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CONSUMER ECOLOGICAL BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS PRO-ECOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES IN ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES BY GENERATION Z

Abstract: This is an empirical study that is based on the results of questionnaire research on ecological behaviour and consumer choices shown by generation Z and their attitudes towards pro-ecological practices implemented as part of ecological policies in accommodation businesses. At the same time, an attempt was made to find out whether the implemented ideas could encourage this generation to choose places offering practices friendly to the environment and thus be a source of competitive advantage of such locations. The description of the results was preceded by an overview of past research on the issue and theoretical background on sustainable consumption. An analysis of the results showed that Generation Z in most cases tried to limit their negative impact on the environment as well as trying to apply ecological guidelines in practice. Generation Z support pro-ecological behaviour on a daily basis, however, this is mainly true when it comes to behaviour bringing financial or health-related benefits. The young approve of most pro-ecological practices in the accommodation industry but they differ in preferences and in exchange for their support, they expect financial rewards. In conclusion, this generation rates more highly accommodation facilities implementing pro-ecological practices and this translates into a greater willingness to stay at such places.

Keywords: sustainable consumption, Generation Z, pro-ecological practices, tourism, accommodation facilities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The young are an important part of the tourism market. As consumers, they are characterised by a relatively large amount of free time, mobility, interest in the world, eagerness to learn about new cultures, and willingness to be in close contact with nature and with local communities (Buffa, 2015). The value of the tourism market for the young was estimated at 190 billion USD in 2009, 286 billion USD in 2014 and the forecast for 2020 puts it at over 400 billion USD (Richards, 2016).

According to Anderson and Sharp (2010), the young are those aged under 30 which comprise Generations Y and Z. The authors focused on the latter group: those born between 1995 and 2010, between 10 and 25 years of age (Lazanyi, Bilan, 2017; Vallone et al., 2016). There is a scarcity of research describing these because many are still children (Southgate, 2017).

It was observed that the young are independent (Desai, Lele, 2017), they expect quick and full access to

information and they expect immediate answers to their questions (Opis, Cenusa, 2017). They are heavy users of the internet and the internet-related tools needed for tourism which have been the subject of numerous analyses (Hamed, 2017; Ip, Lee, Law, 2012; Nemeč Ruđež, Vodeb, 2015).

Generation Y, also known as the millennials, are usually perceived as being ecologically-oriented, while Generation Z, or the post-millennials, are perceived as socially-oriented. This means being involved in many of the problems of the modern world. It has been pointed out that Generation Z are involved in social-political actions on social media, and that they support the weak and excluded and apart from social matters, they are also familiar with topics related to ecology and environmental protection. They care about the quality and durability of products, but also pay attention to ecological issues (*Eko-generacja Z*) as ecological benefits should be

one of the reasons for choosing a product. Understanding motivations for purchasing and sources of customer satisfaction is key to effective sales based on generating value which is why it is worthwhile analysing those groups who determine demand on the tourism market. One of such groups is the young.

According to the outlines of the *2030 Agenda for sustainable development (Przekształcamy nasz świat...*, 2020), societies should be responsible for the realisation of goals on sustainable consumption. Ecological consumption, an example of such, should focus on the behaviour and choices of tourists while travelling and staying at their destinations. From that perspective, there is a need to recognise the pro-ecological attitudes of the young (as consumers of tourism products) and their attitude towards proecological practices implemented by accommodation businesses as those responsible for building a competitive advantage.

As a result, the main aim of the present study is to show the ecological behaviour and consumer choices of Generation Z and their attitudes to pro-ecological practices implemented as a part of ecological policies in accommodation businesses. At the same time the authors tried to answer the question whether proecological actions can encourage these generations to choose pro-ecological accommodation and thus be the source of competitive advantage for such businesses.

The consequence of these aims is the hypothesis that ecological policies and following their guidelines can be a source of competitive advantage for an accommodation business.

2. LITERATURE ANALYSIS

The concept of sustainable development is an important issue in tourism (Tzschenke, Kirk, Lynch, 2004). According to UNWTO, sustainable tourism should:

- make optimal use of the natural resources which are key elements of its growth and help to preserve natural heritage and biological diversity;
- respect the authenticity of societies of the recipient regions, preserve their cultural heritage, traditional values and promote cross-cultural understanding and tolerance;
- secure the long lasting functioning of the economy, providing socio-economic benefits for all involved (Nowacki et al., 2017; UNWTO, 2017).

Its implementation is realised on two levels: creating sustainable tourism consumption and the operation of tourism businesses following guidelines for sustainable growth (Burzyński, Abram, 2011). Implementing sustainable consumption means accepting responsibility by consumers with a view to limiting negative impacts on the environment (Bruska, 2016; Evans, 2011) and with

the aim of guaranteeing a dignified life for all within the limits of Earth's abundance (Bruska, 2016; Lorek, Fuchs, 2013; Lorek, Spangenberg, 2014). The literature distinguishes two types of sustainable consumption: eco-friendly green and socially responsible (Bruska, 2016). The former means using goods and services to meet basic human needs and improve standards of living while at the same time, minimising the use of natural resources, toxic materials and the amount of waste (Ryszawska-Grzeszczak, 2007). Ecological behaviour includes consumption of ecological goods, growth in spending on ecological food, frugal use of consumer goods, purchasing goods which do not generate a lot of waste, sorting garbage and recycling. The creation of the pro-ecological consumer is a prerequisite for the emergence of a market for environment-friendly products (Kryk, 2011).

Since sustainable tourism has to achieve ecological objectives, the impact of tourism growth on the environment is the subject of numerous analyses (Berezan, Millar, Raab, 2014). It has been pointed out that sustainable design is of key importance for destinations, keeping up with contemporary market trends and further emphasised by the notion that sustainable growth in tourism is best seen in the accommodation sector (Mousavi, Hoskara, Woosnam, 2017), connected with its rapid growth which has a strong impact on the environment (da Rosa, Silva, 2017). Realisation of sustainable growth at the level of a single business is done through implementation of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) guidelines and pro-ecological and pro-social actions aimed at the well-being of employees and guests. Actions aimed at raising ecological awareness among customers using such services can result in an increased willingness on the part of companies to act in a socially responsible way and at the same time to increase interest in products characterised by high ecological standards (Kryk, 2011).

One aspect of sustainable growth is action aimed at protecting the environment which is of key importance in many regions. Hence, protection of the environment is given priority in the activity of many tourism businesses including those providing accommodation services which is reflected in the management system and development strategies. Efforts are being made in order to design and/or improve environmental policies and minimising negative impacts on the environment e.g. by implementing water- or energy-saving programs. In most cases, such actions are voluntarily chosen and result from the need to develop and adapt to European and world trends and standards in the tourism industry (Borkowska-Niszczoła, 2011).

From the literature, it has been pointed out that accommodation businesses are even more environmentally oriented, alongside the introduction of legal regulations (Berezan, Miller, Raab, 2014). As stated earlier, consumer expectations are very important factors

stimulating actions on the part of business owners and local authorities, and consumer pressure acts as a catalyst (da Rosa, Silva, 2017). It was pointed out that following guidelines for sustainable growth results in a higher quality of product which in turn improves the level of consumer satisfaction (Edgell, 2006). Business owners tend to build their brands using connotations from ecology (Kapera, Wszendybył-Skulska, 2017).

When it comes to protection of the environment, the hospitality industry is a key tourism element (Erdogan, Baris, 2007). According to experts' estimates, about 75% of accommodation's impact on the environment is directly related to excessive consumption (Bohdanowicz, 2006). Thus, customer attitudes, sustainable consumption and acceptance of the practices being implemented, can limit the negative impact. Therefore, it is important to engage customers in the pro-ecological actions of accommodation businesses through the option of not changing sheets and towels daily, using recycled toilet paper, magnetic cards triggering the energy supply, dosage-allowing devices for liquid soap, low-power lighting, gym equipment supporting electricity production, selective waste collection and education on responsible behaviour. In order to improve consumer involvement in environment saving actions, certain benefits have been offered for instance a free meal for customers using training bikes capable of generating at least 10 watt-hours of electricity (Crowne Plaza Hotel Copenhagen Towers in Denmark), bus transport to nearby ski-lifts included in the price (*Nad przelotem Hotel*), vouchers for snacks and drinks in exchange for not using the daily hotel service (Sheraton accommodation) (Borkowska-Niszczota, 2011, 2015).

One can wonder to what extent the guidelines for sustainable growth are actually implemented. Surely, such practices will be implemented better as the benefits resulting from them exceed the costs of their introduction. As Ryan (2002) emphasised, some pro-ecological practices can generate millions of savings. Business managers have noticed such opportunities and tried to optimise the use of water and energy or reduce the amount of waste (Mousavi, Oskara, Woosman, 2017). New methods of management implemented in accommodation facilities create an opportunity to gain competitive advantage (Borkowska-Niszczota, 2011). It is a chance to stand out in the market (Beccera, Santalo, Silva, 2013) and as a result, can lead to a higher value for a brand. Still, some business owners do not take advantage as they do not see benefits coming from such actions (Kang, Stein, Heo, Lee, 2012).

Initiatives connected with gaining a competitive advantage as a result of pro-ecological actions differ depending on the quality of services offered by a facility (Ge, Chen, Chen, 2018). Pro-ecological actions can be a tool for building customer loyalty. Other positives of such initiatives include good relations with local

stakeholders, improving their image in comparison with competitors, and law-compliance (Prochorowicz, 2015). The image of an environment-friendly facility has a positive effect on creating word-of-mouth marketing, a willingness to pay more and a willingness to return to the same place (Han, Hsu, Lee, 2009; Kelly, Haider, Williams, Englund, 2007; Lee, Hsu, Han, Kim, 2010). However, it cannot be assumed that all customers will display the same positive response to pro-ecological practices in accommodation. There are groups of consumers expecting such practices and ready to pay for them but it is not clear if they are substantial enough to justify pro-ecological investments resulting in higher prices. This problem is amplified by the fact that consumers exist who do not wish to pay more for ecological accommodation, despite being aware of the value of such practices (Manaktola, Jauhari, 2007). Declarations do not necessarily translate into actual actions. In a study by Bereza, Millar, and Raab, over 80% of respondents declared their willingness to pay more for pro-ecological practices but from the same group, over 40% said that the best motivating factor for environmentally-friendly behaviour would be a discount (Bereza, Millar, Raab, 2014). Other analyses have shown that consumers are willing to pay more for accommodation services in places following pro-ecological guidelines (Kang, Stein, Heo, Lee, 2012; Kostakis, Sardianou, 2012; Millar, Baloglu, 2011). In the study by Han, Hsu, Lee and Sheu (2011), 90% of respondents said that they would rather stay in accommodation observing ecological guidelines. Robinom and Giannelloni (2010) managed to confirm a hypothesis that environmental protection initiatives can be considered a 'plus' attribute of a hotel. At the same time, limitations to the comfort of a stay were also seen as a barrier to certain behaviour (Baker, Davis, Weaver, 2014; Han, Chan, 2013). Furthermore, Baker, Davies and Weaver (2014) noticed that consumers were more willing to implement pro-ecological behaviour at home rather than at the hotel.

Research shows consumer's positive attitudes to ecological facilities (Chen, Tung, 2014; Gao, Mattila, 2014) but some differences in attitude were observed depending on the gender of respondents (Han, Hsu, Lee, Sheu, 2011) and their age (Sidali, Huber, Schamel, 2017). In turn, Millar, Mayer, Baloglu (2012) analysed expectations and attitudes to ecological matters among both business and leisure tourists without any significant differences between the two groups.

Within the sphere of sustainable growth in the hospitality/accommodation sector, another aspect under investigation is the influence of employees on the implementation of actions (Chan, Hawkins, 2010). Analysis of the determinants affecting the implementation of pro-ecological practices is another important area of study. Gil, Jimenez and Lorente (2001) pointed out dependence on age, membership in a chain and the financial

results of a given hotel. Another interesting subject is co-operation (in particular, international) aimed at gaining competences, ideas and consequently, implementing pro-ecological practices (Ge, Chen, Chen, 2018).

In Poland, the issue of pro-ecological activities undertaken in accommodation has been studied as well and the results have shown an insufficient appreciation of the idea of eco-development among consumers (Kapera, Wszendybył-Skulska, 2017). The determining factors affecting the choice of a particular hotel are quality, location, and price (all about 60%) with less than 32% of respondents mentioning the importance of pro-ecological activities (Kapera, Wszendybył-Skulska, 2017). This figure, however, should not be seen as low as ecological awareness can be treated as a significant secondary factor which can prove decisive in cases where the three earlier-mentioned factors are assessed as being of similar value. Kasim (2004) also observed similar determiners of choice, arriving at the conclusion that investments in ecology are a waste of resources.

Some factors determining the implementation of pro-ecological practices in accommodation businesses include legal regulations, material benefits, customer expectations and pressure. The analysis here will focus on the last item as it is the ever growing social awareness of ecology-related issues and the resulting demand for them that has led to the emergence of assessments on the impact of accommodation facilities on the environment (Liang, 2013). One of the tools used for the synthetic assessment of this impact is the Green Key Eco-Rating Program (Pawłowski, 2016) as consumers pay more attention than ever to ecology-conscious entities and products and this can then be used in promotional activities (D'Souza, Taghian, 2005).

Since Generation Z place a premium on care for the environment, they willingly participate in pro-ecological initiatives that limit their negative influence on the environment. It is the first generation that is aware of ecological changes and the negative impact on the planet (*Eko-generacja Z*).

The above conclusions are in agreement with the findings of Han, Kim and Kiatkawsin (2017) which seem to negate some of the stereotypes of the young and the results confirm the hypothesis which states that they take care of the environment and are willing to take pro-ecological actions. Other publications (Haddouche, Salomone, 2018) have suggested a different attitude however and studies on Generation Z carried out in Poland have also shown the cost of environmental losses in economic calculations. It appears that what drives water-saving is not an ecological mind set, rather it is the cost of private spending. What seems to be a promising factor is the fact that the young are nevertheless aware that the environment should be protected as part of taking care of oneself and the health of future generations (Kwiatek, Skiba, 2017).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The article is based on the results of empirical research. Pilot work was carried out using a standardised questionnaire (characterised by indirectness with face-to-face contact being abandoned in favour of written communication) with a group of 245 young people aged 18-25 over the period from December 2019 to January 2020. The questionnaires were handed out and filled in by groups of young people gathered in the same place at the same time. The venue of the survey was Warsaw, a place generating strong tourism demand. The dominant group were 19 year olds (26.1%), 20 year olds (21.2%) and 18 year olds (18.4%) with the least numerous being 23 year olds (0.82%). Most of the respondents were female (62.4%) and they were, in most cases, studying (47.7%) or those both studying and working (48.2%).

The questionnaire was made up of eight questions covering the attitudes of young people towards ecological behaviour and products, types and frequency of actions aimed at environmental protection in everyday life, the importance of the eco-friendliness of selected products and their manufacture, willingness to pay more for ecological products and for accommodation which implemented pro-ecological practices, incentives for customers engaging in pro-ecological practices, and the level of satisfaction with the actions undertaken by accommodation facilities as part of ecological policy. The authors also tried to determine whether the respondents would appreciate pro-ecological accommodation more and whether they would be willing to pay for such services. The research interpreted the results by means of analysis, synthesis and deduction.

4. RESULTS

The first question to respondents was of a general character and was meant to introduce more detailed questions stating their attitudes towards ecological behaviour and products. The results indicate that more than half of them (59.1%) tried to follow guidelines on ecology, but did not succeed. For a substantial group (19.2%), it was important as they always try to follow the guidelines, but there are those who are indifferent (8.9%). Another group (3.7%) are those who apply guidelines only when it suits their interest, and 1.2% of the respondents deem such guidelines a waste of time. Moreover, 7.7% did not state an opinion.

The research determined which pro-ecological behaviour was implemented on a daily basis as well as frequency. The results are presented in Table 1.

The most frequent pro-ecological behaviour is noticing lights that had not been switched off, sorting garbage, carrying their own shopping bags and avoiding dispos-

able ones. The behaviour which got “often” or “from time to time” ratings were saving electricity, conserving water and buying healthy food. When it comes to using biodegradable bags, they mostly reported using them “from time to time” and “always” or “often”. Avoiding plastic packaging was reported as occurring “from time to time” or “hardly ever”. Rare is the habit of returning bottles – over half of the respondents never do it.

While shopping it is important to check whether the product itself and the process of its production are eco-friendly. Hence, the importance of ecological issues was rated using a 1-5 scale where 1 meant “no importance” and 5 stood for “very important”. What the respondents deem “very important” and “important” (results 5 and 4) is whether a given product and its manufacture is environmentally-friendly and this holds for food (63.68%), juices (57.15%), apples (51.43%) and electricity (50.2%). The same feature seems less important in case of cars (43.26%), cleaning products (42.86%), trips (42.44%), a meal in a restaurant (39.19%) or a stay in a hotel (36.73%). Least importance was attached to the ecological nature of fuel with only 28.98% of the respondents viewing it as important or very important, while 31.43% attached no importance to it at all.

Responses to the question on the respondents’ willingness to pay more for eco-products varied but positive answers accounted for a slightly higher proportion. The prevailing answer was “rather yes” (36.7%) followed by “rather not” (28.57%), “definitely yes” (5.7%) and “definitely not” (4.9%). Quite a large number of the respondents (22%) had no opinion on the issue and 2% failed to address the question at all.

Subsequent questions relate to the respondents’ attitudes to pro-ecological policies in accommodation businesses where pro-ecological practices were implemented as part of achieving such policies which in many cases entailed limitations and less comfort for guests. However, the respondents expressed their support for such practices indicating that they are the source

of potential or actual satisfaction. They were rated on a 1-7 scale, where 1 indicated dissatisfaction and 7 meant very high satisfaction with a given solution and the results are presented in Table 2. The respondents did not have to use the services offered by accommodation or be their customers in order to express their attitudes to pro-ecological practices in such facilities.

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that the respondents support many of the pro-ecological practices implemented in accommodation. Judging from the percentage of ratings 6 and 7, it can be observed that the most popular practices are movement sensors in corridors, energy-saving sources of light, solar panels, magnetic cards and sorting of garbage. Only slightly less popular are soap-dosing devices, glass bottles, hand driers instead of paper towels, as well as information on pro-ecological practices. It is worth mentioning the less popular practices such as change of sheets and towels on request, lower temperature of water and limiting air-conditioning.

Since the authors believe that involving customers in pro-ecological practices in accommodation is paramount, an attempt was made to find out what kind of incentives might trigger such involvement. In most cases, the respondents expect financial rewards in exchange for their involvement (discounts on a stay – 72.24% or services – 65.71 or cash – 38.37%). Less popular were material incentives – 29.39% or points earned on loyalty programs – 20.41%.

As for the question whether the young are better and as a result would choose accommodation implementing pro-ecological practices, the largest group of answers (50.61%) was “rather yes” and 20% “definitely yes”. As few as 4.48% were of a different opinion and chose the answer “rather not” while “definitely not” was chosen by 0.4% of the respondents. At the same time, 23.26% of the respondents had no opinion whatsoever. Far less optimistic results were recorded when it came to the question whether the young would be willing to pay

Table 1. Kinds and frequency of everyday pro-ecological behaviour in Generation Z (% of responses)

Behaviours	Whenever I can	Often, I try to	From time to time	Hardly ever, never	No reply
I sort my garbage	33.06	34.70	25.71	6.12	0.41
I conserve water, I limit its use	22.04	39.19	28.16	10.20	0.41
I carry my own shopping bag, I try not to buy disposable bags	38.78	29.38	17.96	13.47	0.41
I use biodegradable bags	21.22	22.86	37.96	17.55	0.41
I conserve electricity, I limit its use	18.37	32.65	35.10	13.47	0.41
I try to buy and use healthy foods	24.49	38.78	30.20	6.12	0.41
I notice the lights that haven't been switched off	50.20	30.20	15.51	3.68	0.41
I return bottles	7.76	9.79	22.04	60.00	0.41
I avoid plastic packaging	7.76	18.77	39.59	33.47	0.41

Source: own research.

Table 2. Declared support for pro-ecological practices implemented in accommodation (% of responses)

Factor	Rating							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	No response
Towels and bed sheets changed only on request	13.88	9.79	11.84	12.24	14.70	8.16	25.31	4.08
Soap dosing devices instead of disposable soaps	4.08	2.04	11.84	8.57	19.59	11.02	38.78	4.08
Use of magnetic cards triggering lights in rooms	3.27	3.67	9.39	11.02	17.55	12.65	38.37	4.08
Drinks in recyclable bottles	4.90	6.12	9.80	9.80	17.55	18.37	29.38	4.08
Rooms with information on pro-ecological practices	5.31	10.61	11.02	14.29	17.96	13.06	23.27	4.48
Sorting garbage	4.08	5.71	6.94	11.84	16.33	13.88	36.74	4.48
Hand driers instead of paper towels	7.35	5.71	11.43	16.33	15.92	11.84	26.94	4.48
Use of energy-saving sources of light	0.82	1.63	8.57	11.84	17.14	14.29	41.63	4.08
Ecological food	0.82	3.27	13.46	11.84	20.41	17.14	28.98	4.08
Solar panels in accommodation	2.45	2.04	8.98	11.84	18.78	10.61	41.22	4.08
Movement sensors in corridors – unused devices automatically switched off	2.04	6.53	5.71	9.39	15.92	11.43	44.90	4.08
Limited air-conditioning	7.76	6.53	15.92	17.14	21.22	16.33	11.02	4.08
Lower water temperature of and limited use of water	9.80	12.24	13.06	15.92	17.55	11.43	15.92	4.08
Longer usage cycle for bed sheets	17.14	10.61	14.29	15.92	17.14	11.43	9.39	4.08

Source: own research.

more for a stay implementing pro-ecological practices. The responses varied, although the largest proportion (32.65%) chose “rather yes” and “definitely yes” (6.5%), as many as 26.9% replied “rather not” and 7.34% “definitely not”. A similar proportion of respondents (23.67%) had no opinion on the matter.

5. CONCLUSION

The implementation of *Agenda for sustainable development 2030 (Przekształcamy nasz świat...*, 2020) and its aim of sustainable consumption will not be possible without the involvement of consumers of tourism services. Pro-ecological tourism should show active interest in the issue not only at home but also while travelling. Such tourists should support accommodation facilities in the implementation of ecological policies. Choice of environmentally-friendly accommodation and acceptance of pro-ecological practices should result from a high level of ecological consciousness, particularly in the case of young consumers. This in turn can be achieved through its constant building both formally and informally.

The presented results provide a lot of useful information on the pro-ecological behaviour of Generation Z and their attitudes towards pro-ecological actions in accommodation businesses, and proving the existence of such behaviour was the main aim of this study. As for behaviour and consumer choices, in general the young are trying to apply ecological guidelines, they support pro-ecological behaviour and products even though they admit that they are not always successful in doing so. This confirms earlier findings showing that the

young do take care of the environment and are willing to undertake pro-ecological activities. The activities they perform in the first place are the results of new regulations (sorting garbage) or result from economic or health-related reasons (avoiding disposable bags, saving energy and water, buying healthy foods). It is also in line with earlier findings showing that it is financial frugality rather than a conscious pro-ecological stand that leads to such behaviour.

Unfortunately, the young are not used to giving up products packed in plastic or returning glass bottles to recycling centres. The respondents pay more attention to the eco-features of a product and the ecological character of its manufacture in the case of food products than tourism services such as a stay in a hotel or a meal in a restaurant. Still, a noticeable group of respondents do pay a lot of attention to the ecological nature of tourism products.

Post-millennials generally support the implementation of pro-ecological practices in accommodation facilities the only difference being the scale of such support. Certain practices are very popular and are both accepted and supported by about 50% of respondents. However, other practices such as prolonged usage of bed sheets, or sheets and towels changed only on request are not positively viewed. When it comes to a willingness to pay more for pro-ecological practices, opinions vary. Generation Z expects financial incentives/rewards (discounts or cash) for their involvement in pro-ecological actions.

An auspicious omen is the fact that a large part of young consumers tend to rate more highly and choose those facilities which are pro-ecological. This provides

an answer to the question stated in the introduction and confirms the assumed hypothesis. Ecological policies and pro-ecological practices can be a source of competitive advantage for companies providing accommodation services. While analysing the results, it is important to bear in mind the pilot character of the study. Both the selection and size of the sample are limitations to generalisations from the conclusions. Moreover, the importance of the issue should be emphasised as well as the ever growing importance of issues on sustainable growth in the contemporary world. These facts, beyond any doubt, provide arguments for the continuation of research.

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