# THE EXPANSION STRATEGY OF MULTINACIONAL CHAINS

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***Abstract:*** *Retail operates as an intermediary in between the wholesale and final customers. After the change of regime in Slovakia the first multinational chains appeared and started to create their hypermarket-network throughout the country. It is well known that these international companies are getting bigger slice cleaved off of the retail market, as a daily shopping gradually supplanted by large weekly shopping trips, and as a result, of course, increased the size of the amount spent per purchase occasion. The key of the success of chains comes from appropriately selected sites. This paper examines the criteria for site selection of food chains in Slovakia. In our research, we consider the most important factors that influence the location choice (the road network coverage, the number of available income and population) as well as the penetration index to examine the current situation in the Slovak retail market. The penetration index examines the various size categories of municipalities in at least the percentage of the test facility as a commercial store network. The study ends with the research conclusions and proposals for future development.*

***Keywords:*** *Chain stores, Site selection, Slovakia, Retail market, Penetration index, Size category.*

***JEL Classification:*** *L11.*

## Introduction

Retailing has gone through significant development since the change of regime. Due to a rise in the standard of living, active demand increased, and customer needs diversified. At first, retailers were not able to satisfy these customer needs. However, the above mentioned modified demand urged them to extend their product range. As a result, there was an increase in the number of their stores as well. [4]

After the Slovak market had opened up a lot of western investors arrived to the country and the number of shopping centres and hyper- and supermarkets owned by multinational retail companies increased rapidly. Customers quickly adapted to a wider selection offered by the newly arrived businesses and changed their shopping habits accordingly. Daily shopping was replaced by larger-scale weekly shopping, which of course resulted in higher spending per shopping trip. Customers' need for comfort was also increasing gradually, and international chains did their best to satisfy those demands. [9]

## 1 Statement of a problem

On the focus of researches included the retailers are investigations about the right site selection. Choosing the right location is important because the wrong decision has a negative impact on the success of business.

Analysis of the factors defines the site selection had been mentioned in the 18th, 19th century by the researchers. The most significant representative of this generation was Thünen, who had examined the installation principles of individual farm units in 1826. [11] The first researcher who identified the most significant factors influencing the site selection (materials, labour costs, transportation costs) was Alfred Weber (1928). [12] The excellent choice of site selection theories is Hotelling model (1929), which highlights that during the choosing of right site it is necessary taken into account by the competing companies decision.[6] Prominent figure of that period is Christaller (1933), who coined the theory of central places. [5]

The transformation of retail has affected the development of location theory as well. On the focus of respective economic geography there is the production and related activities in the product. However, the product must not only be prepared and sent to the device, but as Applebaum [1, 2] warns, the task of geography is to help the presentation of the information about the product, to assess the market, to determine the location of the business unit, select the appropriate sales channel, select a wholesale and retail unit premises. Despite the fact that trade is an important part of the tertiary sector, the geographers' attention for a long time avoided the study of retail geography, as the retail do not manufacture products.

Brown (1992) in relation to site selection distinguishes between the theoretical and the practical school. The practical approach started to develop after the II. World War in Britain and examined problems about the site selection of retailers. In contrast, representatives of the trends dealt with analysis of the more spatial structure and evolution of retail systems. Practical research trends were rather inductive, while the theoretical rather deductive logic. [3]

The relevant literature about retail geography can be divided into three groups. The first group consists of studies that analyse the structure and evolution of the retail based on Christaller's central places theory. The second group includes those authors who have approached the consumer side of the topic, focusing on consumer behaviour and perceptions of consumers. The third group includes the design and site selection strategy in retail outlets.

## 2 Methods

This paper deals with the expansion strategies of retail chains. The idea of the research carried out by Tibor Tiner's study *Commercial facilities site selection criteria in Hungary*. We used the above-mentioned author's approaches and methodology for the research in Slovakia.

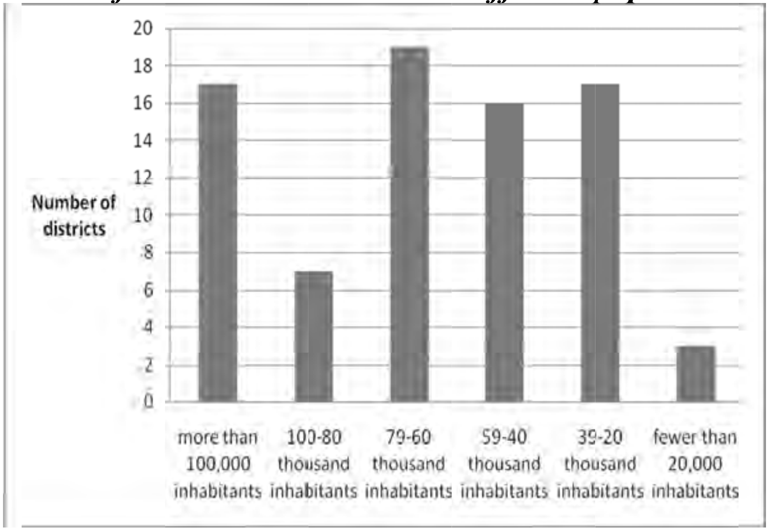
In order to provide a detailed and well-structured analysis, factors influencing the choice of location will be discussed such as the purchasing power of the population of the districts in Slovakia, and the Slovak road network. We were collected data about food, furniture and furnishings retail chains in Slovakia from the internet. We look at their sites from retailer's official website and with the help of the market penetration index, we will examine to what extent the number of stores is close to the ideal value. The penetration index is the percentage ratio of the number of commercial units and the right size categories of municipalities. The paper aims to describe retail chains in Slovakia and to analyse the relations between them as well as to analyse the number of stores in regional breakdown.

## 3 Factors influencing the choice of location of retail chains

Investors need to consider a number of factors before choosing the location for a new retail establishment. The analysis of natural environmental and social economic factors is of utmost importance. The size of the settlement and of its attraction zone, the purchasing power of its inhabitants and good transport links are all important factors that influence retailers' choice.

Similarly, the number of people living in the attraction zone of the potential retail establishment is also of particular importance. [10]

***Fig. 1: Number of districts in Slovakia in different population categories***




*Source: [own collection from online sources]*

As it can be concluded from Figure 1, 21.5% of the districts in Slovakia have a population of more than 100 000, while the population of Bratislava and the surrounding regions exceeds 430 000. Bratislava is followed by the districts of Nitra, Žilina, Košice and Prešov. Each one has a population of more than 150 000. The population of western regions outnumbers the one of eastern regions by far. The fast growing Bratislava, situated in Western Slovakia, and its vicinities have a combined population of 432 000. Population growth in some western districts is also significant, namely in the districts of Trnava (with a population of 129 000), Dunajská Streda (with a population of 118 607) and Nitra (with a population of 165 011). Similarly, the districts of Komárno (with a population of 106 414), Nové Zámky (with a population of 145 586) and Trenčín (with a population of 113 994) are also considerable. Thus, it can be concluded that the western regions of Slovakia are particularly suitable for the opening of large retail establishments. Though not to the same extent as the western part of the country, but the eastern regions are also suitable for the establishment of retail outlets due to the large population of the Košice and Prešov Districts, with 233 886 and 167 616 inhabitants, respectively. Besides considering the size of the population, the income level of the inhabitants is also important.

The income level of people living in the capital and its agglomerations as well as of people in the western districts is the highest. The smallest number of large-shop-floor retail establishments can be found in those districts of Central and Eastern Slovakia, where the income level of people is the lowest. The districts of Košice and Prešov do not belong to the above group, since their population is relatively large. As a result, stores of various retail chains can be found primarily in Košice and its vicinities, which is the second biggest town in the country in many respects. The first place regarding the number of job opportunities belongs to the capital, Bratislava. Consequently, it is the most prosperous region as well. The identical indicators of southern and north-western regions are of average values. Thus, on the basis of the above information it can be specified in which regions distribution channels might be most profitable. The higher the incomes, the more people can afford to shop, and the customer base will also increase in number. This means that customers with higher incomes will buy a wider range of goods in a larger amount than those who earn less.

The third factor influencing the choice of location is the level of accessibility of retail establishments (hypermarkets, specialist stores and other megastores) by car. Motorways and expressways are considered to be of utmost importance in this respect. These had to be built in a way, so that the retail establishments would be easily accessible even for foreign customers. The roads with the heaviest traffic in Slovakia are the D1 and D2 motorways. The previous one goes in northward direction from Bratislava towards the Czech Republic, and the latter one is the highest-capacity road of the country that crosses Slovakia from Bratislava via Košice, all the way to the Ukrainian border. The R2 and R1 expressways are also high-capacity roads. R2, just like the D1 motorway, also crosses the whole country from west to east, but it ends in Košice. R1 also goes in a west-east direction, but it is a lot shorter at present. It is known that for the establishment of their new stores retail chains tend to choose those locations, which are situated near busy roads going by large settlements. [10]

## 4 Hypermarket chains in Slovakia

Out of all hypermarket chains, Tesco Stores SR a. s. has the highest number of stores in Slovakia, which has been present on the market since 1999. According to the most recent statistics, the company runs 140 large-shop-floor establishments all over the country. Out of these 51 could be considered important from the perspective of the present study, since these 50 stores belong to the category of hypermarkets. The British retail company also operates supermarkets and retail units of other kinds. Out of the 51 Tesco hypermarkets there are two in Bratislava. The vast majority of them (96%), however, were opened in other regions of the country. Tesco hypermarkets can be found in 48 Slovak towns altogether. This fact indicates that Tesco has put large emphasis on winning customers' trust in regions out of the capital.

Hypernova, which opened the first two Slovak hypermarkets in 2001, has only as few as 21 stores in the country. Their stores are considered to be one of the most visited ones; though, the company is present on the Slovak market to a much smaller extent than the first and biggest Tesco Stores SR a. s. Hypernova has a single store in Bratislava, and the remaining 20 are situated in other towns. The latter ones make up 95.2% of all Hypernova stores. This suggests that, similarly to its British competitor, Hypernova also targeted customers outside the capital in the framework of its expansion strategy.

Kaufland, an increasingly expanding German multinational corporation, opened its first store in Slovakia in 2000. Though with their 43 stores they got ahead of Hypernova in their expansion, their presence on the Slovak market can be considered moderate in comparison with Tesco. Out of their all stores three are situated in the capital. The remaining 39 units making up 90.7% of all, similarly to the strategy of Hypernova and Tesco, have been opened and maintained in smaller and larger towns. Thus, it can be concluded that Kaufland also relies on the profitability of stores located further away from the capital.

The Carrefour retail company has been present on the Slovak market since 2000. They opened their first hypermarket in Danubia Shopping Center in Petržalka, a district of Bratislava. Currently there are four Carrefour stores in Slovakia, two of which can be found in Bratislava. There is one in Košice and also in Žilina at Dubeň Shopping Center. Carrefour is not one of the biggest retail corporations with a large distribution channel in Slovakia; however, annually it attracts more than 8 million customers to its stores. [7]

### 4.1 Peculiarities of the expansion of hypermarket chains

There are 72 towns in Slovakia whose population exceeds 10 thousand. We classified these towns into six groups: population exceeding 100,000, population of 100,000 - 50,000, population of 50,000 - 30,000, population of 30,000 - 20,000, population of 20,000 - 15,000 and population of 15,000 - 10,000. It can be observed that the lower the category, the more settlements can be found in a group. This suggests that the number of megastores in settlements will decrease with their size. The indexes relating to the above phenomenon can be expressed by calculating the penetration index (PEX) of hypermarkets.

Table 1 shows to what extent the above mentioned hypermarket chains are present in settlements belonging to different categories.

***Tab. 1: Penetration index (PEX) of hypermarkets***

| Size of settlement (thousand inhabitants) | Number of settlements | Tesco | | Kaufland | | Hypernova | | Carrefour | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number of stores | PEX | Number of stores | PEX | Number of stores | PEX | Number of stores | PEX |
| **above 100** | 2 | 3 | 1.500 | 5 | 2.500 | 2 | 1.000 | 3 | 1.500 |
| **50-100** | 8 | 8 | 1.000 | 9 | 1.125 | 4 | 0.500 | 1 | 0.125 |
| **30-50** | 11 | 8 | 0.727 | 8 | 0.727 | 10 | 0.909 | - | - |
| **20-30** | 18 | 17 | 0.944 | 12 | 0.667 | 5 | 0.278 | - | - |
| **15-20** | 14 | 10 | 0.714 | 9 | 0.643 | - | - | - | - |
| **10-15** | 19 | 5 | 0.263 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

*Source:[ Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and the websites of the stores]*

On the basis of Table 1 it can be concluded that in the category of towns with a population above 100,000, of which there are only two in Slovakia, there is rather high competition between hypermarket chains. Tesco stores can be found in both towns. In Bratislava there are even two. Each of the other three retailers also has more than one store in the above mentioned two towns. The penetration index of each hypermarket chain reaches the ideal value of 1.00. Thus, they have more than one store both in Košice and in Bratislava too. Besides hypermarkets, Tesco also runs further supermarkets in the researched towns. This strengthens its position on the market.

In the category of towns with 50-100 thousand inhabitants Tesco and Kaufland have a dominant position. Having a penetration index of 1.125, Kaufland also has a dominant position in the same group. There are three hypermarkets in Žilina: a Tesco, a Kaufland and a Carrefour store. Hypernova did not want to or has not opened a store in this town yet. Contrary to this, there is competition between Tesco, Kaufland, and Hypernova in towns like Prešov, Trenčín or Nitra. Carrefour is represented only by one store (in Žilina), but Hypernova has only five stores fewer in the above towns than Kaufland, its German competitor.

In the category of towns with 30-50 thousand inhabitants, where there are 11 settlements, there is fierce competition between hypermarket chains. Carrefour does not have stores in this category of settlements, but Tesco, Kaufland and Hypernova have 8, 8 and 10 stores in them, respectively. This fact indicates their nearly equal position. The towns in this category are e.g. Liptovský Mikuláš, Zvolen, Komárno, Nové Zámky, Levice, Humenné, Bardejov etc.

The research of towns in the category of those with 20-30 thousand inhabitants showed very strong Tesco dominance. There are 18 towns in the group, and there is a Tesco hypermarket in 17 of them. The British company, however, has to compete with Hypernova in Pezinok and Rimavská Sobota and in Ružomberok, Lučenec, Dunajská Streda compete with Kaufland two. These towns make up 16.7% of all in the category. Thus, their combined penetration index is 1.88, which can be considered as a relatively adequate value, since there is at least one hypermarket in each town.

There are 14 towns in Slovakia with their population between 15 and 20 thousand. With its ten stores in Žiar nad Hronom, Púchov, Dolný Kubín, Rožnava, Kežmarok, Senec, Galanta, Detva, Bánovce nad Bebravou and Malacky, Tesco is a winner in this category too. Neither Hypernova nor Carrefour has stores in the settlements of this group. It is only Kaufland that competes with Tesco Stores SR a.s. in seven towns of this group. The combined value of penetration indexes amounts to 1.36 in this case.

In the category of settlements with 10-15 thousand inhabitants Tesco also has a dominant role, since none of its three above mentioned competitors have stores in these towns. The penetration index in this case is 0.263, which is a rather low value.

## 5 DIY retail chains

Out of all DIY retail chains in Slovakia Baumax is the biggest one. It has been on the Slovak market since 1996 and has 14 stores. Three of them are located in Bratislava. Thus, the proportion of stores not located in the capital amounts to 78.6%.

With regard to the number of retail units, Merkury Market comes in as second, which currently has 14 stores in Slovakia. One of them are in the capital, and the remaining 13 are in other towns. Consequently, the proportion of stores not located in the capital is 92.9%. This is a significantly high value.

One of the least represented DIY retail chains in Slovakia is Hornbach. The company was started up in 1996 and they have opened stores in Austria, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Sweden, Romania and also in Slovakia. They have only two stores in the country: one in Bratislava and the other one in the opposite corner of the county, in Košice.

### 5.1 Expansion strategy of DIY stores

We analysed the penetration of DIY retail chains in Slovakia, and compared their PEX with the ones of hypermarkets (Table 2).

*Tab. 2: Penetration index (PEX) of DIY retail chains*

| Size of settlement (thousand inhabitants) | Number of settlements | Baumax | | Merkury Market | | Hornbach | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number of stores | PEX | Number of stores | PEX | Number of stores | PEX |
| **above 100** | 2 | 5 | 2.500 | 2 | 1.000 | 2 | 1 |
| **50-100** | 8 | 8 | 1 | 7 | 0.875 | - | - |
| **30-50** | 11 | 1 | 0.091 | 4 | 0.364 | - | - |
| **20-30** | 18 | - | - | 1 | 0.056 | - | - |
| **15-20** | 14 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| **10-15** | 19 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

*Source:[ Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and the websites of the stores]*

On the basis of the data presented in Table 2 there is minor competition between the three DIY retail chains in towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants. There are three Baumax and one Merkury Market stores and one Hornbach unit in Bratislava, while in Košice their corresponding numbers are two, one and one, respectively. Consequently, the penetration index of each DIY retail chain in this settlements category reaches the ideal value of 1.000.

On the other hand, in towns with 50-100 thousand inhabitants there is fierce competition between Baumax and Merkury Market, since Hornbach does not have stores in these towns. While Baumax has stores in each town of this category (Martin, Žilina, Trenčín, Nitra, Trnava, Banská Bystrica, Poprad, Prešov), Merkury Market has opened stores only in seven of them (Žilina, Trenčín, Nitra, Trnava, Banská Bystrica, Poprad, Prešov).

The fewer inhabitants Slovak towns have, the fewer DIY stores are located in them. Hornbach does not have stores in towns with 30-50 thousand inhabitants either. There is one Baumax and one Merkury Market store in Prievidza, and Merkury Market has a retail outlet in Michalovce, Zvolen and Levice. As it can be concluded, Merkury Market has three stores more in towns with 30-50 thousand inhabitants than Baumax. The combined value of the penetration index amounts only to 0.364 in this case.

A rather big change can be observed in the next category. In towns with 20-30 thousand inhabitants there are no DIY retail units, apart from the only Merkury Market store in Dunajská Streda.

Similarly, there are no DIY stores in the next two settlement categories, with 15-20 thousand and 10-15 thousand inhabitants, either.

## 6 Home furnishing retail chains

The third group of megastores analysed was the one of home furnishing retail chains. Jysk, the Danish retail chain, definitely has a dominant position in this group. They opened their first Slovak retail outlet in Trenčín on 26 October 2006. Currently they have 32 retail units, three of which can be found in the capital. The other 29 stores are located in other towns. More than 90% (90.6%) of Jysk's stores are located out of the capital. This means that Jysk, similarly to its competitors, primarily focuses on markets out of the capital.

Another home furnishing retail chain in Slovakia is Kika. With its four stores it belongs to the group of minor retailers in the country. The German company opened its first Slovak, apparently very modern, store in 2005. The other three are located in Košice, Poprád, Banská Bystrica.

Fima Möbel cannot be considered a major retail chain either, since they have only three stores in the whole country. Their head office is in Dunajská Streda. It is worth pointing out that all of their three retail units are located in Western Slovakia. There is one in the capital and one in Dunajská Streda and Nové Zámky. The expansion strategy of home furnishing retail chains is similar to the ones of hypermarkets and DIY retail chains, since 66.7% of all DIY stores are located out of the capital.

### 6.1 Peculiarities of the expansion of home furnishing retail chains

The aim of the research was to analyse what strategy furnishing retail chains follow in choosing new locations in Slovakia.

***Tab. 3: Penetration index (PEX) of home furnishing retail chains***

| Size of settlement (thousand inhabitants) | Number of settlements | Jysk | | Fima Möbel | | Kika | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Number of stores | PEX | Number of stores | PEX | Number of stores | PEX |
| **above 100** | 2 | 5 | 2.500 | 1 | 0.500 | 2 | 1 |
| **50-100** | 8 | 7 | 0.875 | - | - | 2 | 0.250 |
| **30-50** | 11 | 10 | 0.909 | 1 | 0.091 | - | - |
| **20-30** | 18 | 8 | 0.444 | 1 | 0.056 | - | - |
| **15-20** | 14 | 2 | 0.143 | - | - | - | - |
| **10-15** | 19 | - | - | - | - | - | - |

*Source: [Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and the websites of the stores]*

On the basis of the data in the table it can be stated that Jysk owns the majority of stores in all settlement categories, except the category of towns with 10-15 thousand inhabitants, where none of the 19 towns has a home furnishing store in it.

In towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants, of which there are only two in Slovakia, there are eight home furnishing stores: five Jysk stores, a Fima Möbel store and two Kika stores. There are five retail units in Bratislava (3 Jysk, 1 Fima Möbel, 1 Kika), and three in Košice (2 Jysk, 1 Kika). The value of the penetration index of each three chain exceeds 1.000, of course.

In towns with 50-100 thousand inhabitants Jysk has a significantly dominant position. The company has stores in the following towns: Martin, Prešov, Banská Bystrica, Nitra, Trnava, Trenčín and Poprad. Thus, there is only one town in the category, namely Žilina, where there is not a Jysk store. The penetration index comes near to the ideal value of 1.000. It is 0.875.

There are 11 towns in the category of settlements with 30-50 thousand inhabitants in Slovakia. This group is also dominated by Jysk with its ten retail units. They have stores in the following towns: Bardejov, Michalovce, Zvolen, Levice, Komárno, Nové Zámky, Prievidza, Liptovský Mikuláš, Humenné and Spišská Nová Ves. Fima Möbel has only one store in this category, namely in Nové Zámky. Its penetration index is almost negligible, since it is only 0.091.

In the category of settlements with 20-30 thousand inhabitants Jysk stores also outnumber competitors' units. The retail chain has already opened stores in Lučenec, Trebišov, Rimavská Sobota, Hlohovec, Senica, Dunajská Streda, Piešťany and Ružomberok. The company's penetration index is 0.444 in this category. Fima Möbel has a store only in one town out of the 18 in the category of towns with a population of 20-30 thousand. This is of course reflected in the value of the penetration index, which reaches only 0.056. Kika is not represented in this group of settlements either.

It can be observed that the lower we go in settlement categories, the fewer home furnishing stores are located in the towns of the category concerned. In the group of towns with a population of 15-20 thousand there are only two home furnishing stores: there is a Jysk store in Rožnava and one in Púchov. As a result, the value of the penetration index is a lot lower than the ideal amount. It amounts only to 0.143.

As it has been mentioned earlier, there are no home furnishing stores in the lowest settlement category. For this reason the PEX is also zero, obviously.

## Conclusion

The aim of the study was to analyse the expansion strategies of multinational retail chains in Slovakia.

Retail trade plays a significant role in the economy of most EU member states. Its GDP contribution is rather high, and it also contributes to economic development by creating job opportunities. Globalisation processes taking place in economy and society also have an influence on the retail market. As a result of the expansion of multinational corporations there have been significant changes in the structure of the retail market in Central and Eastern Europe. Recently, retail trade has been dominated by multinational retail chains. Not only do these corporations endanger small shops, they are also very strong competitors of local, national retail chains. The number of their shops and the combined size of the shop floor they use is increasing all over Europe year by year.

Market surveys have shown that there are still significant differences between the retail markets of Southern and Western Europe. While there is a high level of concentration in the countries of Northern, Western and Central Europe, the markets of southern regions are still not saturated. In spite of this, retail markets in Europe as a whole are becoming more and more concentrated.

Shopping centres and hypermarkets are considered to be the most powerful distribution channels of both food and non-food items. While by the year 2000 only two shopping centres and one multinational retail chain had entered the Slovak market, currently there are almost 40 shopping centres and more than 100 hypermarkets in the country. Despite the fact that the biggest increase in the number of retail chains could be observed in 2006 and 2007, new stores are still opened on a regular basis, and the Slovak market is still not saturated.

Being familiar with customer needs is a must for all retail chains in the current market situation. All retail market actors must be familiar with their customers' motivations, product preferences and must know when they go shopping as well as what sort of in-store shopping environment they prefer. Marketing decisions must be based on customer orientation. The main points of their strategy should be the promotion of sales by attracting more customers to their stores and by providing further training to their shop assistants, so that they will understand and perceive customers' values, attitudes and personalities.

As for the attitudes of Slovak customers, it can be stated that they have quickly adapted to new retailers on the market, and have forgotten small shops that had been popular earlier. On the other hand, new surveys suggest that the popularity of small shops is bound to rise in the future.

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