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COVID Crisis

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1 Introduction

This essay is a critical evaluation of marketing strategies at Marriott. There were three basic types of analysis used in marketing reports in the past. The 3Cs study entails looking at customers, competitors, and current business. Industry environment analysis and collaborator analysis are two newer elements(Bishop,2014).

Businesses in the telecommunications, internet service provider, pharmacy, unorganised retail, health care, and similar industries have a competitive advantage during the Covid pandemic times. In contrast, businesses in the hospitality industry affected adversely. Businesses nowadays are in dire need of working capital, and marketing is thus a key revenue generator for companies(Wijayanto, 2021, Slater, Hult and Olson, 2010). In this report, main focus will be on the many different marketing strategies that Marriott international deployed at the strategic and operational levels during and after the Covid pandemic.

In doing so, this report critically evaluates marketing theories and strategies used by Marriott International. Further, the analysis tools such as SWOT, Porter's five, marketing mix analysis, competitor analysis, etc will be covered in the report. In task 2, the report will provide a managerial implications for the identified marketing strategies by Marriott international. Finally, on the basis of managerial implications identified in the task 2, the report goes on to provide recommendations for the chosen company to improve their marketing strategies for the post pandemic era.

2 The concept of marketing during the Covid Crisis

COVID-19 certainly changed how we live, work, and buy, particularly consumer behaviour. Most firms will be affected. To maintain customer wants and employment, companies must minimise harm. Marketing can accomplish this. The epidemic has made companies reconsider their societal duties (Diamantis, 2020). Companies formerly prioritised shareholder satisfaction. They now prioritise shareholders, employees, customers, and society (Robichaud, 2020). Nearly 200 CEOs agreed in August 2019 to prioritise producing value for all stakeholders (Roundtable, 2019).

In the case of Marriott International, there are few confusions. In an report produced by Marriott, “To provide critical support to our most at-risk associates, the Marriott Disaster Relief Fund (MDRF) was deployed and distributed over \$1.45 million of food, medications, hygiene items, and other essential items to associates in 16 markets”(Serve360,2020). However, according to the case study report Marriott on the Moodle, Sorenson slashed his senior team’s salary by 50% and furloughed numerous staff, i from its Maryland HQ. Most of its staff from the HQ had to take no pay leave for 90 days, which assessed during the covid. The purpose was to cut the cost. Compensation packages were in place. Employees as a primary stakeholder, the responsibility of Marriot towards its employees were overlooked compared to other top hotel chains such as Hilton. According to the report, Hilton had a more employee centric strategic plan to reduce its staff cost. For example: Team Members at Hilton have opened access to over 500,000 positions at over 30 prominent firms, including “Amazon, CVS, Albertsons, and Walgreens”, through the Hilton Workforce Resource Centre.

Table 1. Market-Share Amongst the Firms Examined

Market share (Firms Examined)	2017	2018	2019	2020	% chg
Hilton	21.51%	22.78%	23.28%	21.67%	0.74%
Hyatt	11.81%	11.39%	12.36%	10.39%	-12.02%
Marriott	54.12%	53.10%	51.65%	53.18%	-1.74%
Choice	2.49%	2.66%	2.75%	3.89%	56.22%
Wyndham	10.07%	10.06%	9.96%	10.87%	7.94%

Source: (Bloomberg, 2022)

Table 2. Global Market-Share

Market share (Global)	2018	2019	2020	% chg
Hilton	13.96%	14.49%	13.71%	-1.8%
Hyatt	6.98%	7.70%	6.58%	5.7%
Marriott	32.53%	32.15%	33.64%	3.4%
Choice	(in other)	(in other)	2.46%	-
Wyndham	6.16%	6.20%	6.87%	11.5%

Source: (Bloomberg, 2022)

Tables one and two examined how the COVID-19 epidemic affected hotel chains' market share in the U.S. and abroad. They show the 2017–2020 market share of each hotel corporation (Bloomberg, 2022).

Marriott had the highest proportion, Hilton the second, and Hyatt the third, but none changed much over time. Choice Hotels had the biggest market share growth, but Wyndham and Choice both had less than 6%. Wyndham and Choice have low market shares, therefore the percentage rise can be deceiving (Bloomberg, 2022). According to the figure below (trefis.com, 2022), Choice Hotels International stock is up 1.1% while Marriott International is down -8.2% since early February.

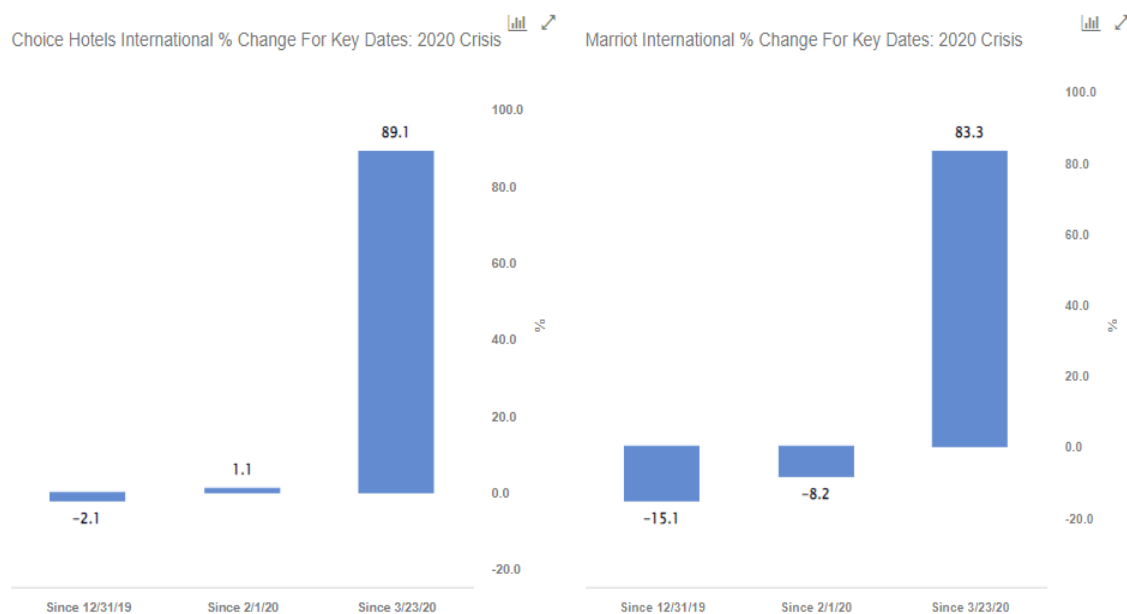


Figure 1

In order to maintain its market share, Once COVID-19 struck its markets, Marriott had to respond. Along with many other enterprises, it had to cut costs and temporarily close some parts of its operations. These measures should have to get the chain past the initial outbreak wave.

Next, the report tries to explore the importance of marketing during Covid. How and where Marriott International spent their resources on marketing strategies In 2023, Marriott International will invest more in customer-facing technology. "Product innovation and connection with our members remain major focus areas, especially through investing in Marriott Bonvoy app and other digital products", said CEO Anthony Capuano during the fourth quarter results call (Phocuswire, 2023).

He adds that “Marriott has seen gains from its digital platforms that are “highly profitable channels for our owners” and that mobile app users increased 32% year on year, digital room nights increased 27% year on year and digital revenue rose 41% year on year” (Phocuswire,2023).

A news release announced Marriott International's Marriott Media Network, an omnichannel cross-platform ad solution for advertisers. The network will initially target U.S. and Canadian travellers before extending globally to include more than 164 million Marriott Bonvoy members. Marriott owned or leased 7,989 properties with 1,479,179 rooms in 2021. Marriott's 2021 Balance Sheet shows \$25.6 billion in assets, including \$1.5 billion in resources (2021 ANNUAL REPORT:42)Here, Marriott took two major strategic actions recently in post pandemic era. Those are its Middle East operations and co-branded credit card expansion (Eschenbrenner et al,2023).

3 SWOT Analysis

3.1 Strengths

Extensive global reach

This can be considered as Marriott’s great strengths. Its headquarters in USA. They manage and franchise a great number of facilities which are known for their surprisingly excellent hospitality and service. Willard Marriott alongside this well accomplished man’s spouse opened a small hotel in the capital of USA, In 1957. After that, it expanded vastly. In 2022(figure 2, the total amount of Marriott hotels globally surpassed 8,000, with a sizable majority of these hotels were located internationally. This is due in part to the purchasing the Canadian brand Delta Hotels and American chain Starwood Hotels and Resorts in 2015 and 2016. The total number of Marriott Worldwide properties per region varied greatly in 2022, despite the fact that the most of the company's hotels, 5,846, were established in North America.



Figure 2

Brand Reputation

Brand Reputation is also a greater strengths at Marriott International. Customer loyalty and brand equity are also associated with this concept. Rust et al. (2021:41) expound brand reputation as the “overall impression of what stakeholders think, feel, and talk about a brand”. The brand events which have an effects on company’s financial performance can be a reason for brand reputation.

FORTUNE magazine named Marriott International, Inc. (NASDAQ:MAR) one of the World's Most Admired Companies for the 16th year. Marriott rose from 37 to 29 in today's 2016 rankings. After getting through the Covid tough time, Marriott International has still managed to maintain its customer reputation. This proves by improving their ranking from 29 in 2016 to 16 in 2023 as world's most admired companies list. Marriott also had the number 1 in the hotel, casinos and restaurant category in hospitality industry.

Marriott Rewards continue to be the world’s leading and most valued frequent guest program. It includes around 14 million members. According to the annual report(2021), In 2000, They added 20 global business and travel partners and offered "elite"

membership levels to recognise our best customers. A new, customer-focused marriott.com offers customised web page content and email offers. They added 20 global corporate and travel partners and offered "elite" membership levels to recognise our best customers. A new, customer-focused marriott.com offers customised web page content and email offers. These along with other innovative technology uses make us faster, more adaptable, and better equipped to meet or surpass customer, owner, and franchisee expectations. Marriott's honesty and consistency give this service evolution a competitive edge and a greater return on investment for stakeholders.

3.2 Weaknesses

Less agile

Marriott's one of the greatest strengths is its scale, because of its size, Marriott's has less ability to become agile and adapting to the changing market environments. For example, there is a trend among younger generation to embrace traveling with friends as a group, which is rapid progress in the industry. Conversely, Marriott's provide more family rooms and may not suitable to accommodate these groups. Marriott's needs to change its operation to accommodate these new market trends.

Labour Cost

Additionally, operation costs including labour costs have been increasing quickly. As result, as respond to Covid spread, Marriott cut off a substantial percentage of its workforce in 2020, then once recovered, Marriott had the difficulty with filling numerous vacancies in many locations and also added extra recruitment costs. This will not only increase the company's costs, also have an adverse influence on the quality level of service that the customers expect(Case study, Moodle).

Negative online reviews

Negative reviews of services or products by customers are likely to affect an organisation (Lis and Fischer, 2020). An increasing number of consumers are eager to publish online evaluations, which are catching the attention of other potential customers. When consumers look for hospitality services and come across a supplier with a high number of unfavourable ratings, they will automatically move on, because the majority of consumers use online reviews before making purchase decisions (El-Said, 2020).

3.3 Opportunities

In 2022, tourism is expected to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Marriott's strengths and market share opportunities are projected to benefit from US residents' international travel ("Tourism in the US - Market Size 2005-2028").

Marriott could retain customers with one of the most popular hotel rewards programmes. Marriott also offers short-term rentals to keep up with Airbnb and other popular business models. Marriott's brand trust and lower prices may give them an edge in the hospitality business.

3.4 Threats

The hotel industry is competitive. Marriott has several difficult rivals. Introduction of low budget hotel facility by Airbnb can be considered as a disruptive innovation happened in the hotel and leisure industry and posed a huge threat for Marriott. Airbnb-style rentals accounted for 16% of the US accommodation sector in 2018. Only two years afterward, in 2020, that figure had risen to 29% (Ajmera). Travel issues also harm Marriott. The COVID-19 pandemic caused the company's second-quarter 2020 revenues to drop 72% (Lock, 2022). Marriott closed 22 Russian properties owing to Ukraine sanctions. Marriott may suffer again from these geopolitical and natural disasters. (Scholz, 2022).

4 Porter's five Analysis

4.1 Threat of New entrants

Leading hotel chain Marriott. Marriott's risk of newcomers is modest. Marriott, a hospitality company, offers luxury hotels, resorts, and suits. Newcomers must invest heavily in infrastructure and advertising to start this firm. This much capital is hard for newcomers to get. Businesses also work from home after the COVID-19 outbreak.

Marriott and other five-star hotels have lost revenue because to homeworking. Luxury-seeking tourists will also stay at luxury hotels and resorts. AirBnB is growing in luxury hotels market share.

Luxury and innovative concepts like "bubble rooms in Iceland, silos in New Zealand, treehouses, underwater dwellings, ice homes", and others are becoming popular. Thus, Marriott offers comfort and elegance but they don't offer adventure, this may be the case for losing market share. Marriott's regular customers anticipate superb service and don't want to switch hotels(marriott.gcs-web.com).

4.2 Bargaining Power of Customers:

Marriott clients have moderate bargaining power. Marriott serves two groups. First, luxury hotel guests. Consumers with a small effect on hotel revenues have little bargaining power. Switching hotels is too expensive. After visiting these hotels, new consumers prefer a specific brand over another. The second group is businesspeople who deploy employees to these hotels. They assist the hotel and regulars.

4.3 Bargaining power of supplier:

Marriott vigilantly choose its suppliers to suite its brand recognition and sustain a durable bond with suppliers. Prior to introduction of new amenities to their hotels,

Marriott thoroughly assess design, performance, and budget. As a big hotel chain, Marriott is always a key buyer for its suppliers. Marriott's excellent brand reputation gives it several application options, lowering suppliers' bargaining power. Marriott suppliers have little leverage in bargaining. . Marriott Hotel provides infrastructure, maintenance, and meals(marriott.gcs-web.com).

4.4 Competitive Rivalry:

Marriott is challenged with Hilton, Carlsen, Hyatt, and Four Seasons. These hotels are comparable. Due to the absence of differentiation amongst huge hotel & resort corporations, any edge in competition must come from client loyalty, reservation and lodging experience quality, and additional products. Marriott is the largest firm, but this advantage may not last. Marriott's RevPAR, Occupancy, and ADR can be compared to industry averages and competitors to determine its competitive advantage. The table below compares Marriott's system-wide indicators to U.S. industry average and Hilton, Marriott's biggest competitor(marriott.gcs-web.com).

INTERNATIONAL

		Industry Average	Marriott		Hilton	
		2021	2021	vs. 2020	2021	vs. 2020
U.S.	RevPAR	\$71.87	\$81.55	67.7%	\$80.88	64.5%
	Occupancy	57.6%	55.2%	18.4% pts	60.8%	18.8% pts
	ADR	\$124.67	\$147.84	11.7%	\$132.94	13.8%
Global	RevPAR		\$74.66	60.4%	\$73.65	60.4%
	Occupancy		51.3%	16.1% pts	57.2%	16.9% pts
	ADR		\$145.56	10.0%	\$128.82	12.9%

System-Wide Performance Metrics (includes company operated and franchised properties); Data from: "2021 Annual Report," 26;

"Hilton Worldwide," 53; "STR".

Table 3: Comparison of Marriot International with competitors(Industry Average).

5 Marketing Mix

Some marketing definitions are brief, some are lengthy. The UK Chartered Institute of Marketing defines marketing as meeting client needs: According to Blythe, “Marketing is the management process which identifies, anticipates, and supplies customer requirements efficiently and profitably”(2001:11).

5.1 Product

This can be described as “buddle of benefit”(Schaefer,2011:50).

Considering the hotel as a main product it can be further categorized into separate brands such “The Ritz-Carlton, St. Regis, JW Marriott, BULGARI, Le MERIDIEN, Westin, Renaissance hotels, Gaylord hotels, Courtyard hotels, Fourpoints, Spring hill suites etc”(Each brand is exclusive in its own style and theme which makes it differentiated from others.

5.2 Marriott Price/Pricing Strategy:

Marriott prices vary by division of business such as hotel, customer, and region. The goal of the firm is to deliver the best quality and service at the right pricing. Demand and promotion and costs of maintenance impact the hotel prices. Marriott also adjusts its prices based on market situation and competitors(competitor pricing strategy).

5.3 Marriott Place & Distribution Strategy:

Leading luxury hotel chain Marriott. Marriott's speciality is hospitality. It offers hotels, hospitality administration, resorts, motels, and more. Hotels is the main income source. Marriott has hotels in more than 100 countries located near major airports, motorways, popular destinations and more. Marriott's position draws business tourists, interstate holidaymakers, and city holidaymakers. Marriott grows hotels through direct and third-party networks(marriott.gcs-web.com).

5.4 Marriott Promotion & Advertising Strategy:

Marriott exclusively promotes their items online. They have an international brand website that presents all the products they sell and allow customers to free book hotel rooms. Ads, movies, and social media campaigns encourage it. Marriott Bonvoy pays loyal customers. Marriott keeps clients by offering incentives and new products.

6 Managerial Implications

Marriott International has a global presence and successfully markets to this target market. PESTLE, SWOT and Marketing Mix 4Ps research showed that Marriott's market strategy takes into account both internal and external environments. The hotel chain also uses traditional and digital marketing to target its customers and promote its brand. They introduced the loyalty programme to build customer loyalty and sales. This method helped the Marriott to stand out from competitors such as Hilton and establish a brand identity.

Managerial Implication 1: Investing in brand innovation

Brand innovations for changing client preferences: Marriott is continually adding and updating brands. Autograph Collection and Edition Hotels are emerging brands targeting new clients. The company is also renovating JW Marriott. Marriott is adding green properties to its portfolio along with brand innovations. In five years, a green hotel prototype will save \$100,000 and cut energy and water use by 25%. 35 business and leisure tourists' evolving requirements prompted these developments. As such, continuing offerings to better appeal to customers and attract new customers could be a better solution for highly competitive business environment. (Data monitor, 2010).

Managerial implication 2:

According to Codor(2023), 58% travellers like to travel with friends. Considering these group travel trend among millennials, Marriott should be able to accommodate new demands. Marriott hotel rooms are mostly family rooms.

Managerial implication 3

Marriott's capabilities and strong brand image could benefit from virtual experiential marketing's unique and memorable encounters. Marriott's website approaches can be analysed to improve virtual experiential marketing and products.

Managerial Implication 4: Porter's five

Single-mindedness has long been promoted as a desirable feature of successful businesses in the strategy literature. After Porter's (1980) seminal work, it was almost untouchable that firms should try either a cost leadership or a differentiation approach and that attempting both would result in a "stuck-in-the-middle" situation, a recipe for poor performance. Marriott is mostly following cost leadership strategy as a pure or single strategy(Kumar, Subramanian and Yauger,1997).

Managerial Implication 5: Potential opportunities for expansion. Marriott is considering to expand its business to Albania and Madagaskar. The PESTEL analysis has conducted to consider the feasibility of the decision.

	Albania	Madagaskar
Political	Unitary parliamentary constitutional republic President is head state, Prime Minister is head of government. <u>Unicameral Parliament</u> Relatively new democracy (post-Soviet era, 1992)	Representative Democracy Elected President appoints Prime Minister and Cabinet Bicameral Parliament Years of political instability, but improving recently
Economic	Market-based mixed economy (diverse with 54% Services, 22% agriculture, 24% industry) The government has been focused on improving infrastructure which lags behind EU standards. GDP growth rate of 2.2% in 2019 Economic Freedom Index raking of 57	Mixed economy with the government implements structural reform agendas aimed at maintaining economic growth. The government controls some industries, notably utilities like water and electricity. GDP growth rate of 4.8% in 2019 Economic Freedom Index ranking of 99
Social	Majority Muslim population, with large catholic and eastern orthodox populations High levels of education with a 99% literacy rate Human Development Index score of 0.791 ranking of 69	More than 50% of the population is Christian. 75% literacy rate with 95% of the population receiving primary education and 30% enrolling in secondary education. Human Development Index score of 0.521 and
Technological	Relatively low investment in the tech sector Nearly universal access to the Internet and basic technology	Lagging access to <u>utiles</u> for much of the population Robust Information and Telecommunications sector improving rapidly from foreign investment
Legal	Civil Law is based on the French system. High levels of corruption, but improving in recent years Albania ranked 82 for Ease of Doing Business in 2020	Civil based heavily on French codes and statutes High levels of corruption and subject to the ever-changing political landscape Madagascar ranked 161 for Ease of Doing business in 2020
Environmental	Diverse landscape including coastlines, mountains, and <u>Valbone</u> valley National Park in the north <u>Similler</u> climate and geography to other Mediterranean countries, like Greece and Italy Relatively poor waste management infrastructure Frequent high <u>somg</u> in Tirana urban area	One of the most ecologically diverse places on earth Home to several critically engendered species Island has seen a rise in ecotourism in recent years Madagascar generated around 879.00 million <u>US dollars in the tourism sector alone</u>

Table 4: PESTEL analysis

7 Recommendation

Managerial Implication

Investing in brand Innovation

"The goal is to improve the quality of the guest's experience."

The literature supports Marriott's real-time service. Quality interactions allow consumers to cocreate unique, tailored experiences with the firm (Prahalad and Ramaswamy , 2004).

However, Marriott's 'always on' attitude is not always beneficial to all clients. Some social media monitoring technologies are overbearing and may have a negative impact. The MPlace app, for example, employs beacons to provide location-based discounts. Customers receive limited brand value from this tool, and studies have indicated that involvement with firm-provided promotions is lower, which can contribute to poor brand perceptions (Gensler et al., 2013).

During firsthand observation of the MLive hub, Marriott was aware of this and should develop a strategy to engage users organically with minimum advertising content. It would improve customer experience.

Managerial Implications 1

In order to support market trend, the Marriott need to change their business model from adding larger size smart rooms. They can include some activities to allow group travellers to enjoy. They can also add multicultural/ continental food options. They can offer discount for larger group bookings.

Managerial Implication 2

Adding virtual experiential marketing and products. Experiential marketing is the promotion of a product or business using an experience that emotionally connects the buyer with the object of the encounter. Given that it is non-partisan, a well-constructed experience engages the user, becomes memorable, and allows for free interpretation. Marriott can further invest to in this area(Ganga,2022).

Managerial Implication Despite the drop in occupancy rates and revenue, Wall Street analysts agreed with the measures, stating that Marriott International will gain from the growth ambitions owing to its solid brand position and digital resources. According to Zacks Equity Research(zacks.com,2023 "given its property locations, we believe the company is well poised to benefit from rising market demand on the back of increased business." Marriott has also completely updated its mobile app to fit current travel needs, including new digital capabilities and personalised travel content. Entering the

Albanian or Madagascar markets would require brand identification and digital capabilities.

Managerial implication 3

Identify the emotive components of Marriott's website's experience marketing in connection to virtual tours and promotional films. Determine how Marriott's virtual experience marketing components—"sense perception, feel perception, think perception, and act perception"—impact consumer experiential value (emotional and utilitarian).

Marriott does this by actively inviting influencers to collaborate on content and by using 'brand fit' influencer content. Marriott's Snapchat marketing engages younger influencers. Marriott recruited four social media celebrities to participate in 'Six Days, Seven Nights,' a three-month campaign that allowed viewers to discover different destinations through their eyes.

Managerial Implication 4

However, Porter identifies the possibility for hybrid approaches and some scholars also challenge the single strategy view and studied the value for "dual" or "hybrid" strategies. Kotha and Vadlamani (1995) explain the importance of hybrid approach to flourish in the difficult business climate of the twenty-first century. Following a cost leadership and product differentiation strategies, Marriott could better face the fierce competition against its competitors.

Managerial Implication 5

Marriott sees significant development prospects in Starwood's "three-tiered collection of brands": "The Luxury Collection, Autograph Collection Hotels, and the Tribute Portfolio". "Autograph Collection and Tribute Portfolio" have the potential to open 50 hotels in the coming years..

Utilising Marriott's distribution and marketing programme, as well as simpler and more flexible brand criteria, they will be able to accelerate growth for these brands. They can expand to new countries and market segmentation as well. The St. Regis brand is underrepresented in several key global markets, compared to The Ritz-Carlton. St. Regis operates 38 hotels and has 22 in the pipeline, while Ritz-Carlton leads luxury hotel construction with 93 open and 41 in the queue. Marriott plans to add ten St. Regis partnerships per year.

8 Conclusion

This report evaluated Marriott international's marketing strategy during and after Covid pandemic. As a well-recognized brand, Marriott has managed to get through the Covid pandemic successfully using different strategies such as staff cut. However, there are pros and cons of those strategies as the report evaluated above. It is also important to upgrade their marketing and promotional strategies to match with new trends in the market.

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