

THE ROLE OF ASSOCIATIVE AND RELATIONAL MODERATORS ON EXPERIENTIAL BRANDING

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Abstract:

This study aims to (1) evaluate the moderating effect of associative moderators (e.g., brand personality and brand association) on the relationship between experiential values (e.g., enjoyment value, aesthetic value, and entertainment value) on brand attachment and brand love; (2) investigate the moderating effect of relational moderators (e.g., brand trust and brand commitment) on the relationship between brand attachment, brand love and behavioral intentions (e.g., purchase intention and word-of-mouth). This study conducted both paper-based and online-based questionnaires to collect the data. The respondents were 323 cosmetic users in Taiwan and Indonesia. The results indicate that brand personality and brand association moderate the effects of experiential values (e.g., enjoyment value, aesthetic value, and entertainment value) on brand attachment and brand love. Brand trust and brand commitment moderate the effects of brand attachment and brand love on purchase intention and word-of-mouth. Therefore, marketers who are able to create more positive brand personality and higher brand associations can amplify the influence of customers' experiential values on their attachment and love toward the brand. Customers who have higher trust and commitment toward the brand can accelerate the influences of brand attachment and brand love on purchase intention and word-of-mouth. Since previous studies of experiential branding are still underdeveloped, the results of this study can provide important insight for brand managers in order to enhance their branding performance especially from experiential aspect. This study results can also be very helpful for academicians in the marketing field to further validate the moderators on experiential branding. This study examined the important of associative moderators and relational moderators on branding, particularly from experiential branding.

Keywords: brand management, experiential values, associative moderators, relational moderators, behavioral intentions

1. INTRODUCTION

Experiential marketing is an important task of marketing. In the recent years, both academicians and practitioners have begun to pay more attention to consumers' consumption experiences with products or services as well as with brands (Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013). The article of Holbrook and Hirschsman in 1982 is the starting point for experiential marketing literature. They noted that researchers have neglected the equally important aspects of experiential consumption. In the competitive markets, providing attractive experiences for consumers is a critical issue for firms to secure their position in competing with competitors. However, in the academic field, experience as a concept as well as an empirical phenomenon is yet to be fully developed comparing with cognitive aspects of consumption behaviors (Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013). This phenomenon can be proved by the number of experiential studies which is still relatively underdeveloped.

There are two important experiential constructs that have been widely used by researchers in the marketing and consumer literature which are brand attachment (Park, et al., 2010) and brand love (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006). However, studies which examine the moderating effects on those constructs are still rare. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by emphasizing on the moderating effects of associative moderators (e.g., brand personality and brand association) and relational moderators (e.g., brand trust and brand commitment) on the relationship between brand attachment as well as brand love with its antecedents and consequences. Moderating effect is important because it systematically modifies either the form and/or the strength of the relationship between independent variable and dependent variable (Sharma, et al., 1981).

Experiential value has been increasing over time. In the 21st century, firms emphasizes more on customers' experiential values including entertainment, enjoyment and aesthetic (Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013). Experiential value can be evoked during interactions involving either direct usage or distanced appreciation of goods and services (Keng, et al., 2013). In this study, experiential values which consist of enjoyment value, aesthetic value and entertainment value serve as the antecedents of brand attachment and brand love. Furthermore, the consequences of brand attachment and brand love are consumers' behavioral intentions which consist of purchase intention and word-of-mouth.

Specifically, this study aims to (1) evaluate the moderating effect of associative moderators (e.g., brand personality and brand association) on the relationship between experiential values (e.g., enjoyment value, aesthetic value, and entertainment value) on brand attachment and brand love; (2) investigate the moderating effect of relational moderators (e.g., brand trust and brand commitment) on the relationship between brand attachment, brand love and behavioral intentions (e.g., purchase intention and word-of-mouth).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Associative moderators

This study identifies brand personality and brand association as two of associative moderators. These moderators can enhance the brand to associate with consumers' itself. Brand personality is defined as "all personality traits used to characterize a person and associated with a brand, is a concept within the field of relational marketing" (Louis & Lombart, 2010). Brand association is defined as "anything that reminds someone of the brand" (Ponsonby-McCabe & Boyle, 2006). Consumers may associate a brand with their traits and human characteristics along with brand personality dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, or ruggedness (Aaker, 1997; Aaker, Vohs, & Mogilner, 2010). When consumers involve in these processes, they infer something about the brand (Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013).

Experiential values consist of enjoyment value, aesthetic value and entertainment value. Enjoyment value is defined as the extent to which the shopping activity is perceived to provide reinforcement in its own right, apart from any anticipated performance of consequences (Childers et al., 2001). Aesthetic value is defined as the appreciation of the formal, expressive and symbolic quality of a product, appearance or environment (Fiore and Kimle, 1997). Entertainment value is defined as pleasant experiential state, which includes physiological, cognitive, and affective components (Vorderer et al., 2004).

Psychological process of imbuing brand with personality is referred as animism (Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto, 2009). The theory of animism emphasizes on consumers' wishful thinking of instilling life into objects when some motion or noise from the object is discerned, for example, attributing life to the nonliving (Guthrie, 1993). Brand personality offers consumers a means to construct identity and provides a mechanism to express the actual self, ideal self and social self (Wang & Yang, 2008). Furthermore, a strong and positive brand personality enhances brand equity evaluation, which can further facilitate word of mouth and repurchase intention (Lau & Phau, 2007; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007).

Previous studies have examined the effects of experiential values on its antecedents. Childers, et al. (2001) found that enjoyment positively influence attitude. Sheng and Teo (2012) argued that higher entertainment value, derived from playfulness, enjoyment, and delight can lead into higher level of brand equity. Orth and Malkewitz (2008) suggested that higher aesthetic value can enhance brand loyalty and brand equity.

Based on the above discussions, this study proposes that the positive effects of enjoyment values, aesthetic value, and entertainment value on brand attachment and brand love will be stronger when consumers have more similar personality with a brand. When consumers feel that they have more similar personality with a brand, experiential values that consumers have will lead to higher attachment and higher love toward a brand. Thus, this study hypothesizes:

- H1. Brand personality moderates the effects of (a) enjoyment value, (b) aesthetic value, and (c) entertainment value on brand attachment.*
- H2. Brand personality moderates the effects of (a) enjoyment value, (b) aesthetic value, and (c) entertainment value on brand love.*

Based on human associative memory theory (Anderson and Bower, 1973), consumers' memory store about knowledge of a brand as individual pieces of brand information which are linked together to form a complex brand's associative network (French and Smith, 2013; Teichert and Schontag, 2010). Memory can recall brand information through an "activation" process when one association stimulates the recall of another, linked association (Anderson, 1983). This study proposes that the positive effects of enjoyment values, aesthetic value, and entertainment value on brand attachment and brand love will be stronger when consumers have high association with a brand. When consumers feel that they have high association with a brand, experiential values that consumers have will lead to higher attachment and higher love toward a brand. Therefore, the following hypotheses are developed:

- H3. Brand association moderates the effects of (a) enjoyment value, (b) aesthetic value, and (c) entertainment value on brand attachment.*
- H4. Brand association moderates the effects of (a) enjoyment value, (b) aesthetic value, and (c) entertainment value on brand love.*

2.2. Relational moderators

This study identifies brand trust and brand commitment as two of the relational moderators. The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) posited that two fundamental factors, trust and commitment, must exist for a relationship to be successful. This theory could be applied as well in branding management. Consumers' relationship with brand may be successful when trust and commitment exist (Fournier, 1998). Brand trust is viewed as a central element for the success of brand. It is defined as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function" (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Kabadayi & Alan, 2012).

Brand attachment corresponds to the emotional link between a consumer and a brand (Bozzo et al., 2003; Park and MacInnis, 2006). Based on attachment theory, Thomson et al. (2005) defined emotional brand attachment as an emotion-laden bond between a person and a brand characterized by deep feelings of connection, affection, and passion. Brand attachment can explain stronger forms of behavior and may also be considered as a proxy of the strength (Didier and Lombart, 2010). Brand love can be defined as the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love consists of passion for the brand, attachment to the brand, positive evaluation of the brand, positive emotions to the brand, and declaration of love for the brand (Ahuvia, 2005).

Orth et al. (2012) found that brand attachment has positive influence on customers' brand loyalty and willingness to pay price premium. Japutra, et al. (2014) conceptualized that the outcomes of brand attachment including intention to recommend, purchase and revisit, resilience to negative information and act of defending. Moreover, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) found that brand love has positive influence on brand loyalty and word-of-mouth. Yasin and Shamim (2013) also found that brand love has positive influence on word-of-mouth as well as mediate the effect of purchase intention on word-of-mouth. This study proposes that the effect of brand attachment and brand love on purchase intention and word-of-mouth will be stronger when consumers have high brand trust. When consumers highly trust a brand, consumers' attachment and love toward a brand leads to higher intention to purchase it and higher word-of-mouth. Therefore, this study hypothesizes:

H5. Brand trust moderates the effect of brand attachment on (a) purchase intention and (b) word-of-mouth.

H6. Brand trust moderates the effect of brand love on (a) purchase intention and (b) word-of-mouth.

Brand commitment is defined as "the pledging or binding of an individual to behavioural acts" (Kiesler, 1971). Based on theory of commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991), individuals are naturally motivated to become attached to entities. They may become committed to a brand (Park, et al., 2009). Brand commitment is a continuing desire to maintain a relationship with a brand (Turri, et al., 2013). Consumers who are committed to a brand are often willing to stay in an exchange relationship as well as put forth effort to maintain the relationship. Didier and Lombart (2010) found that brand attachment positively influence brand commitment (i.e., affective commitment and continuance commitment). This study proposes that the effect of brand attachment and brand love on purchase intention and word-of-mouth will be stronger when consumers have high brand commitment. When consumers highly commit to a brand, consumers' attachment and love toward a brand leads to higher intention to purchase it with higher word-of-mouth. Thus, the following hypotheses are developed:

H7. Brand commitment moderates the effect of brand attachment on (a) purchase intention and (b) word-of-mouth.

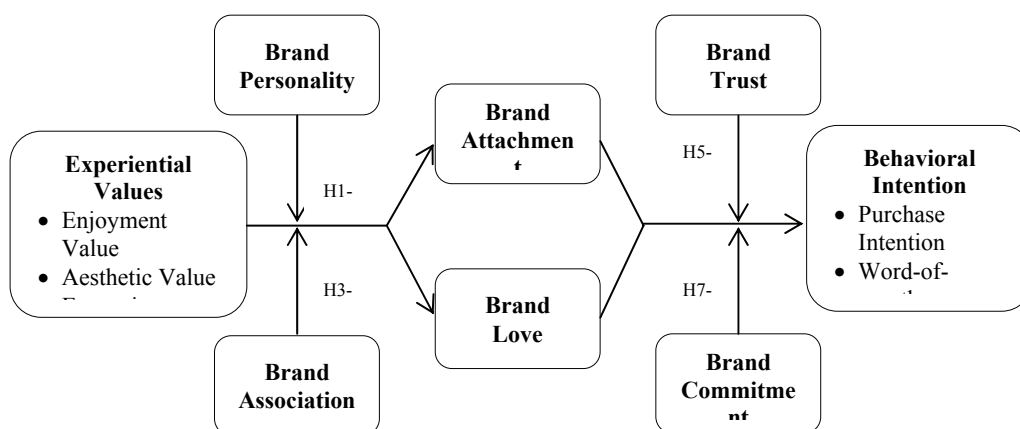
H8. Brand commitment moderates the effect of brand love on (a) purchase intention and (b) word-of-mouth.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Framework

Based on the above explanations, a research framework is developed as shown in Figure 1. Associative moderators (e.g., brand association and brand personality) may moderates the effects of experiential values on brand attachment and brand love, while relational moderators (e.g., brand trust and brand commitment) may moderates the effects of brand attachment and brand love on purchase intention and word-of-mouth.

Figure 1: Research Model



3.2. Data collection

Data were collected through both paper-based survey and online survey. Totally, 361 data were collected from cosmetics users in Taiwan and Indonesia. Among them, 301 are from Taiwan and 60 are from Indonesia. Online questionnaire was conducted only for Indonesian respondents. Due to some missing data, only 323 usable questionnaires were used for further analysis.

3.3. Construct measurement

This study operationalized 8 major constructs. All measurement items used 7-point Likert Scale from 1="strongly disagree" to 7="strongly agree". The antecedents of experiential values consist of enjoyment value, aesthetic value, and entertainment value. The measurement items of enjoyment value (5 items) were adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Childers et al. (2001) while for aesthetic value (7 items) and entertainment value (5 items) were adapted from Sheng and Teo (2012). Furthermore, the measurement items of brand attachment (5 items) and brand love (6 items) were adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). The consequences are behavioral intentions which consist of purchase intention and word-of-mouth. The measurement items of purchase intention (4 items) were adapted from Yoshida and Gordon (2012), while word-of-mouth items (5 items) were adapted from Yoo and Donthu (1997) and Delgado et al. (2005).

The moderator variables of this study consist of associative moderators (e.g., brand personality and brand association) and relational moderators (e.g., brand trust and brand commitment). The measurement items of brand personality (4 items) were adapted from Geuens et al. (2009) and Emari et al. (2012), while brand association (8 items) were adapted from Pappu, et al. (2005, 2006). Furthermore, the measurement items of brand trust (5 items) were adapted from He, Li and Harris (2012) and brand commitment (5 items) were adapted from Coulter, Price, and Feick (2003).

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive analysis

Table 1 shows the characteristics of respondents such as gender, age, education, working experience, current career, and annual income. More than 85% of the respondents are female with more than 75% between 18-25 years old. More than 70% of the respondents are students with a bachelor degree or above forty five percent of the respondents have working experience less than 3 years and 86.7% of the respondents have annual income less than 0.5 million NTD (1USD = 30 NTD).

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Classification	Respondents	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	37	11.5%
Female	286	88.5%
Age		
Less than 17	1	0.3%
18-25 years old	245	75.9%
26-35 years old	51	15.8%
36-45 years old	17	5.3%
45-55 years old	5	1.5%
More than 55 years old	4	1.2%
Education		
High school or lower	22	6.8%
Bachelor degree	230	71.2%
Master degree	68	21.1%
Doctoral degree	3	0.9%
Working Experience		
No working experience	90	27.9%
Less than 3 years	147	45.5%
3-5 years	34	10.5%

6-9 years	24	7.4%
10-15 years	16	5%
More than 16 years	12	3.7%
Current Career		
Student	233	72.1%
Official	9	2.8%
Administration staff	11	3.4%
Financial/accounting	7	2.2%
Educational services	7	2.2%
Medical services	15	4.6%
R&D technological	3	0.9%
Tourism and leisure industries	7	2.2%
Doing own business	8	2.5%
Unemployed	8	2.5%
Others	15	4.6%
Annual Income		
Less than 0.5 million NTD	280	86.7%
0.5 – 1 million NTD	32	9.9%
1.1 – 2 million NTD	6	1.9%
2.1 – 3 million NTD	4	1.2%
3.1 – 4 million NTD	1	0.3%

4.2. Factor analysis and reliability

This study conducted factor analysis, item-to-total correlation, and Cronbach's alpha tests to ensure the dimensionality and reliability of the research constructs. Table 2 shows that factor loadings of all the questionnaire items are higher than 0.6 (0.631-0.932), all item-to-total correlation coefficients are higher than 0.5 (0.547-0.891), and Cronbach's alpha of all the factors are also higher than 0.8 (0.813-0.950). Items with factor loadings lower than 0.6 were deleted. All the values exceed the generally accepted guideline from Hair, et al. (2010) which we can conclude that all of the questionnaire items are appropriated to be used for further analysis because it shows high degree of internal consistency.

Table 2: Factor Analysis and Reliability

Variables	Number of items	Factor Loadings	Eigen value	Percentage of Variance Explained	Item to total correlation	Cronbach's α
Enjoyment Value	5	0.845-0.891	3.828	76.560%	0.759-0.820	0.923
Aesthetic Value	7	0.774-0.868	4.726	67.519%	0.696-0.808	0.919
Entertainment Value	5	0.853-0.890	3.774	75.482%	0.769-0.819	0.919
Brand Attachment	5	0.706-0.901	3.472	69.444%	0.582-0.814	0.888
Brand Love	6	0.842-0.910	4.715	78.579%	0.776-0.864	0.945
Purchase Intention	4	0.880-0.912	3.220	80.497%	0.788-0.836	0.919
Word-of-Mouth	5	0.889-0.932	4.172	83.447%	0.828-0.891	0.950
Brand Personality	4	0.751-0.834	2.565	64.124%	0.576-0.685	0.813
Brand Association	8	0.631-0.869	4.895	61.184%	0.547-0.803	0.908
Brand Trust	5	0.832-0.893	3.784	75.683%	0.743-0.820	0.919
Brand Commitment	5	0.873-0.905	3.960	79.194%	0.798-0.850	0.934

4.3. Moderating effects of associative moderators

To test the moderating effect of associative moderators (e.g., brand personality and brand association), this study divided the respondents into four groups as the between-subjects factors in ANOVA model based on two levels of each independent variable (high vs. low) and two levels of each experiential

moderator (high vs. low). Customers having a human personality that is similar to a brand personality tend to stimulate higher influences of enjoyment value ($F=79.738, 51.281$, respectively; $p<0.001$), aesthetic value ($F=113.975, 68.285$, respectively; $p<0.001$), and entertainment value ($F=79.545, 69.120$, respectively; $p<0.001$) on brand attachment and brand love. Customers with more similar personality with a brand tend to elicit higher influences of enjoyment value ($X^2=5.42, 5.67$, respectively), high aesthetic value ($X^2=5.41, 5.68$, respectively), and high entertainment value ($X^2=5.25, 5.59$, respectively) on brand attachment and brand love than customers with less similar personality with a brand ($X^2=5.00-5.33, 4.67-5.33$, respectively).

Furthermore, customers with high association with a brand tend to stimulate higher influences of enjoyment value ($F=86.834, 75.265$, respectively; $p<0.001$), aesthetic value ($F=121.091, 94.675$, respectively; $p<0.001$), and entertainment value ($F=87.060, 92.198$, respectively; $p<0.001$) on brand attachment and brand love. Customers with high association with a brand and high enjoyment value ($X^2=5.58, 5.89$, respectively), high aesthetic value ($X^2=5.58, 5.90$, respectively), and high entertainment value ($X^2=5.42, 5.84$, respectively) tend to stimulate higher brand attachment and brand love than customers with low association with a brand ($X^2=4.82-5.00, 4.95-5.06$, respectively). Therefore, H1 - H4 are supported.

4.4. Moderating effects of relational moderators

To test the moderating effect of relational moderators (e.g., brand trust and brand commitment), this study divided the respondents into four groups as the between-subjects factors in ANOVA model based on two levels of each independent variable (high vs. low) and two levels of each experiential moderator (high vs. low). The results show that customers with high brand commitment tend to stimulate higher influences of brand attachment ($F=56.887, 48.501$, respectively; $p<0.001$) and brand love ($F=53.952, 48.113$, respectively; $p<0.001$) on purchase intention and word-of-mouth. Customers with high commitment toward a brand and with more attachment ($X^2=5.24, 5.40$, respectively) and more love toward a brand ($X^2=5.64, 5.31$, respectively) tend to stimulate higher purchase intention and higher word-of-mouth than customers with low commitment toward a brand ($X^2=4.80-5.22, 4.96-5.42$, respectively).

In terms of brand trust, the result of cluster analysis shows only three groups of respondents without high brand attachment-low brand trust as well as high brand love-low brand trust respondents. This situation seems to suggest that respondents with high brand attachment and high brand love tend to always have high trust toward a brand. Customers with high brand trust tend to stimulate higher influences of brand attachment ($F=99.511, 72.725$, respectively; $p<0.001$) and brand love ($F=100.233, 80.480$, respectively; $p<0.001$) on purchase intention and word-of-mouth. Customers with high brand trust lead to the highest effects of brand attachment and brand love on purchase intention ($X^2=5.69, 5.62$, respectively) and word-of-mouth ($X^2=5.39, 5.28$, respectively). Thus, H5 – H8 are supported.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the moderating effect of associative moderators on the relationship between experiential values on brand attachment and brand love. This study also aims to investigate the moderating effect of relational moderators on the relationship between brand attachment, brand love and behavioral intentions. Several conclusions can be drawn from this study.

First, associative moderators which consist of brand association and brand personality moderates the effects of experiential values on brand attachment and brand love. The results strongly support the developed hypotheses. Associative moderators are important to evoke brand attachment and brand love from experiential values. As what animism theory and associative memory theory noted, it is easier for consumers to emotionally attach with a brand and to love a brand when they can associate that brand with traits, their characteristics as well as their personality (Aaker, Vohs, & Mogilner, 2010; Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013).

Psychological process of imbuing brand with personality is referred as animism (Puzakova, Kwak, and Rocereto, 2009). The theory of animism emphasizes on consumers' wishful thinking of instilling life into objects when some motion or noise from the object is discerned, for example, attributing life to the

nonliving (Guthrie, 1993). Brand personality offers consumers a means to construct identity and provides a mechanism to express the actual self, ideal self and social self (Wang & Yang, 2008). Furthermore, a strong and positive brand personality enhances brand equity evaluation, which can further facilitate word of mouth and repurchase intention (Lau & Phau, 2007; Freling & Forbes, 2005; Ramaseshan & Tsao, 2007). Based on human associative memory theory (Anderson and Bower, 1973), consumers' memory store about knowledge of a brand as individual pieces of brand information which are linked together to form a complex brand's associative network (French and Smith, 2013; Teichert and Schontag, 2010). Memory can recall brand information through an "activation" process when one association stimulates the recall of another, linked association (Anderson, 1983).

Second, relational moderators which consist of brand trust and brand commitment moderates the effects of brand attachment and brand love on purchase intention and word-of-mouth. The results also show strong support for the developed hypotheses. To enhance consumers' behavioral intention, maintaining good relationship with consumers is a must (Kabadayi & Alan, 2012). Referring to commitment theory (Meyer and Allen, 1991), when consumers are emotionally attached and love a brand, it is likely that they are more willing to purchase a brand and do word-of-mouth if they have high trust and high commitment toward that brand. If consumers trust and commit to a brand, it means that they have desire to maintain a relationship (Turri, et al., 2013).

5.2. Research implication

From many aspects, moderators have been considered as one of the most important variables to facilitate and accelerate the influences of the independent variable to dependent variable (Sharma, et al., 1981). This study contributes to the marketing literature, especially to experiential marketing literature, by proposing important moderators (e.g., associative moderators and relational moderators) on the relationship between brand attachment, brand love and its antecedents and consequences.

The results of this study may also provide an important reference for practitioners to develop optimum marketing strategy of the company. Specifically, the results of this study can enhance marketers understanding about consumers' experience with a brand. In order to enhance the experiential values of consumers, marketers may emphasize more on first, their positioning strategy and second, their relationship with consumers. With clearer positioning of a brand, consumers can easily identify the meaning, value, and purposes of that brand and it is likely enhancing consumers' experiential values by using that brand. Furthermore, with maintaining good relationship with consumers, brand trust and brand commitment are likely can be built. If company can provide beliefs of safety, honesty, and reliability of the brand, brand trust and brand commitment will be created accordingly.

5.3. Limitation and future research

There are several limitations of this study which could be point to the need for further research. First, although this study includes important research constructs that related with experiential marketing, it doesn't guarantee that all constructs are included. Future research may add more research constructs, such as brand attitude, brand satisfaction, brand loyalty, etc. Second, this study used just one product category, which is cosmetics product. Future research may extend to the different product category to verify the generalizability of the results. Third, this study didn't evaluate the relationship of the research constructs from different consumers' characteristics. Future research may examine the relationship from different gender, age, income, etc.

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