

THE USE OF VIDEO DIRECT MAIL BY RETAIL MANAGERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR STORE IMAGE AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION

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This exploratory research examined the direct and indirect effects of video direct mail on consumers' perceptions of store image and purchase intention for a retail jeweler. Results indicated that a consumer's image of a store has a positive impact on attitude toward the use of video direct mail as a communication medium. The evaluation of video content by consumers was also positively influenced by their attitude toward the use of video direct mail and their image of the retail store. A positive relationship between video direct mail and purchase intention was also found. With aggressive retailers seeking to bypass media clutter through the use of novel advertising media like video direct mail, these findings provide an important initial step toward understanding the linkages between retail store image and video direct mail. Implications for retail marketing managers are discussed from services marketing and attitude toward the ad theory perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

With videocassette recorders penetrating over 70% of the homes in the U.S. (1992 Statistical Abstract of the United States), it is not surprising that the use of videocassettes as a method of selling upscale products is on the rise (Horton 1987). The medium of a videocassette affords marketers the opportunity to use the demonstration power of television without TV's time restraints or expense. Direct mail videos have been used by Commodore Business Machines, Apple Computer, Royal Viking Cruise Line, Kemper Financial Services, Life Fitness, Canteen Corporation, IBM, Estee Lauder Inc., and Hartmarx Corp. (First 1988; Graham 1988; Horton 1988; Young 1991). While dozens of studies have examined retail store image and its associated attributes (e.g., Davies and Brooks, 1987; Golden, Albaum and Zimmer 1987; Keaveney and Hunt 1992; Lindquist 1974; Steenkamp and Wedel 1991; Wu and Petroschius 1987; Zimmer and Golden 1988), there is a paucity of research focusing on the effects of a retailer's use of video direct mail on customer impressions of store image and subsequently, purchase intention.

What are consumers' attitudes toward the use of video promotions? How do consumers perceive the use of video direct mail in general and what impact does this perception have on the evaluation of a specific video promotion? Does video usage impact consumers' perceptions of the retailer's store image? Does store image influence purchase intentions directly or only indirectly through attitude toward the ad (i.e., content of the video)? Does consumer evaluation of the content of the video moderate purchase intentions or are purchase decisions made based on the current image of the store? The purpose of this exploratory field study is to examine the direct and indirect effects of video direct mail on store image, attitude toward the ad, and purchase intentions.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

According to Martineau (1958), a store's image is comprised "partly of functional qualities and partly of an aura of psychological attributes." More recently Dichter (1985) has suggested that "image" is a global or overall impression that combines factual and emotional material. Most researchers agree that store image is an overall attitude toward the store, based on perceptions of specific store attributes (e.g., Bearden 1977; Lindquist 1974; Walters 1978). According to Gronroos (1984; 1990), the image consumers have of a retail service is based on their perceptions of both the functional quality and the technical quality of the service.

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Functional quality deals with "how" the customer was treated by the contact personnel whereas technical quality deals with the quality of the product or service outcome. Even consumers who have no prior experience with a retailer will have developed an image of that business based on what they perceive will occur (Clow, Kurtz, and Ozment 1991).

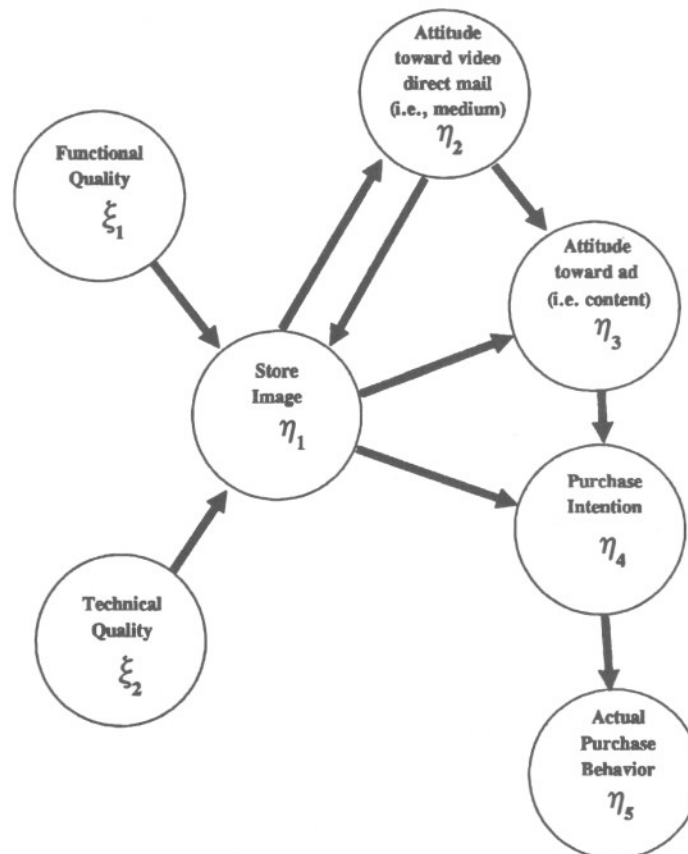
A similar perception was posited by MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) in their conceptualization of attitude toward the ad. They hypothesized that past experience and information would impact perceptions of an advertiser. Borrowing from MacKenzie and Lutz' conceptualization of attitude toward the ad, we propose a model (see Figure 1) that integrates Gronroos' (1984) Perceived Service Quality Model. We suggest, as did Gronroos, that functional and technical quality perceptions (reflecting past experience) will directly impact consumers' image of the store (i.e., attitude toward the advertiser). Thus, our first two hypotheses address the formation of the consumers' image of the retail store:

H1: Consumers' positive perception of the functional quality (i.e., customer service) of a retail store will have a significant positive impact on the perceived image of the store ($\lambda_{11} > 0$).

H2: Consumers' positive perceptions of the technical quality (i.e., merchandise offering) of a retail store will have a significant positive impact on the perceived image of the store ($\lambda_{12} > 0$).

A consumer's attitude toward a particular advertising stimulus can contribute to the formation of brand attitude and purchase intention (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989; Brown and Stayman 1992). Both the verbal and visual elements of an ad can affect the consumer's attitude toward the ad itself and subsequently, the brand. However, as previously mentioned, attitude toward the ad is affected by upstream variables such as past experience and information about the advertiser,

FIGURE 1



advertiser perceptions, and attitude toward the advertiser. MacKenzie and Lutz (1989) found that attitude toward the advertiser influenced attitude toward the ad directly, as well as indirectly through ad perceptions. Another influencing variable was the attitude of consumers toward advertising in general.

Based on MacKenzie and Lutz, store image (i.e., attitude toward the advertiser) is hypothesized to have a positive direct effect on attitude toward the ad. Specifically, the consumer's perception of the store in terms of image is likely to influence attitudes toward an unsolicited video direct mail promotion. In addition, perceptions of store image will indirectly effect attitude toward the ad operating through the consumer's attitude toward the medium (i.e., video direct mail). In other words, receipt of an unsolicited video promotion may create positive or negative affect in and of itself. As noted in our beginning paragraph, the use of video direct mail is growing. It is not uncommon to see the technique used in lead generation programs. For example, Nordic Track print advertisements provide a toll-free number for interested customers to request a videotape which will further demonstrate the offer. Conventional wisdom would predict that consumers who pro-actively request a follow-up video would be more positive toward the video than consumers who received the video unsolicited. These effects, regardless of direction, should flow through to impact attitude toward the ad (i.e., the content of the video itself). The recursive nature of the relationship between these variables is evident in Hypotheses 3 and 4:

H3: Consumers' perceived image of a retail store will have a significant impact on their attitude toward video direct mail as a medium ($\beta_{12} > 0$).

H4: Consumers' attitude toward video direct mail as a medium will significantly impact upon their perceived image of the retail store ($\beta_{21} > 0$).

H5: Consumers' perceived image of the retail store will significantly impact upon their attitude toward the video ad such that the more positive the store image, the more positive the attitude toward the ad (i.e., video content) ($\beta_{31} > 0$).

H6: Consumers' attitude toward video direct mail as a medium will significantly impact upon their attitude toward the ad (i.e., video content) such that if the attitude is negative,

attitude toward the ad will be negative ($\beta_{32} > 0$).

Finally, attitude toward the ad and the consumers' image of the store are predicted to have an impact on purchase intentions. Traditional hierarchy of effects logic prescribes that ad attitudes impact attitude toward the brand and subsequently purchase intention. However, in a retail setting, be it a department, specialty or discount store, attitude toward the brand may be less salient since multiple brands may be advertised within a single ad. For example, a department store such as Famous Barr, Nordstrom's, or Dillards may regularly run a newspaper ad highlighting a variety of brands. Alternatively, a jewelry store (e.g., Zales) would rarely advertise its diamonds via a specific brand name; hence, for this model, attitude toward the brand has been replaced with the consumers' image of the retail store. Both attitude toward the ad (i.e., video content) and the consumers' image of the retail store are hypothesized to directly affect purchase intention (Barich and Kotler 1991).

H7: Consumers' perceived image of the retail store will significantly influence their intentions to purchase ($\beta_{41} > 0$).

H8: Consumers' attitude toward the ad (i.e., video content) will significantly influence their intentions to purchase ($\beta_{43} > 0$).

H9: Consumers indicating that the video content positively influenced their purchase intentions will be more likely to actually purchase ($\beta_{54} > 0$).

METHOD

Subjects were 800 customers of a local retail jewelry store in a moderate-sized city. These individuals had purchased from the store during the last year or were acquainted with the store. In November, subjects received a 30-minute videotaped Christmas catalog promoting the availability of gift merchandise. Approximately six months later, a follow-up questionnaire was mailed to the same subjects. This mailing generated a 25.1 percent response rate (201 questionnaires were returned). Prior to data analysis, respondents who omitted items ($n = 25$) were removed from the study, leaving a final sample of 176 (41.4 percent female; 58.6 percent male).

Video Stimulus. The video was professionally produced, including music and narration. The store

owner provided a personal on-camera introduction, along with merchandise descriptions and a conclusion. Approximately 20 pieces of jewelry were presented. Some jewelry was displayed on rotating stands. Felt backgrounds were used and no models or hands were shown. All jewelry was described in depth, but no prices were mentioned. Several times during the video, viewers were encouraged to visit the store. Assurance of quality and personal service was mentioned at the beginning and end of the video. The video was accompanied by a one-page cover letter from the proprietor. The letter thanked the customer for past patronage, reminded him or her of the upcoming Christmas season, and emphasized the appropriateness of jewelry as a gift of love.

Construct Measurement. The post-exposure questionnaire contained 25 questions measuring six latent constructs. All constructs were measured via multi-item indicators (Churchill 1979).

Perceived Quality

The mean response to four 7-point semantic differential scales (anchored by high/low) was used to measure perceived functional quality ($\alpha = .88$). The stem statement, "Please indicate your evaluation of the store based on the following criteria," was used in conjunction with professional conduct of the sales staff; friendliness of the sales staff; appearance of the sales staff; and customer service. Perceived technical quality was assessed utilizing the same stem with the following criteria: jewelry quality; jewelry selection; store atmosphere ($\alpha = .86$). It should be noted that subjects were asked to respond to these measures based on previous in-store encounters and not on reactions to the video.

Perceptions

Perceived store image was measured on 7-point scales anchored by high/low. For this construct, the stem statement "Please indicate your evaluation of the store" was linked with prestige, image, and overall satisfaction ($\alpha = .85$).

Attitudes

Attitude toward the video medium in general was measured with three 7-point scales anchored by "Strongly Agree" (7) and "Strongly Disagree" (1) ($\alpha = .84$). A sample item is "I would like to receive more video direct mail promotions in the future". Attitude toward the content of the video was measured via four 7-point bipolar adjective scales (Good/Bad,

Appealing/Unappealing, Poor/Excellent). Video content, background music, presentation of merchandise, and selection of merchandise were each assessed respectively ($\alpha = .89$).

Additional Measures

Purchase intention was measured using four 7-point bipolar adjective scales anchored by "Strongly Agree" (7) and "Strongly Disagree" (1) ($\alpha = .87$). Sample items included: "The video influenced me to go into the store to look further," and "The video format influenced a purchase decision at this store." For purposes of validity, self-reported purchase behavior in terms of actual number of purchases was also measured.

RESULTS

The data were analyzed using LISREL 7 simultaneous equation procedures (Joreskog and Sorbom 1983; 1988). Our measurement model, along with the maximum likelihood coefficients and t-values for both the λ_x and λ_y matrices, is shown in Table 1. A confirmatory factor analysis indicated our measures were valid and the proposed latent constructs unidimensional (Anderson and Gerbing 1982; Kumar and Dillon 1987).

Given adequate measures for the model, the proposed model was tested for adequate fit using the correlation matrix of the structural model. An excellent fit between the S and Σ matrices was indicated ($X^2_{(df=11)} = 5.73$, $p = .89$). The Goodness-of-Fit and Adjusted-Goodness-of-Fit indices of .99 and .97, respectively, corroborate the fit.

Finally, the authors tested the theorized model (see Table 2). Of the nine paths hypothesized in the structural model, seven were significant. Supporting Hypothesis 1 and 2, the perceived functional and technical quality of a retail store were found to have a positive impact on consumers' image of the store. The more positive a consumer's evaluation of the functional quality (i.e., customer service), the more positive his/her perceived image of the retail store. The same relationship holds for technical quality. The more positive the evaluation of the store's merchandise offering (i.e., technical quality), the more positive were perceptions of the store's image.

In looking at the relationship between a consumer's perceived image of a retail store and his/her attitude toward the medium of video direct mail, Hypothesis 3 was supported but not Hypothesis 4. A consumer's image of a store had a positive impact on attitude toward

TABLE 1
MEASUREMENT MODEL

Latent Construct	Maximum Likelihood	T-Value
Functional Quality		
λ_{x11}	1.000	a
λ_{x21}	2.180	6.581 ^b
λ_{x31}	2.200	6.463 ^b
λ_{x41}	1.189	5.185 ^b
Technical Quality		
λ_{x52}	1.000	a
λ_{x62}	0.834	4.758 ^b
λ_{x72}	0.923	4.831 ^b
Image of Store		
λ_{y11}	1.000	a
λ_{y21}	1.208	6.445 ^b
λ_{y31}	1.796	7.529 ^b
Attitude toward video direct mail		
λ_{y42}	0.811	9.696 ^b
λ_{y52}	1.000	a
λ_{y62}	1.291	11.144 ^b
λ_{y72}	1.096	10.992 ^b
Evaluation of video		
λ_{y83}	1.000	a
λ_{y93}	0.989	10.641 ^b
λ_{y103}	1.004	9.139 ^b
λ_{y113}	0.748	8.522 ^b
λ_{y123}	0.723	10.321 ^b
λ_{y133}	0.432	8.519 ^b
λ_{y143}	0.803	12.029 ^b
Influence on purchase decision		
λ_{y154}	0.441	5.172 ^b
λ_{y164}	1.000	a
λ_{y174}	0.911	13.912 ^b
λ_{y184}	0.837	13.466 ^b

^aFixed parameter

^bSignificant at $p < .01$

the use of video direct mail. However, the reverse is not supported. The attitude held by consumers concerning the use of video direct mail in general does not impact upon their image of the store.

Supporting Hypothesis 5, the evaluation of the video content by consumers is positively influenced by their attitude toward the use of video direct mail and their image of the retail store. The more positive a consumer's image of a store is, the more positive is their evaluation of video direct mail. There is also a positive correlation between consumers' attitude toward video direct mail and his/her evaluation of the video promotion used by a particular store. Based on

the maximum likelihood coefficients of 0.828 for β_{32} and 0.243 for β_{31} , the impact of a consumer's attitude toward the use of videos for direct mail has a much stronger impact on his or her evaluation of the content of the video promotion than his or her image of the retail store.

Regarding the effect of video direct mail on purchase intention, the data indicated a positive relationship. However, store image did not influence purchase intentions directly. Thus, Hypothesis 6 was only partially supported. It must be kept in mind that purchase intentions in this study were within the context of the effect of the video promotion. Respondents who

TABLE 2
STRUCTURAL MODEL

Path	Maximum Likelihood	T-Value
γ_{11} Functional quality $\rightarrow$ Image of store	0.741	20.318 ^a
γ_{12} Technical quality $\rightarrow$ Image of store	0.286	8.042 ^a
β_{21} Image of store $\rightarrow$ Attitude toward the medium	0.338	4.315 ^a
β_{31} Image of store $\rightarrow$ Attitude toward the ad	0.243	8.670 ^a
β_{41} Image of store $\rightarrow$ Purchase intention	-0.086	-1.391
β_{12} Attitude toward medium $\rightarrow$ Image of store	-0.006	-0.160
β_{32} Attitude toward medium $\rightarrow$ Attitude toward the ad	0.828	29.509 ^a
β_{43} Attitude toward the ad $\rightarrow$ Purchase intention	0.758	12.218 ^a
β_{54} Purchase intention $\rightarrow$ Purchase behavior	0.296	4.076 ^a

Goodness-of-Fit Indices

$$X^2_{(d.f. = 11)} = 5.73, p = .891$$

$$GFI = .99$$

$$AGFI = .97$$

^aSignificant at $p < .01$

indicated they liked the video also indicated the video influenced a subsequent purchase. Because β_{41} was not significant, the subsequent purchases appear to be stimulated by the video and not the image of the store.

The influence of video direct mail on subsequent purchase decision was verified by a positive relationship between Purchase Intention (η_4) and Purchase Behavior (η_5). Hypothesis 7 was supported adding validity to the Purchase Intention (η_4) latent construct in that actual purchase behavior (following receipt of the promotional video) was positively correlated with purchase intention.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTED FUTURE RESEARCH

Although exploratory in nature, this study revealed several significant findings concerning the use of videos by retail stores. It appears that videos are a viable medium for transmitting promotional materials to potential customers. These videos do impact purchase intentions and actual purchase behavior. The study also reinforced past research concerning the formulation of a retail store's image and the importance of that image in purchase behavior (Hartley 1989; Lewison 1991).

The image of a store consists of both the products sold (i.e., technical quality) and the service provided (i.e., functional quality) when the product is purchased. The

values of LISREL γ coefficients indicate that the impact of the functional aspect of service is more important than the technical aspect. In other words (at least for this data), how the individual is treated by sales personnel has a greater impact on the image the consumer has of a retail store than does the merchandise assortment or quality. This does not imply that product quality is not important. The significant path between technical quality and store image indicates its importance; however, in the formulating retail store image, consumers' evaluation of the service aspects are of greater importance.

One possible explanation for this result is the saturation of the retail market with relatively homogeneous merchandise. If consumers perceive a commodity-type competitive situation, the only distinguishing factor in the formulation of the store's image are variances in perceived treatment by each retail firm. Stores that cater to consumer needs enjoy a more positive image than stores in which the customer feels he or she is just customer and not a "person". To enhance the image consumers have of a retail store, marketing managers may desire to hire and train personnel who excel in serving the customer. For example, the Von Maur department store chain (headquartered in Davenport, IA) forgoes advertising expenditures, budgeting those funds instead for customer service (Von Handorf 1993). Of importance to the manager is the incremental return on dollars budgeted to personal selling training versus those expended on advertising such as video direct mail.

When consumers hold a positive image of a retail store, they hold more positive attitudes toward the promotional medium used by the store and toward the promotional message itself. Apparently stores that enjoy a positive image will benefit more from the use of video direct mail than stores with neutral or negative images. Thus, it would appear that retail marketing managers must first assess the image consumers have of their stores before attempting to use video direct mail. The use of the video direct mail medium may only be profitable for firms rated on the very positive end of the image spectrum.

When a store's image is positive, the use of video direct mail is positively received and consumers' attitude toward the content of the video are positive. Because of its novelty and high perceived cost of production (Young 1991), consumers may consider a video a more prestigious medium and equate its use with more exclusive or innovative stores. Future research should investigate whether consumers equate the use of videos with these characteristics and whether the use of videos is perceived to be equally appropriate for specialty stores and mass merchandisers.

This point is further corroborated by the insignificant path from "attitude toward the medium" to "store image". The attitude consumers have toward the use of video direct mail does not change or modify their image of the firm. A video mailed to individuals with a positive attitude toward the use of video direct mail will not affect their image of the firm advertised. In other words, retailers cannot create more positive store image by transmitting promotional information through what may be perceived as a "prestigious" medium.

As expected, the attitude consumers had toward the use of video direct mail had a direct impact on their evaluation of its contents. The more positive the attitude concerning the use of videos, the more positive the evaluation of the video content. Concerning the influence of the video on subsequent purchases, the study indicated that positive attitude toward the video was positively correlated with increased purchase intention. The video, if evaluated positively, also had a significant impact on purchase behavior. This finding was reinforced by the significant path between purchase intention and actual purchase behavior. Alternatively, were the subsequent purchases affected by the image of the store rather than the video? It appears subsequent purchases were due to the video and not just because consumers had a positive image of the retail store.

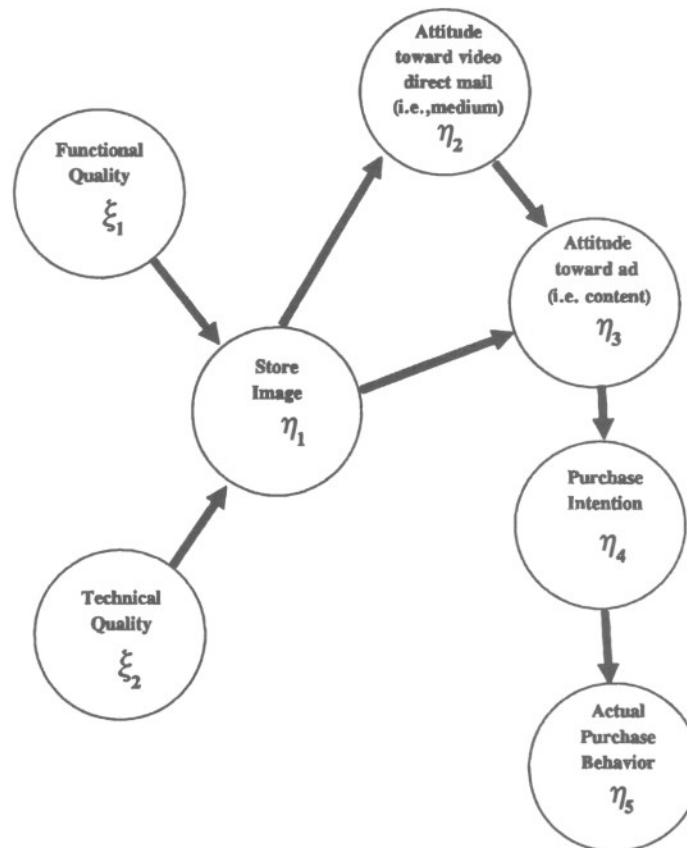
Support for the relationships hypothesized presents an interesting sequence of steps with implications for management (see Figure 2). To increase purchase behavior, retail stores may use video direct mail, but only if the retail store is perceived to have a positive image by the recipient of the video. Wise retailers should carefully segment the firm's mailing list to ensure a video goes only to individuals who currently have a high regard for the store. Video direct mail targeted to other individuals may be a wasted expenditure.

If the video is mailed to only those customers who have a positive image of the store, they will be more receptive to the use of video direct mail. These individuals will be more inclined to watch video and to respond more positively to the merchandise and video content. The evaluation of the video is further enhanced by the positive image the consumer has of the firm. The more positive the consumer evaluates the video content, the more likely s/he is to be influenced to make a purchase.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, our findings must be considered preliminary. Additional research examining the effects of solicited versus unsolicited video direct mail across divergent types of retailers must occur before generalizing is appropriate. For example, while Wal-Mart generally has a positive image, it seems improbable that a discounter would engage in promotion via video direct mail. Future research could examine retailers representative of the classification scheme proposed by Lovelock (1980) (i.e., discrete versus continuous relationships between customers and providers; extent of physical goods versus personal service, etc.).

Given the nonexperimental nature of a field study, randomization and experimental manipulation were not possible. Nevertheless, the present research represents a modest initial step toward understanding the linkages between retail store image and the use of novel advertising media like video direct mail. Future research should experiment with different types of video stimuli. While companies do use video catalogs, the present study's use of a 30-minute video may be atypical. Future research should also segment by type of goods (e.g., impulse, shopping, specialty) to determine if these relationships hold across categories. With resourceful retailers looking to recapture the public's attention, the effects of nontraditional media like video direct mail on retail store image and purchase intention warrant additional study.

FIGURE 2



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