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1. An Empirical Evaluation of Managers' Perception of Firm's Strategic Factors in Ilorin, Nigeria pages 4 - 17
2. Contemporary Management Approaches as Tools for Improving the Administration of Military Units in Nigeria pages 18 - 38
3. Performance Outcome of Market Orientation Behaviour among Botswana's Small Service Firms pages 39 - 59
4. Building Relationship Marketing Through Parable And Storytelling pages 60 - 75
5. Impact of Training and Development on Managerial Succession of Selected Banks in Nigeria pages 76 - 91
6. Customer Expectations and Loyalty of the Hotel Industry in Lagos, Nigeria pages 92 - 108
7. Participative Management and Organizational Commitment among Academic Librarians in Ogun State pages 109 - 120
8. Promotional Strategy As A Correlate of Sales Performance of Selected Companies of Carbonated Non-Alcoholic Beverages in Lagos State, Nigeria. pages 121 - 139

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BUILDING RELATIONSHIP MARKETING THROUGH PARABLE AND STORYTELLING

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Today most firms have realised the need to retain customers rather than search for the new prospects due to more cost and persuasive effort required to manage them. However, there is high rate of new products failure which indicates the absence of repeat purchase and no brand loyalty for these new products. Stories and parables are effective tools in passing information from one person or organisation to another. They are also needed to build relationship in marketing. The major problem faced by organisations, is that this message sometimes may not be clearly and meaningfully communicated and hence, results to ineffective marketing of products and services. The objective of this paper therefore, is to examine how storytelling and parables are employed to build customer's loyalty for firm's products. Population sample of 1687 respondents were considered for the study in Ilorin Kwara State Nigeria. The respondents voluntarily participated in the survey and are basically consumers of household products. Questionnaire instrument was designed to elicit information from customers about the significance of storytelling as one of the marketing communication strategies used in building Relationship Marketing. G Power3.1 Software Package was used to perform data analysis. Findings revealed that personal selling is the most significant medium through which customers build brand loyalty. Also Parables and Storytelling are powerful forms of human communication that marketing executives employ to achieve long time relationship with customers. The paper recommends that marketers should endeavour to tell true story and make it appeal to customer's senses. It is concluded that, building long time relationship through storytelling and parable will go a long way in determining the organisation's success, in terms of increase profitability and market share. Organisations therefore, need to develop effective means of communicating messages to their prospects and maintain profitable customer in order to achieve overall success and growth.*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The use of storytelling and parable in conveying meaning to words has been popular amongst the people since the time immemorial. This makes it a form of communication that explains the unknown and brings value to our expression (4imprints.com, 2011). It is useful as a form of communication not only in everyday life but also in marketing. It is recognised as a powerful tool that business and marketers everywhere need to know how to harness and once they do, the benefit become apparent (4imprints.com, 2011).

Story can be obtained from direct mail, pictures in advertising, press release, content of a website, e-mail and magazine amongst others. It is used to communicate a purpose which ultimately grow a business and build relationships (4imprints.com, 2011).

The art of storytelling is therefore, being regarded as the most powerful form of human communication because it works whether you are selling magazines adverts. Successful communicators can also be master storytellers in speeches, brochures, publications and marketing campaigns (Wylie, 2000).

According to Wylie (2000) stories in form of parables, anecdote and narratives paint pictures in the mind of target audience to whom communication is directed. This help the audience pay closer attention to the communication, understand the messages faster and remember the key points longer.

Parable is described as a short story that teaches moral (Hornby, 2010). It is commonly used in religion texts designed to persuade people to follow moral code of the religion in question. Storytelling is one of the oldest methods of changing minds whether informally in conversation or with more specific purpose such as in speeches and business communication. Parable and storytelling are therefore, sometime inseparable and are often used as medium of communication in organisation (changing minds.org, 2013).

The purpose of communicating information about products to consumers is therefore, to bring about awareness and enlightenment to the people. The information provides customers about the product existence, features, advantages and benefits, where to buy and the price to be paid for the product. Hence, organisations use communication, in form of storytelling and parable, to create loyalty for their products, by not just seeking a simple sale or transaction but to sell to consumers now and in the future. Relationship Marketing therefore, aims at focusing important customers on a continuous or regularly basis (Futrell, 2008).

It is very important as a marketer to be skilful in the art of storytelling and parable for a good presentation to be made to prospective customers. There

are lot of products that have been introduced to the market and failed due to lack of effective presentation. The buyer should be provided the needed information to make a buying decision. Stories and parables are effective tools in passing information from one person or organisation to another. They are also needed to build relationship in marketing. The major problem faced by organisations, is that this message sometimes may not be clearly and meaningfully communicated and hence, results to ineffective marketing of products and services. This study therefore, examines those excellent techniques: in form of parables and storytelling, incorporated in presentations that help in gaining customers' attention and interest in products.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Stories and Parables

According to Futrell (2008) there are various methods through which Marketing executives or Salespeople gain their prospect's attention and capture their interest amongst which include the following:

Simile: This is a direct comparison of something with something else using words like or as, for example the Lacazera soft drink (low sugar) is like chocolate yoghurt drink. The sales people or marketing executives often use simile to compare one product to other ones. This communicates similarity in the product being compared (Oxford Dictionary, 2010; Futrell, 2008).

Metaphor: This is an implied comparison that employs a contrasting word or phrase to evoke a vivid image. This says a lot about a group's self perception and perception of the company (Christensen, 2002; Futrell, 2008).

Analogy: It compares two different situations that have something in common such as "the car air conditioner is very good. It is like the air conditioner in your sitting room" (Fotrell, 2008).

Parable: This is a brief story used to illustrate a point. It usually compare something familiar to something unfamiliar. For example it can be expressed in this form: I fuel my car regularly for it to take me to wherever I want to go and also keep it working. This food supplement does the same thing to your body, it is necessary to make your body work.

According to Futrell (2008) Similes and Metaphor are used to describe something while analogy and parables are used to explain how something works. He further said that the only real difference between a Simile and Metaphor is that a Simile uses the word like or as; Analogies differ from parables in that analogies aren't stories but parables are.

Storytelling: This involves weaving of similes, metaphors, analogies and parables by marketing executives throughout their presentations to paint a beautiful picture about how their product will fulfil the needs of the buyer. It is a skill that can be developed through experience (Futrell, 2008). Stories, fables, and parables have been very effective in passing information to younger people (Kirkwood, 1983; Bucher, 1991; Frankel, 1992). Stories have been described as one of the oldest pedagogical technique forming key parts of learning (Schank, 1990). Parables are considered as powerful means of teaching concepts because they provide a mental structure for new knowledge (Graeff, 2008). There are other linguistic rhetorical forms that organisational stories can have and these include:

Scripts: These are subjects, attitudes, pictures and messages, exclamations of tradition and "we do like this here" proto stories which a community uses to create conformity and control. It can be filed with a view to understanding the sub stories and their extension (Christensen, 2002).

Rumours: According to Christensen (2002) are usually spread and difficult to combat but it is important to listen to them. Rumours are also referred to as grapevine in organisations. This is one of the informal communication process through which important messages are passed across to the employees in the workplace.

Counter Stories: These are irony and satire that arise as a contrast to management wishful thinking. It is always in opposition to management story (Christensen, 2002). They are very effective when both the management and employee in organisation have reached a deadlock and are finding a way of arriving at stalemate. Each of the party will try to employ blackmail to force the opposing party into agreement with the other party.

Anecdotes: These are stories that arise and are told anywhere, for example in canteen, web etc. It is in form of a short, interesting or amusing story about a real person or event (Christensen, 2002; Hornby, 2010).

Myths and fables: These are complex stories with moral. Fables may also be described as a traditional short story that teaches a moral lesson while myth is a story from ancient times, especially one that was told to explain natural events (Christensen, 2002; Hornby, 2010).

It is reported that stories and how we tell them are an integral part of business, public relations and marketing; for instance corporate culture is based upon the company's story, mission and vision statements are stories meant to portray company's promise to its stakeholders (4imprint Inc, 2011).

Storytelling in business context has many uses and benefits which include:

- Stories about products, customers, employees make brands

relatable to stakeholders.

- Stories about business approaches, attitudes and promises build brand loyalty.
- Stories about recent events and announcement create awareness (4imprint Inc, 2011).

Storytelling is used to pitch new ideas, demonstrate expertise, explain complex issues and problems, change behaviours and create brand champions. According to Simmons (2006) there are six kinds of stories that all business leaders should be able to tell well and this include:

- i. Who I am stories - These are stories of self revelation about how a business came to be.
- ii. Why I am here stories - They are stories of motivation about why a customer decided to buy.
- iii. The vision stories - They are tales of where we are going, like announcement of a new product.
- iv. Teaching stories - They are tales of why and how best to use a brand's service.
- v. Values in action stories - These are how values intersect the real world; for example how a non profit helps in community through its programs.
- vi. I know what you are thinking stories - They are tales designed to overcome objections like a political adverts addressing an opponent.

Kawasaki (2007) gave nine best storylines for marketing as follows:

- a) Aspirations and beliefs: The storylines are helpful to connect emotionally to the speaker, the company and the issues.
- b) David vs. Goliath: This involves sharing stories about how a small organisation takes on a big company. In other word, rooting for the underdog appeals to emotions, creates meaning and invokes passion.
- c) Avalanche about to roll: This taps into the desire to get the inside story before it's widely known.
- d) Contrarian/Counterintuitive/Challenging assumptions:
 - (i) Contrarian - They are positions that are not in line or directly opposite to the wisdom of the crowd.
 - (ii) Counterintuitive - These are ideas that fight with what our intuition (as opposed to a majority of the public) says is true.
 - (iii) Challenging widely held assumptions are situations when everyone else says the reason for an event is X and somebody show that it's actually Y. This is good for debate and discussion most

especially in protecting corporate reputation.

- e) Anxieties: This is more about uncertainty than an emerging, disruptive trend. Companies bombard customers with FUD (Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt) with no facts to back up their points.
- f) Personalities and personal stories: This can be in form of a personal story with some life lessons to help us understand what makes executives tick and what they value the most.
- g) How to Stories and advice: This involves how to solve problems, find next practices and overcome common obstacles.
- h) Glitz and glam: This involves finding a way to logically link to something glitzy and glamorous.
- i) Seasonal/event related: This is tying storyline to seasonal or major events.

In business and marketing, it is important to know when to use stories to communicate with different stakeholders and at the same time understand the stories which worth telling to the target audience. Also, the channel for communicating stories to the audience needs to be considered, most especially the one that would make the most sense (4imprint Inc, 2011).

Customer Relationship

The concept of Customer Relationship Management is all about building long time relationship with customers. This makes it to be synonymous with the concept of Relationship Marketing. According to Futrell (2008:52) "Relationship Marketing is the creation of customer loyalty". In this study it would be assumed that Customer Relationship Management, when it is related to Marketing activities becomes Relationship Marketing. Therefore, the study adopts Customer Relationship Management as Relationship Marketing and vice versa.

The most valuable resource any business can get is customer and it is more profitable to sell to existing customers than to prospect or those who are not customers (Katz & Green, 2009). This is because an existing customer has developed a kind of brand loyalty for the company's product and thus required no persuasive effort to buy the product. In case of new customers or prospects there is need for more persuasive effort to convince them to buy product. This can result to trial or repeat purchase. It is only when they are satisfied with the purchase that they make repeat purchases which may result to developing brand loyalty for the product (Katz & Green, 2009). The customers that are not satisfied after the trial purchase stop further purchase of the product. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is therefore defined as the process of tracking the customer's different contacts

with the firm, and using this data to improve sales as well as the customer's experience (Katz & Green, 2009).

The Managers in sales organisation usually devote time on the most efficient and effective way to manage their customers, using all sorts of technologies, gathering information on customers strategies, employing different selling approaches for different customers, and putting a system in place to connect all this together. This system is called Customer Relationship Management (Johnston and Marshall, 2010).

Customer Relationship Management, according to Johnston and Marshall (2010:5) is defined as "an organisation wide customer focus that uses advanced technology to maximise the firm's ability to add value to customers and develop long term relationships". There are other definitions of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) given by scholars amongst which include:

"Customer Relationship Management is a business strategy to select and manage the most valuable customer relationships" (Thompson, undated). Customer Relationship Management is defined as "a cross functional process for achieving a continuing dialogue with customers, across all of their contact and access points, with personalised treatment of the most valuable customers, to increase customer retention and the effectiveness of marketing initiatives" (Day, 2000: 23).

"Customer Relationship Management is an enterprise approach to understanding and influencing customer behaviour through meaningful communications in order to improve customer acquisition, customer retention, customer loyalty and customer profitability" (Swift, 2001: 42).

Peppers and Rogers (2004: 236) described it as "an enterprise wide business strategy for achieving customer specific objectives by taking customer specific actions" It is viewed as "a comprehensive business model for increasing revenues and profits by focusing on customers" (Marshall and Johnston, 2010: 99). The core message these definitions are trying to give is that Customer Relationship Management contributes to firms' success through acquisition of right customers, retention of satisfied and profitable customers and increased profit margin by offering right products at the right time (Stanley, 2000; Marshall and Johnston, 2010).

A look at the various definitions on Relationship Marketing or Customer Relationship Management above indicates that Relationship Marketing involves having a lifetime relationship with customers through integrated marketing process such as continuous dialogue with customers, customers' retention and managing the most valuable customers amongst others. Graeff (2008) discussed the importance of parables in teaching marketing

by arguing that "Parables are very effective at teaching important lessons of life dealing with such issues as relationships, loyalty, promises, motivation, trust, power in relationships, and influence over others". He said parables can be used to deal with relationship issues such as attracting, creating, and maintaining relationships with customers, suppliers, buyers and channel members. This study is in support of Graeff's (2008) view that parable is very effective in teaching Marketing but can also be used to build relationship. There have been very few works in this area, and it is hoped that in the nearest future there will be more researches done in the area.

This paper therefore, examines how Marketing executives employ Storytelling as one of the marketing communication tools to build Customer's loyalty for firms' products.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The respondents were basically customers of household products such as beverages, foods, confectionaries, electronics and cosmetics. They are residents in Ilorin and voluntarily recruited for the survey for a period of two weeks (between April 10th to 23rd, 2013).

A questionnaire instrument was designed to elicit information about the medium through which the customers become aware of the products and their perception about the role play by marketing executives of these organisations considered for the study.

It was also designed to determine if storytelling is a significant marketing communication strategy that can be used to build Relationship Marketing. The questionnaire contained 16 structured item questions and close ended answers provided for each item.

Final Sample consisted of 1687 respondents, with 928 female and 759 male. This makes the return rate of completed questionnaire for the period of two weeks covered by the study, to be 97%, from the initial total questionnaire of 1739 distributed out to the prospective respondents. A simple random technique was used to select the respondents for the study. This is done to enable all the respondents have equal chance of been considered for the study.

The (one sample case) t test and ANOVA (one way) were the statistical techniques used for the study. The t test was used to measure the difference in the mean of the two Samples considered for the study while Analysis of variances was used to test the difference in the groups mean. The ANOVA has advantage of testing more than two means and in this study it is used for

four groups of sample. G * Power 3.1 software package was used to perform the data analysis. The software is a flexible Statistical Power analysis program for the social, behavioural, and biomedical sciences introduced by Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, and Buchner (2007).

3.1 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES.

The proposed statement of hypotheses for the study is:

H₁: There is no significant difference in group's perception about marketing executives playing important role in creating products awareness to consumers

H₂: There is no significant difference in group's preference for the choice of medium used to develop brand loyalty.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION.

There are 1687 respondents who voluntarily participated in the survey. This comprised 55% females and 45% males. The respondents were basically, consumers of household products ranging from beverages, confectioneries to cosmetics products. They were asked to give their perception about the role play by the Marketing executives in bringing products to the consumers. There are 51% who agreed that the Marketing executives played significant role in distribution of products to consumers while 49 % disagreed. The reasons given by the respondents in support of the Marketing executives playing significant role in distribution of products to consumers include: They introduce most of the new products to consumers. They educate the consumers about the product's usage, benefits and price.

The Marketing executives in some cases also provide after sales services such as repair, installation or provide professional advice about the products to the consumers. All these reasons above, make the respondents belief that Sales people or Marketing executives are important direct link to the consumers.

According to Futrell (2008) the "Sales people make product available to people. They are involved in person to person discussion. They can see customer's reactions and make needed adjustment. This cannot be done by advertising".

The marketing executives also play essential role in distributing goods from the place of production to the end users. In other word, they make goods available to the end users. In situation where the customers react either positively or negatively about the sale offering, they take note by either approving the recommendation or work on addressing the problem raised. This enabled a kind of friendly relationship developed between the

Consumers and the Marketing executives. This consequently becomes a lasting relationship if sustained.

The consumers now depend upon marketing executives for information about the products. They use the information to develop brand loyalty. The Marketing executives therefore serve as one of the important sources of information about product attributes to the consumers.

The survey revealed that greater proportion of respondents preferred quality products (72%); make request for product with better performance (81%) and satisfaction ((76%). All these attributes consequently result to customers developing brand loyalty which is the core essence of Relationship Marketing.

Hypothesis (H₁) with T - tests to examine the relationship between the group perception and product awareness to consumers.

There are seven categories of products considered for the study amongst which include: Beverages, confectioneries and snacks, electronics, cosmetics, furniture, pharmaceutical products and other household items like cutleries, stove, knife and cooking utensils. Beverages and confectioneries were demanded by 60% of the respondents, followed by household items with 12%, Electronics with 8%, Furniture having 10%, cosmetics 7% and 3% for pharmaceutical products. This reveals that most respondents have demand for consumables or convenience goods that are majorly staple, impulse, emergency and shopping goods.

Staples are bought on regular basis; examples are bread, tooth paste, biscuits, milo, powder milk etc. Impulse goods are those purchased without any planning effort e.g. Ice cream, yoghurt, candy bars, pop corn or roasted groundnut.

Emergency goods are purchased when there is urgent need for it e.g. purchase of umbrella during rain period, purchase of refrigerator during dry season, kerosene or gas for cooking and purchase of drugs for treatment of ailment.

Shopping goods are those that the customer in the process of purchase usually compares on such bases as suitability, quality, price and style. Examples include furniture, clothing, used cars and major household appliances (Kotler & Armstrong, 1987; Gbadeyan, 2000).

In the study only 3% of the respondents have demand for pharmaceutical products. This indicates that most of the respondents would only buy drug on prescription by Doctors or when they are sick. They even prefer to buy cosmetics rather than buy drugs to take care of their health. This is mostly

common among the female folks.

Hypothesis H_1 is designed to test group's perception about marketing executives creating product awareness to customer. G Power 3.1.2 software was used to compare the means of those respondents that agreed that the marketing executives perform significant function in creating product awareness to customer with those that disagreed. The difference between the two independent means with a priori type of power analysis, one tail and effect size (d) equals to 0.3036 indicates that a significant relationship exist. This is done at 0.05 alpha level and Power equals to 0.95. The total number of participants needed to demonstrate a statistically significant effect in the current study was 119. However, because the actual number of participants totalled 1687 respondents, the actual power of each t test was 0.9502870. Table 1 below provides detail information about the analysis. This survey therefore, reveals that the marketing executives play significant role in creating product awareness to the customer.

This is particularly true in the case of most of the products that are offered through personal selling to the customer. The marketing executives in this case take advantage of their personal contact to offer the product's benefits and features to customers.

Table 1: T tests - Means: Difference from constant (one sample case)

Analysis: A priori: Compute required sample size

Input:	Tail(s)	= One
	Effect size d	= 0.3035714
	α err prob	= 0.05
	Power (1- β err prob)	= 0.95
Output:	Noncentrality parameter δ	= 3.3115730
	Critical t	= 1.6578695
	Df	= 118
	Total sample size	= 119
	Actual power	= 0.9502870

Source: Computer print out, march 2013

Hypothesis (H_2) with ANOVA to test group preference for medium through which consumers developed brand loyalty.

The media identified in the study through which the respondents developed brand loyalty are: Promotion, Advertising, Public Relations and Personal selling.

There are 380 respondents who preferred Public Relations, 410

respondents preferred Promotion, 437 preferred Advertising and 460 preferred Personal selling. The statistical Power of the fixed effects, omnibus, one way ANOVA model was employed to test the hypothesis using G Power version 3.1.2 software.

The following parameters were used to calculate the statistical power: effect size = 0.33; type 1 error probability = 0.05 and number of groups = 4. The actual power for N = 160 was 0.951, which is considered to be acceptable for a type II error. The evaluation of the power analysis appears in Table 2 below:

Table 2: F tests - ANOVA: Fixed effects, omnibus, one-way

Analysis: A priori: Compute required sample size

Input:	Effect size f	= 0.3322552
	α err prob	= 0.05
	Power (1- β err prob)	= 0.95
	Number of groups	= 4
Output:	Noncentrality parameter λ	= 17.6629629
	Critical F	= 2.6625685
	Numerator df	= 3
	Denominator df	= 156
	Total sample size	= 160
	Actual power	= 0.9506495

Source: Computer print out, march 2013.

The A Priori power analysis of the ANOVA with a medium size effect (0.33) indicated that a total sample size of 160 out of the actual 1687 would be needed to detect a significant medium through which customer brand loyalty is built at 95% significant level.

In the survey Personal selling was the highest medium (27%) preferred by the respondents, followed by Advertising (26%), Promotion has 24% and Public Relations has 23%. This analysis indicates that all these media have significant effect on customer brand loyalty but Personal selling happened to be the most significant medium that has effect on customer brand loyalty. The respondents were of the view that personal selling is very essential in any organisation's marketing mix, it generate revenue and provide services that makes customers to be satisfied with their purchase (Futrell, 2008). Personal selling enables marketing executives to use storytelling to paint a beautiful picture of how their products will fulfil the needs of their buyer. It is reported that great story tellers are top marketing executives (Futrell, 2008). Therefore, storytelling is one of the significant media through which

the marketing executives develop consumer's brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is just one of the many marketing activities that can result to Relationship Marketing. Parables and storytelling can also be used to attract, create or maintain relationship with customers (Graeff, 2008).

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

Relationship marketing is building long time relationship with customers through effective and efficient communication. The end result of this, is to bring about improve customer loyalty and profitability (Swift, 2001).

Communication must be meaningful and be presented in such a way that it will influence customers in their purchase decisions. There are various forms of marketing communication used in conveying and creating awareness about brand loyalty to customer such as Public Relations, Advertising, Personal selling and Promotions. However, the study identified Personal selling as the most significant medium through which customers build brand loyalty for products. This medium offers good opportunity for direct contact between the marketing executives and the prospects.

This enables marketing executives employ various communication mix at their disposal to make good products offering to their prospects. In other words, Parables and storytelling are some of the most powerful forms of human communication that marketing executives employ to achieve long time relationship with customers. This has consequently made storytelling and parables continued to be recognized as important medium of business communication in organizations. It is therefore necessary for every organization that has not yet realized the relevance of this medium of communication to discover and fully employ it to influence prospective customers to make their product purchase decision.

The following recommendations are suggested for this study:

- Marketers should endeavour to tell true story. This is because customers are always looking out for inconsistencies and falsehood in every message communicated to them and once they discover any; that can lead to credibility problem for the company and its product (4imprint Inc, 2011).
- Story should appeal to customers' senses. The customers should be able to see, hear, feel, smell and taste the products being offered to them (Futrell, 2008). In other word, the message should appeal to customer's needs and senses for it to have great influence on them.
- Prospects must be able to have proved that marketers will do what they promise they will do. This can be done by incorporating proof statements in to their message. The Marketers can use past sales

figures, guarantee, testimonials, company proof results and independent research results to further build customer's confidence and trust (Futrell, 2008).

Developing a good communication skill is therefore a necessary strategy towards building lasting relationship between business organisations and their customers. The use of parable and storytelling in marketing will help managers in organisations make better decisions and customers becoming more informed about their products through moral lessons that can be learnt from their communication with the marketing managers. Marketers should in addition to this, endeavour to measure the effect their story would have on their products. This is because effective storytelling will go a long way in determining organisation's success in terms of its profitability and market share.

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