslivan and Kuslivan (2000) and was adjusted to suit our research.

Table 1: Format of Papers

No	Instrument	Scale
Section A - Attitude		
1	My personality suited for working in the hospitality industry	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
2	I can use my expertise and skills in hospitality sector	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
3	I feel like a slave working in the hospitality industry	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
4	Working in the hospitality industry may negatively impact my moral values	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
5	When I assist guest, I enjoy seeing them delighted	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
Section B – Subjective Norm		
1	Working in hospitality industry is a respected (prestigious) vocation in the Malaysian Society	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
2	I talk to my relatives and friends with pride about my vocation in the hospitality industry	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
3	My family is proud of my profession in hospitality industry	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
4	I think that those working in the hospitality industry are not valued in the society	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
5	Parents would not want their daughters to marry with someone working in the hospitality industry	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
Section C – Perceived Behavioral Control		
1	I find works in the hospitality industry exciting.	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
2	I may feel independent and free in hospitality work.	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
3	Working in the hospitality industry can have negative consequences on family life.	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
4	In the hospitality industry, there is always something new to learn on a daily basis.	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
5	Working hours are excessively challenging in the hospitality industry.	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
Section D – Career Intention		
1	I am very happy to have chosen hospitality as a vocation path	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
2	It is definite that I will work in the hospitality industry after graduation	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
3	I encourage my friends and family to work in the hospitality industry since it's a pleasant industry to be a part of.	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
4	In my perspective, the disadvantages of working in the hospitality industry exceed the benefits.	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
5	The decision to pursue a career in hospitality industry was a huge mistake.	Likert Scale (1 – 7)
Section E – Demographic Profile		
1	Age	18 – 20 21 – 23 24 – 26 27 – 30
2	Gender	Male Female
3	Level of Study	Diploma Undergraduate
4	Programme	HM110, HM112, HM115, HM240, HM245

4. Result and Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

The sample consists of 113 individuals who have completed their internship, with 57.5% female (65 participants) and 42.5% male (48 participants).

In terms of age distribution, the largest group falls between 21 and 23 years old, comprising 43.4% (49 individuals). The second-largest group is aged 24 to 26 years, making up 34.5% (39 individuals). The 18 to 20-year-old group represents 18.6% (21 individuals), while those aged 27 to 30 constitute only 3.5% (4 individuals). Notably, 96.5% of the sample is younger than 27.

Regarding the level of study, the majority, 69.9%, are enrolled in diploma programs (79 participants), with 30.1% pursuing undergraduate degrees (34 participants).

This data provides a comprehensive overview of the sample, revealing a predominantly young population with a strong focus on diploma-level education.

4.2 Reliability Test

The reliability test, according to Cronbach (1947), is used to look at the item's factors, the general group, and the stability of scores in these factors over the course of trials. According

to Pallant (2016), Cronbach alpha values vary from 0 to 1, meaning that higher on the scale, more reliability is discovered. Four cutoff values for reliability are suggested by Perry R. Hinton et al. (2004): excellent reliability (0.90 and above), high reliability (0.70-0.90), moderate reliability (0.50-0.70), and low reliability (0.50 and below). Based on the reliability test done towards 20 items used in this study, it is shown in the table above that the result is 0.815 which can be considered as high reliability.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.815	.811	20

4.3 Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Pearson Correlation Coefficient is used to measure the strength and direction of linear relationships between two variables. Correlation coefficient ranges from value -1 to +1. A value of 0 indicates that there is no relationship between two variables. A value greater than 0 indicates a positive relationship while a value less than 0 indicates a negative relationship.

4.3.1 Relationship Between Attitude and Career Intention

H1: There is a significant relationship between attitude and career intention among hospitality internship students

The Pearson correlation coefficient, r is 0.476. Based on Table 5 below, it is found that there is a moderate positive relationship between attitude and career intention.

4.3.2 Relationship Between Subjective Norm and Career Intention

H2: There is a significant relationship between subjective norm and career intention among hospitality internship students

The Pearson correlation coefficient, r is 0.700. Based on Table 5 above, it is found that there is a positive strong relationship between subjective norm and career intention.

4.3.3 Relationship Between Perceived Behavior Control and Career Intention

H3: There is a significant relationship between perceived behavioral control and career intention among hospitality internships students

The Pearson correlation coefficient, r , is 0.513. Based on Table 5 above, it is found that there is a moderate positive relationship between perceived behavior control and career intention.

4.4 Discussion

The present study confirms the practicality of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) for investigating how internship experiences shape the career intentions of hospitality undergraduates in Malaysia. Analysis reveals that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control all exert statistically distinct relationships with career intentions, each

varying in effect size. While these patterns echo the broader international literature, they also illuminate specific contextual pressures confronting Malaysian hospitality students.

Relationship of Attitude to Career Intentions

The observed moderate effect size between attitude and career intention ($*r^* = 0.476$) indicates that undergraduates who cultivate positive impressions of the hospitality sector during placement placements become statistically more inclined to seek employment in the field. This observation corroborates earlier investigations (Liu et al., 2011; Obschonka et al., 2015) that identify constructive internship components—such as engaging responsibilities, supportive supervision, and explicit skill training—as catalysts for deepening career commitment. Nevertheless, the moderate magnitude of the association cautions against over-attributing career choice to attitude alone. A subset of students can emerge from highly positive internship experiences yet redirect their career trajectory, motivated by extrinsic considerations—such as perceived prestige, compensation differentials, or the demands of work-life boundary management—that remain outside the experiential learning environment (Wen et al., 2019).

Subjective Norms

A robust association surfaced between subjective norms and career intention ($*r^* = 0.700$), revealing how deeply societal and familial pressures color students' career paths. Kuslivan and Kuslivan (2009) note that in some cultures hospitality roles are tagged with stigma—deemed "low-status" or at odds with religious tenets. Within Malaysia's collectivist culture, young people often sense a tug toward family-preferred fields—business or engineering—dubbed "prestigious." Yet, positive reinforcement from friends or mentors can forge a firmer attachment to hospitality. This pattern signals a clear mandate for tighter industry-academia partnerships, which can reframe prevailing views by launching awareness initiatives and circulating the success narratives of hospitality alumni (Kwok, 2022).

Perceived Behavioral Control

The moderate correlation between perceived behavioral control (PBC) and intention to pursue a hospitality career ($*r^* = 0.513$) indicates that students who leave internships feeling skilled and ready are more inclined to enter the field. This finding echoes Ajzen's (1991) claim that confidence in one's abilities underpins intentions to act. Nevertheless, the weaker link between PBC and intention, relative to the stronger association between social norms and intention, points to a critical caveat: capable students may still withdraw from the sector if they judge that career ladders are short, pathways to promotion are murky, or job security feels thin (Camilleri et al., 2023). Supporting evidence comes from Aun and Chee (2020), who showed that PBC's influence on career choices was overshadowed by the endorsement and expectations of peers and family.

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in understanding how internships influence career intentions among hospitality students. The results indicate that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control all significantly correlate with career intention, though to varying degrees. These findings align with prior research while also offering new insights into the unique challenges faced by hospitality students in Malaysia.

5. Conclusion

This research applied the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to explore how internships influence career intentions among hospitality undergraduates at UiTM Permatang Pauh,

Malaysia. Findings showed that subjective norms (e.g., family and societal pressures) had the most potent effect on career intentions ($r^* = 0.700$), followed by perceived behavioral control ($r^* = 0.513$) and attitude ($r^* = 0.476$). The data highlight the preeminence of sociocultural determinants in career choices, characteristic of Malaysia's collectivist culture, where external expectations often eclipse personal inclination.

The work contributes to theory by confirming TPB's applicability to internship studies in hospitality while drawing attention to subjective norms, an element frequently overlooked in research rooted in individualistic Western contexts (Aun & Chee, 2020; Rothman & Sisman, 2016). From a practical standpoint, findings recommend the establishment of targeted mentorship initiatives and stronger collaboration between industry and academia to mitigate damaging stereotypes and bolster students' perceived self-efficacy (Kwok, 2022).

Constraints of the research include a sample drawn from a single institution and an exclusive reliance on self-reported measures. Future inquiries should implement longitudinal approaches and cross-national comparisons to enhance the external validity of results. Still, the study furnishes implementable guidelines for synchronizing internship curricula with the exigencies of the hospitality sector, thereby tackling the sector's enduring labor shortfall.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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