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RESEARCH ARTICLE

STRATEGIC ROLES OF BRANDING ON ORGANIZATION SALES PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Branding according to empirical literature is the creation of three dimensional characters of a product. It is further described in terms of name, packaging, colours and symbols that help to differentiate the products from its rivals. And also helps the customers to develop a relationship with the product. The practice of product branding is very crucial in determining the degree of sales performance of business organisations. The purpose of this study is to find out the benefits of product branding and the impact on sales performance of manufacturing firms. This study adopts both secondary and primary sources of data collection to gather information. The primary source of data was collected through survey method with the use of structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were directed to 150 respondents who are members of staff of a Coca-Cola Company plant located in Lagos, Nigeria as well as consumers of a particular Coca-Cola brand. Secondary data was gathered from journals, conference articles, internet sources, textbooks and unpublished works. Linear regression was chosen as the method of statistical analysis. The linear regression was chosen because it works well with the Likert scale measurement style which was used to draw up the questionnaires. The study finds that product branding is very significant to improving sales performance of manufacturing firms. Hence decision makers in the manufacturing sector in Nigeria and elsewhere are advised to consider brandingas an essential ingredient to enhanced brand performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Adeleye (2003) describes a brand as the name attached to a product or service. The author added that a brand upon close inspection represents many more intangible aspects of a product or service: a collection of feelings and perceptions about quality, image, lifestyle and status. Other researchers argued that a brand creates in the mind of customers and prospects the perception that there is no product or service in the market that is quite like yours (Keller, 2006; Ajagbe, 2007; Solomon *et al*., 2012). In short, a brand offers the customer a guarantee and then delivers on it. Kotler (2000) stressed that branding is more than just a business buzzword. For Keller (2003), the concept of brand name has become the crux of selling in the new economy. The author added further that if the old marketing mantra was," Nothing happens until somebody sells something," the new philosophy could be" Nothing happens until somebody brands something" (McCarthy, 2002).

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Branding means the use of a name, term, symbol or design-or a combination of these to identify a product (Perreault *et al*., 2008). Branding has been around for centuries as a means to distinguish the goods of one producer from those of another (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Aaker, 1997; Alderson, 2000; Palmer, 2000).

In Western Europe, the earliest signs of branding were the medieval guilds' requirement that crafts people put trademarks on their products to protect themselves and consumers against inferior quality (Wasson, 1960; Sethi, 1975; Kotler and Keller, 2006; Madden *et al*., 2006). In fine arts, branding began with artists signing their works. Branding today plays a number of important roles that improve consumer's lives and enhance the financial value of firms. Nobil (2002) posit that perhaps, it is the most essential facet of any business beyond product, distribution, pricing, or location. Kotler *et al*. (2003) opine that a company's brand is the description in the world, the name that identifies it to itself and the marketplace. They contributed that it indicates a certain degree of product quality so that satisfied customers can easily patronise the brand at some other time. Even though, firms provide the motivation to brand creation through marketing programs and other activities, ultimately a brand is something that resides in the minds of the consumers (Kapferer, 1997; Ibidunni, 2004; Bearden, 2004; Ajagbe *et al*., 2014). A brand is a perceptual entity that is rooted in reality but reflects the perceptions and perhaps even the idiosyncrasies of consumers.

Francis and Stephen (2003) perceive branding as the creation of three dimensional characters of a product, defined in terms of name, packaging, colours and symbols. The authors posit that branding aids to differentiate particular product from its competitors. They also added that branding helps the customers to build a relationship with the products. Bearden and Ingram (2007) elucidated that branding is the use of a name, term, symbol or design- or a combination of all to identify a product. McCarthy (2002) believed that branding is the process by which a company employs marketing strategies to get people to easily remember their business and products over another. He mentioned that a brand promises to consistently deliver specific set of features, benefits and services to consumers. Worlu *et al*. (2007) also refer to branding as the use of a name, symbol or design or a combination of these to identify products and services. In short, it can be viewed as a conscious and planned process undertaken to align business processes with the brand identity and values. In the opinion of Batra and Homer (2004), branding is an activity in which organisations use a name, phrase, design or symbol or a combination of these to identify its products and distinguish them from those of competitors. Palmer (2000) highlighted that branding is the process of creating a distinctive identity for a product which differentiates it from its competitors. Branding is the process of creating distinctive and durable perceptions in the minds of consumers (Johnson and Russo, 1984; Blythe, 2001; Ajagbe *et al*., 2015).A brand is essentially a way of distinguishing the products of one company from those of its competitors. A brand should have value and to have value, a brand must possess the following characteristics as identified by Palmer (2000); consistency, risk reduction and functional and emotional attributes.

Kotler (2000) suggested that brand elements are those trademark-able devices that serve to identify and differentiate the brands. Most strong brands employ multiple brand elements. Brand elements can be chosen to build as much brand equity as possible. The test of the brand building ability of these elements is what consumers would think or feel about the product if they only knew about the brand element. Some examples of brand elements are; trade mark, brand name, brand mark, trade character, trade name and copyright (Aaker, 1997; Davis, 2002; Beckett, 2000).

Literature Review

Branding is important to consumers and marketers as well as sellers. Bearden *et al*. (2007) listed the following as the importance of branding: To a consumer; branding facilitates buying. It helps buyers identify products that might benefit them. If there were no brands, consumers would have to evaluate the non-branded products available every time they go shopping. They would never be so sure that they are purchasing the specific desired products and would have difficulty evaluating the quality of some. Keller (2003) opine that when selecting from among branded products, consumers can purchase with specifications in mind and be sure of their quality. Branding also provides psychological benefits to consumers; some buyers derive pleasure in owning brands with images of prestige. These brands convey status, for example Eva bottled water, as opposed to buying sachet water. From a marketer's point of view, branding has considerable value (Kotler *et al*., 2003; Kotler and Armstrong, 2006). A brand can be used to represent the benefit of a product to include those associated with specific product features. However, those relevant to the product purchase and use experience makes it easier to differentiate a company's product from competing offerings. The seller's brand name and trademark provides legal protection for unique product features that otherwise might be copied by competitors. According to Kotler and Keller (2006), branding holds the following importance; Branding is used to achieve quality differentiation; it helps consumers to choose the brand that gives them satisfaction whenever they buy them. For example, consumers associate the satisfaction derived from a certain product with a brand name. Fournier (1998) argued that most consumers attach a lot of importance to the brand name of the product they are willing to purchase, hence branding increases consumer loyalty. Branding serves as a dependable guide to quality products. This is true since poor quality products can be identified and such products will not have a chance of success in the market in the long run. Blythe (2001) suggested that the use of brand names gives status to manufacturers especially if the brand is an expected one which covers a class for itself. Branding can be used to segment a market, especially one that different grades of a product are offered to consumers according to quality and purchasing power of consumers (Sethi, 1975; Thaker and Chiranjeev, 1996; Kotler *et al*., 2003). Finally, a brand has the ability to deliver the following five levels of meaning; attributes, benefits, values, culture and personality.

Kapferer (1997) stressed that effective brand management requires a long term view of marketing decisions. Because consumer responses to marketing activity depends on what they know and remember about a brand, short term marketing actions, by changing brand knowledge, necessarily increase or decrease the success of future marketing actions. Kotler *et al*. (2003) added that a long-term view results in proactive strategies designed to maintain and enhance customer-based brand equity. This customer-based brand equity takes place over time in the face of external changes in the marketing environment and internal changes in a firm's marketing goals and programs. To this end, the brands positioning must be continuously communicated to consumers. Alderson (2000) reported that major brand marketers often spend huge amounts on advertising to create brand awareness and to build preference and loyalty which in turn increases product sales. Kotler and Keller (2006) emphasized that such advertising campaigns can help create name recognition, brand knowledge, and maybe even some brand preference. The authors concluded that brands are not necessarily maintained by advertising but by the brand experience. They suggested that consumers' image of a brand should match the brand identity established by the company. This is because, in recent times, consumers come to know a brand through a wide range of contacts and touch points such as advertising, but also personal experience with the brand, word of mouth, personal interactions with company people; telephone interactions, company web pages and many others (Adeleye, 2003; Blackston, 2000; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).The brand's positioning will not take hold fully unless everyone in the company lives the brand (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Ajagbe *et al*., 2011; Kotler and Keller, 2006). Therefore, the company needs to train its people to be customer-centered. Even better, the company should carry out internal brand building to help employees to understand and be enthusiastic about the brand promise through effective advertising and right marketing tools to create awareness about the brand promise. Worlu *et al*. (2011) found that the more customers are loyal to a brand, the higher the brand equity or the value the brand has in the market place. The brands however, successfully create its own personality and knowledge in the eyes and mind of the consumers.

Brand Equity

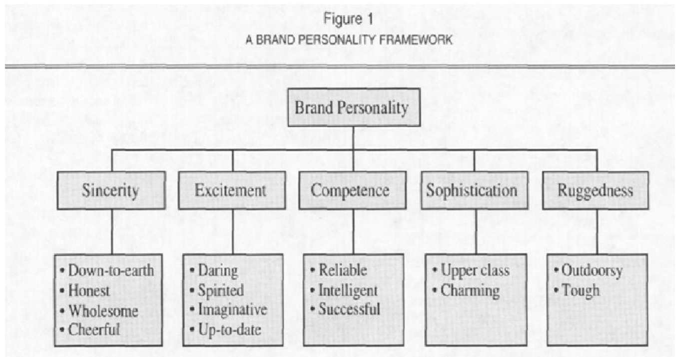
Brands are more than just names and symbols. Brands represent consumer's perceptions and feelings about a product and its performance, that is to say, everything that the product or service means to consumers (Nobil, 2002; Palmer, 2000). The brand can add significant value when it is well recognized and has positive linkage in the minds of the consumer. Johnson and Russo (1984) noted that brand equity is the existence of a brand in the mind of the consumers. They highlighted that brands exist in the minds of consumers, thus, the real value of a strong brand is its power to capture consumer preference and loyalty. A powerful brand has high brand equity. Davis (2002) found that brand equity is the positive differential effect that knowing the brand name has on customer response to the product or service. A measure of brand equity is the extent to which customers are willing to pay more for the brand. Bearden (2004) concluded that a brand with strong brand equity is a very valuable asset.

Brand Personality

Aaker (1997) developed the concept of brand personality, or "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand". The researcher suggested a reliable, valid, and generalizable brand personality measurement scale based on an extensive data gathered involving ratings of 114 personality traits on 37 brands in various product categories from more than 600 individuals (Keller 2003). Brand personality is formally defined as the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. In contrast to product related attributes which tend to serve a utilitarian function for consumers, brand personality tends to serve symbolic or self-expressive functions (Farquhar, 1989; Aaker, 1997). Figure 1 below represents the brand personality model that describes five constructs useful to explain the symbolic and self-expressive functions of a brand, they are sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness.

Brand Knowledge

This is the awareness provided for the brand for customers to know about its existence and its characteristics. The different dimensions of brand knowledge were classified in such that each lower-level element provides the foundations of the higher-level element (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Keller, 2003). Attachment (loyalty, sense of community, engagement), brand awareness depth and breadth (depth unaided recall, aided recall, or recognition) and breadth (when), rational evaluation (brand value, credibility), emotional evaluation (feelings, social approval, self-respect), functional image and benefits (physique (design), quality, reliability, service, price), emotional image and benefits (who, when, how, where used personality, history (Kotler and Keller, 2006). In other words, brand attachment stems from rational and emotional brand evaluations, which derive from functional and emotional brand associations that require brand awareness. Simonson *et al*. (1988) found that brand knowledge measures are sometimes called "customer mind-set" measures because they capture how the brand is perceived in the mind customers.



Source: Aaker, 1997

Dyson *et al*. (1996) reported that measuring sales performance helps a company become more profitable. Sales performance uses raw data concerning the number of actual sales. Sales performance can indicate the rate of customer loyalty to the products. Ibidunni (2004) describes customer loyalty as those buyers who regularly purchase products from the company and refer other customers to the products. Enhancing sales performance can automatically enhance the number of loyal customers. So the performance of sales will in one way or the other affect the company's performance in a variety of ways, such as customer base, market share, sales, revenue and profitability (Worlu *et al*., 2011; Ajagbe *et al*., 2014; Adegbuyi *et al*., 2015). Brand loyalty is a function of the satisfaction the customers derive from using the company's product and this is the only way a company can achieve customer retension. At the end of the day, everyone is selling something, whether it is an international company dealing in home appliances or a non-governmental organization trying to employ volunteers. Aaker *et al*. (2000) suggested that performance variables could be measured by looking at how well a firm could win more loyal customers to buy what they have to sell.

One of the most effective ways to accomplish this is through effective branding. McCarthy (2002) argued that strong branding communicates a company's vision, message and unique value proposition in a way that compels people to take action. The author concluded that sales actually happen when consumers believe in the products and services one is selling.

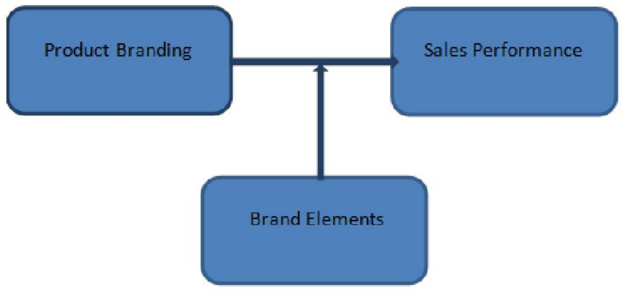


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research methodology is an overall plan that spells out the sources, types of data required and the strategies for obtaining such as well as the appropriate tools for analyzing them (Asika, 1991; Adebayo, 2001; Ajagbe *et al*., 2015). This study adopts both secondary and primary sources of data collection to gather information (Ajagbe *et al*., 2015). The primary source of data was collected through survey method with the use of structured questionnaires. The questionnaires and interviews were directed at 150 respondents who are members of staff of a Coca-Cola Company plant located at Lagos, Nigeria as well as consumers of a particular Coca-Cola brand. Secondary data was gathered from journals, conference articles, internet sources, textbooks and unpublished works. A simple random sampling procedure was used in drawing the required sample size for the study. This procedure was chosen so as to guarantee randomness and representativeness by giving respondents an equal chance of been chosen (Asika, 1991; Ojo, 2005). The sample size used allows every respondent equal chance of appearing in the selection. The construct validity was used to test for the validity of the research instrument (Adebayo, 2001). The questionnaire was designed in such a way that information from the respondents will be adequate to provide answers to the research questions and research hypotheses. Therefore, data on the research instrument was subjected to Cronbach alpha analysis to determine the reliability of the research instrument/measures. In addition to this, a linear regression was chosen as the method of statistical analysis. The linear regression was chosen because it works well with the Likert scale measurement style which was used in designing the questionnaires (Asika, 1991; Ojo, 2005). However, in determining the sample size for the respondents to the questionnaires, the researchers adopted the statistical or Yard's formula as cited in Guilford and Fruchter (1973). The Yard's formula is given thus;

$n= N/ 1 + \alpha^2 N$

Where: n - sample size

N – Population
α^2 - level of significance/ error tolerance
Therefore, to determine the sample size the researcher usedthe estimated population of 250 which is a combination of members of staff of Coca-Cola NigPlc as well as consumers of a particular brand of the company.

$n= N/ 1 + \alpha^2 N$

Where n =? N = 250, α^2 = 5% =0.05
$n= 250/ 1 + (0.05)^2\ 250$
$n= 250/ 1 + 0.0025 \times 250$
$n= 250/ 1 + 0.625$
$n= 250/ 1.625$
n= 150
n= 150 respondents

Data Analysis

Description of Demographic Data

The presentation of demographic information was grouped into two; the bio data of the participants were presented before the description of variables raised in the hypotheses or research questions. The total of 150 participants took part in this study. The analysis of the gender distribution revealed that there were 62 males representing 41.3% and 88 females representing 58.7%. This indicates that female participants were more than male. The age dispersion shows a range of below 20years, 21-25years, 26-30years and over 30years. The participants who are below 20years were 67, representing 44.7%, those who are between 21-25years were 60 respondents representing 40%, the 26-30years group were 12 respondents representing 8%, the over30years were 11 respondents representing 7.3%. The educational qualification distribution of the participants showed that 75 respondents representing 50% were O/L holders, OND/NCE holders were 45 respondents representing 30%, 24 respondents representing 16% were HND/ BSc holders were6 respondents representing 4% hold postgraduate degrees. The marital status distribution of participants showed that 62 respondents were single representing 41.3%, married were 74 respondents representing 49.3% and divorced were 14 respondents representing 9.3%.The nationality distribution indicated that 130 respondents are Nigerians representing 86.7% and 20 respondents are non-Nigerians representing 13.3%.

Hypotheses Testing and Result

Hypothesis 1: Brand awareness does not significantly affect product sales volume

Table 1. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.812(a)	.659	.624	3.7612

Predictors: (Constant) brand awareness

The model summary Table 1 above presents the result for testing the first hypothesis. Simple regression analysis was used to regress the independent variable against the dependent variable. Table 1 above indicated the model summary of the equation of the simple regression analysis that predicted product sales volume. The explanation of the values presented is given below in Table 2.

Table 2. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13417.155	1	13417.155	46.448	.000(a)
	Residual	43040.736	149	288.864		
	Total	56457.891	150			

Predictors: (Constant) brand awareness

The R-square as revealed in table 1 shows that 65.9% of product sales volume could be accounted for by brand awareness. The hypothesis one which stated that brand awareness does not significantly affect product sales volumewas rejected at R=.812, R^2=.659, $F_{(1,149)}$ =46.448; p<.05. This implies that brand awareness significantly affects product sales volume.

Hypothesis 2: Brand personality does not significantly influence customer patronage

Table 3. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.51(a)	.26	.23	5.14

Predictors: (Constant), Brand personality

The model summary 3 above presents the result for testing the second hypothesis. Simple regression analysis was used to regress the independent variable against the dependent variable. Table 3 above indicated the model summary of the simple regression equation that predicted customer patronage. The explanation of the values presented is given below in table 4.

Table 4. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2451.916	1	2451.916	32.77	.898(a)
	Residual	11148.478	149	74.822		
	Total	13600.394	150			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand personality,
b. Dependent Variable: customers' patronage

The R-square revealed in table 4 above that 25% of customer patronage could be attributed to brand personality. The hypothesis two which stated that brand personality does not significantly influence customer patronagewas rejected at R=.510, R^2=.26, $F_{(1,149)}$ =32.77; p>.05. This implies that brand personality does not significantly influence customer patronage.

Hypothesis 3: Brand name does not have any significant impact on customer repeat purchase

Table 5. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.831(a)	.690	.576	6.69227

a. Predictors: (Constant), brand name

The model summary table 5 above presents the result for testing the third hypothesis. The simple regression analysis was used to regress the independent variable against the dependent variable. Table 5 above indicated the model summary of the equation of the simple regression analysis that predicted customer repeat purchase. The explanation of the values presented is given below in Table 6.

Table 6. ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2021.819	1	2021.819	45.143	.705(a)
	Residual	6628.407	148	44.787		
	Total	8650.226	149			

The R-square revealed in table 6 above shows that 69% of customer repeat purchase could be accounted for by brand name. The hypothesis three which stated that brand name does not have significant impact on customer repeat purchase was rejected at R=.831, R^2=.690, $F_{(1,149)}$ =45.143; p>.05. This implies that brand name has significant impact on customer repeat purchase.

DISCUSSION OF RESULT

In this study, the first hypothesis was aimed to find out whether brand awareness do have significant effect on sales volume of the company. The result from data analysis indicated that brand awareness significantly affects product sales volume. Hence, the implication of this result is that brand awareness will determine if an organisation will improve in their sales volume, market share and profitability or not. This further adds that with effective brand awareness, there will surely be an increase in the total sales of the company product. Nobil (2002) reported that a company that maintains large sales in the market can be seen as a market leader as it means that consumers prefer its product to that of its competitors. This also indicates that the company has a relatively large market share which could be a result of effective brand awareness. The integration of the components of the brand name and brand personality competitiveness mix, product, distribution, price, and promotion strategies are determinants of sales improvement (Aaker *et al*., 2000; Keller, 2003). The authors conclude that each of the marketing components helps to influence buyers in brand positioning.

The second hypothesis aims to know whether brand personality does not significantly influence customer patronage. This implies that brand personality does not significantly influence customer patronage. Hypothesis two revealed that brand personality significantly influences customer patronage. Brand personality is the crux of brand image philosophy in which the image and personality a product carries is unique and distinct which significantly affects sales of that product (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 2003). Branding should be used to maintain competitive advantage or at least, maintain the product in customer brand consideration sets. Aaker (1997) develops the concept of brand personality, or the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. The researcher suggested a reliable, valid, and generalizable brand personality measurement scale based on an extensive data collection involving ratings of 114 personality traits on 37 brands in various product categories by over 600 individuals (Keller, 2003). However, empirical studies indicated that brand personality is the set of human characteristics connected with a brand. This is contrary to product related attributes which tend to serve a utilitarian function for consumers; brand personality tends to serve symbolic or self-expressive functions. However, Beckett (2000) found that branding plays significant role in developing and creating positive personality of a company. In addition, branding aids in developing familiarity with name and establishes the company's identity and this results to increased customer patronage.

The third hypothesis aims to understand if brand name does not have significant impact on customer repeat purchase. This implies that brand name has significant impact on customer repeat purchase. Hypothesis three reveals that brand name has significant impact on customer repeat purchase. The results suggest that a high level of awareness of brand name could result to increased customer patronage. Kotler and Keller (2006) suggested that in order to increase sales volume of a company, their market share and customer patronage, there is need to emphasize on improving brand performance. Johnson and Russo (1984) views brand as the name attached to a product or service. However, upon close inspection, a brand represents many more intangible aspects of a product or service: a collection of feelings and perceptions about quality, image, lifestyle and status. It creates in the mind of customers and prospects the perception that there is no product or service in the market that is quite like yours (Kotler and Armstrong, 2006; Adegbuyi *et al*., 2015).

Conclusions and Implications for Research

This study reported that product branding is an essential instrument to enhance sales performance. Some studies have investigated the impact of product branding on company sales performance. The results from this study shows that a high level of awareness of brand name and personality could lead to increased customer patronage. However, to improve sales volume, market share and customer patronage, more attention should be paid to improving brand performance. Also strong competiveness and brand name should be improved upon so they can have more influence on their own. Hence, the role of product brand is to keep the awareness growing about the product. This is the reason brand name and personality is often the most important in the determination of brand performance. The study also finds that the primary role of branding is to distinguish the product of one manufacturer from another. The success of a product will be improved if the product has certain distinguishing characteristics and features. Some of the identified features from this research are that; if it is an innovative product, it must appeal to certain consumer needs in a way that no other product can effectively do that. If there are rival products, it should have features, which give it some edge, such as better quality/price mix, new technology, better environmental safety etc. And finally, should in case of some products, for example, cars, a favourable product report in a consumer magazine could be very important for a new product. Branding plays a crucial role in a company to represent a collection of feelings and perceptions about, image, lifestyle and status for the consumer. Customers are motivated to purchase products they value by purchasing a given product/service based on specific attributes and the consequential benefits provided by the attributes. Branding a product helps to project a sort of personality; hence people with similar personalities go for the same brand. The more dependent an individual is on a branded product for having his needs fulfilled, the more important that brand will be to that person. Hence, firms have to keep up with the brand quality that is trusted by the customers. This study recommends that branding could be a suitable mechanism to influence consumer patronize. This is because it is one of the effective marketing strategies that help organizations develop competitive edge over their rivals.

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