

The Effectiveness of Sports Sponsorship in Term Of Brand Value: A Case of A Soccer Match in Tunisia

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ABSTRACT

Firms are progressively engaging themselves in sponsoring initiatives and reinforcing actions to attract their targets. This paper proposes to unravel how sports sponsoring is concretely implemented by Tunisian firms by examining its impact on consumer behavior especially brand value. Our study empirically uses a questionnaire administered to 389 attendees of the Tunisia/Malawi soccer game qualifying for the 2012 Olympic Games. Our results indicate that aspects of brand equity produce value for consumers particularly increasing trust. Also, firms benefit from developing purchasing intention for sports sponsoring brand.

Key words: Sponsoring, brand equity, sports events, purchasing intention.

INTRODUCTION

Different authors gave diverse definitions of sponsorship. Majority of them have some similarities and majority of them place accent on the relationship advantage between an organisation and the sponsored object that sponsorship offers. Mullin, Hardy and Sutton (2007) define a sponsorship as 'the acquisition of rights to affiliate or directly associate with a product or event for the purpose of deriving benefits related to that affiliation or association. The sponsor then uses this relationship to achieve its promotional objectives or to facilitate and support its broader marketing objectives'. Shank regards it as "investing in a sports entity (athlete, league, team or event) to support the overall organisational objectives, marketing and promotional strategies" (Shank 2009).

We can say that sponsorship is an investment, in cash or in kind, in return for access to exploitable business potential associated with an event. Little research has addressed consumer responses to sponsorship from attitudinal and emotional perspectives. According to Yue , Des & Kishore (2014) 'Sponsorship is often used to create an emotional bond with consumers, improve brand image and awareness and create competitive advantage'.

Sponsorship also has become a popular way for firms to promote their brands. It is one of the fastest-growing communication tools (Witcher et al, 1991). More companies choose to sponsor sports events and pay tens of millions of dollars because soccer games for instance help reach an important part of the target population.

Sponsorship in Tunisia is currently taking a new turn, as some companies are engaging in sponsoring more sports activities. Sport is the primary focus of Tunisian sponsorship. This activity is a significant marketing investment for sponsoring companies. Since 1996, Tunisian sport has become a real social phenomenon and sports clubs, in particular football/soccer clubs. These latter have established themselves as real economic and business entities. They become professional, draining money through transferring and sponsoring players, and also offering TV rights. This paper studies the effect of sport sponsorship on consumer behavior to brands and thereafter, the value of sponsoring the brand. The results indicate that sport sponsorship has increasingly become an important mechanism among other communication tools. Our quantitative study has been conducted on a sample of 389 people attending a soccer game, using questionnaires.

This study has the advantage of being conducted during a real Tunisian soccer event and of measuring the spontaneous reactions of spectators. Our study indicated that Tunisian brand equity and its dimensions (reputation, fidelity, brand image and situational implication) was affected by the sponsoring brand, producing value for the spectators of the "Tunisia/Malawi" soccer game qualifying for the 2012 Olympic Games. The dimensions positively influenced value of the sponsoring brand, as measured by trust and satisfaction.

To retain customers, Tunisian firms are more and more concerned with the value of their brands. This is mainly because of the considerable and increasing number of competitors over the Tunisian market in addition to the changing behaviour of consumers. To uphold these constraints, each firm tends to establish a "long-term" and tight relationship with their customers and moves from a simple transactional framework to a relational one as part of a relational marketing strategy. It is thanks to brands that firms reach to create this link and develop this affective relationship with customers (Kapferer, 2005). These proposals led us to examine in depth the notion of "brand", in particular major Tunisian sponsoring brands of sports events, by studying its impact on consumer behaviour in view of promoting their values. Tunisian firms understood that through sports sponsoring they can reach their objectives. Whether sponsoring athletes, sports teams or events, the expectations are the same. Firms grew aware that they should increase their value and improve their brand image to increase their profits and gain market share (Tribou, 2004). Sponsoring is a communication tool serving marketing policies and communication strategies as important as it may influence the affective relationship between sponsoring brand and consumers. Function-wise, consumers may be confused, as they are in a direct relationship with the product and the brand. Like most countries, Tunisian sports teams, mainly football, became real economic and business institutions, draining money through transferring players, marketing rights coming from sponsors and media coverage rights, notably TVs.

The question of our research is: **what are the effects of sports sponsorship on the value of a sponsoring Tunisian brand?**

we can divide the problem into sub-questions, the first is: Does sponsorship have any impact on brand value? and the second is: Does sponsorship have recall and persuasion effect on consumers?

Sponsorship of events in particular can be especially effective as a marketing tool, in fact our study opts for a sponsoring brand of a sports event (our field of study), knowing that such events are assumed to be the fastest marketing communication tool, as suggested by Roy and Cornwell (2003). In this paper, we focus on the concept “brand equity” from a consumer perspective, a concept which is similar to brand value according to Czellar and Denis (2002) and whose measurement should take into account the relationship between the product and the brand. Several studies (Srinivasan 1979, Farquhar 1990, Aaker 1991, Kapferer 1998, Keller 1993, Swait et al. 1993, Yoo et al. 2000, Yoo and Donthu 2001) put a focus on two approaches to explain brand equity. One approach relies on the firm dealing with brand equity as a financial and stock market value and another approach which relies on consumers’ perception.

Our objective in this paper is to use the second approach which deals with Tunisian consumers’ perception of a sponsoring brand value. It was cognitive psychology which considered the notion of value to analyse consumers’ cognitive processes. Farquhar (1990) divides the first operationalization of brand equity into two groups. The first includes consumers’ perception (brand reputation, brand associations, perceived quality) and the second includes consumer behavior (brand fidelity, willingness to pay a higher price). The essential value of a brand often retains the set of traits that characterize its image (Aaker and Lendrevie, 1994). Associations to the brand take a central position in consumers’ imagination and finally in brand equity evaluation. Strong brands trigger images, effects or even “affection” towards the firm. Managing brand image is then a process of conserving firm identity, differentiating itself from competition, giving more sense to a product or guaranteeing a certain quality to a product (Clifton, 2009). Brand image insures better reputation for a firm by making it known by the public. This is what we try to show in our empirical study. First, we will present the theories which inspired our study as well as our research hypotheses. Next, we define our field of study, sampling plan and data collection method. Finally, we proceed to interpreting our results.

Brand equity, Return on Investment: The proposed model

Sponsorship is a two method communally beneficial partnership between an event being sponsored and the sponsor. However, it is rather unclear how the effectiveness of event market activities can be calculated. As mentioned earlier, approach to sports sponsorship can be divided into two studies stream. One is the consumer psychology approach which incorporates effect of sports sponsorship in terms of consumers’ awareness, recognition, and behavioural intentions. So, Consumer psychological approach to sports sponsorship has fixed on consumers’ cognitive and affective reply. The other approach focuses on grasping the potential contribution of sports sponsorship to positive or negative changes in stock price. The effect of sponsorship on firm value in the stock market can be investigated in financial perspective.

In this study, we will consider the following variables: reputation, fidelity, brand image and impact on consumers’ attitude, with this latter being defined as consumers’ orientation towards the product or the brand (Engel et al., 1990 cited in Michel, 1997). Moreover, attitudes towards the sponsor are more favourable when consumers are involved (Levin et al., 2001). This assumption allows us to claim that spectators unconditionally follow the event and their favourite teams. Sponsoring events that appeal to their market are likely to shape buying attitudes and help generate a positive reaction. Consequently, we retain the hypothesis of a complete dependence of the three attitudinal components. The hypothesis feeds the models of hierarchy of effects presented by Lavidge and Steiner (1961), from the cognitive (beliefs) to the affective (attitude) then to the connotative (intention). Then, we will examine the impact of reputation, fidelity towards the brand, brand image and the implication of consumers’ towards the sponsoring brand. We want to know consumers’ reaction to the brand, in a well

determined environment which is that of a sports event. Then we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand equity of a sponsoring brand positively influences Tunisian consumers' attitude during a sports event.

H1-a: Reputation significantly and positively influences consumers' attitude.

H1-b: Fidelity significantly and positively influences consumers' attitude.

H1-c: Brand image significantly and positively influences consumers' attitude.

H1-d: Situational implication significantly and positively influences consumers' attitude.

As for the attitude-purchasing intention link, it has been shown, in Fishben's reasoned action theory (1967), that intention to act remains a behaviour index that is more important than attitude itself. Chanavat et al. (2009) used hierarchy of effects theory in a context of sports sponsoring. These theories endorse the link between attitude (affective) and purchasing intention (connotative). Our study aims at examining this link, hence our hypothesis.

H2: Tunisian consumers' attitude towards the sponsoring brand influences their purchasing intention.

According to some empirical studies, brand equity produces value for consumers. This value has been discussed in cognitive psychology research and studies on consumers' cognitive processes (Keller, 1993, Krishnan, 1996, Changeur and Dano, 1998, Yoo et al, 2000, Yoo and Donthu, 2001). For Aaker (1991), efficiently managing brand equity needs knowing how this value is created. Then, to understand its sources, it is necessary to choose the perception approach needed to measure brand value for consumers (Raggio and Leone, 2006). In this paper, we check whether brand equity components may create satisfaction during the use of a sponsoring brand in a sports event and trust towards the sponsoring brand. Aaker (1994) confirmed this in his brand approach. Accordingly, we adopt that very approach to study a sponsoring brand in a sports event. This led us to formulate our hypothesis

H3: The dimensions (reputation, fidelity, brand image and situational implication) of brand equity create value of a sponsoring brand in Tunisia.

H3-a: Brand equity significantly and positively influences Tunisian consumers' satisfaction during use of a sponsoring brand. We will proceed dimension-wise and see whether each factor significantly and positively influences satisfaction.

H3-b: Brand equity significantly and positively influences Tunisian consumers' trust towards a sponsoring brand (the same procedure like for satisfaction).

Our model then highlights interaction between the following eight variables:

Simple and multiple linear regressions are used to test our hypotheses. We used measurement scales presented by the previous theories. Each of these scales, called also dimensions, consists of 5 point likert scales. To measure *brand reputation*, which is a variable measured by brand recall and recognition as suggested by Keller (1993), we used the items 6, scale developed by Krishnan (1996) and Yoo et al., (2000), (Cronbach alpha 0,979; variance analysis 90,533).

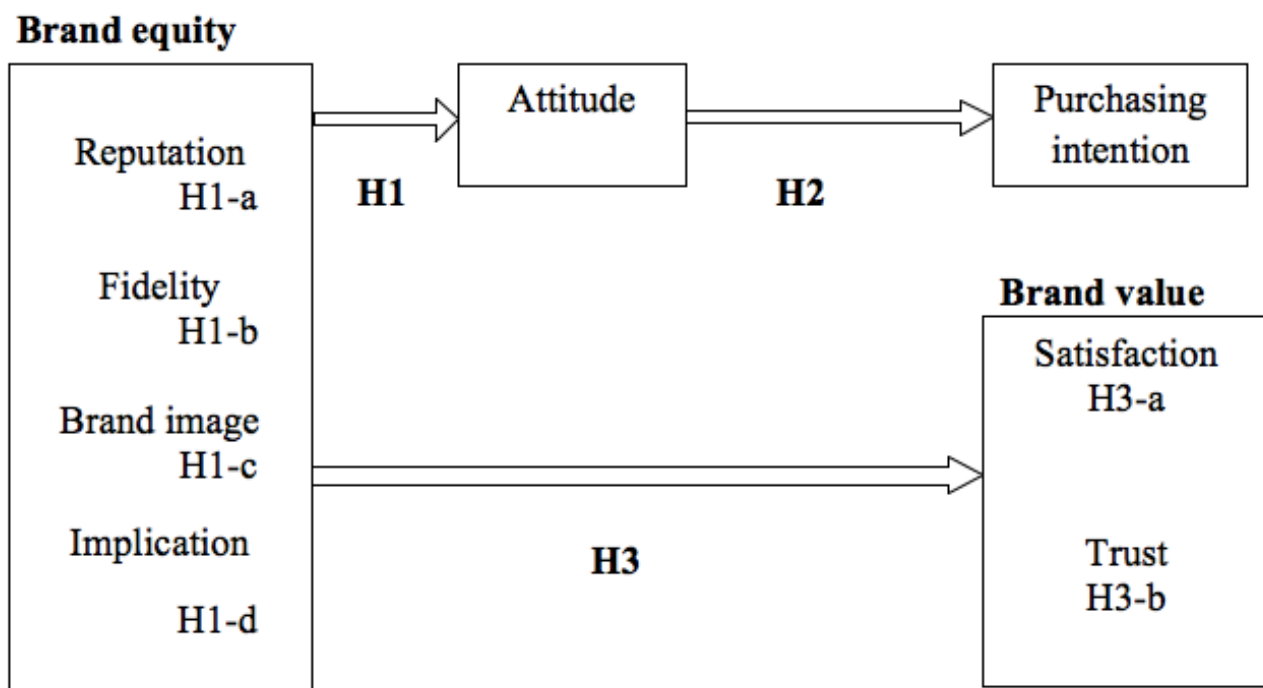


Figure 1- Proposed Model

Brand image is measured by associations to the brand (Keller 1993), which seem to us particularly appropriate to reflect richness of the variable. To measure this variable, we used the items 11 which 3 dimensions: competitiveness, interest charged and hedonism, scale validated by Didellon-Carsana, (1997) (Cronbach alpha 0,921; variance analysis 93,619). To measure *situational implication* we used the Relevance-Interest-Attraction (RIA) items 6, scale validated by Strazzieri (1994), (Cronbach alpha 0,938; variance analysis 77,839). As for *attitude*, we used the items 5, scale of Derbaix and Pecheux (1999), (Cronbach alpha 0,883; variance analysis 68,991). The scale used to measure *purchasing intention* is that of Ajzen (1991) which consists of three items, (Cronbach alpha 0,823; variance analysis 76,070). To precise the scale of fidelity by Yoo and al. (2000) comprising items 8, (Cronbach alpha 0,965; variance analysis 81,804).

Trust is measured by the items 7, scale of Doney and Cannon (1997). Finally, we used the items 4, scale proposed by Dubé and Menon (1998) to measure *satisfaction*.

A questionnaire was administered during a football game between Tunisia/Malawi, qualifying for the 2012 Olympic Games, to a convenience sample of 389 spectators. A team of 15 researchers and one supervisor were involved in the data collection at the Stadium doors, handing a questionnaire to every 5 spectators. The questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of the half-time period and collected before the start of the second half. Five hundred questionnaires were distributed and 389 were returned for a response rate of 77%. The chosen sponsor is mineral water brand "Sabrine". The beverage sector is the most present sector in the Tunisian sports sponsoring, because of a natural relationship between athletes and drinks and because these products are particularly substitutable. We opted for this product because "Sabrine" is the only sponsor of the Olympic team and which belongs to a mass consumption product category.

After administering the questionnaire, we checked the thoroughness and coherence of all administered questionnaires with respondents before moving to the codification phase. Then,

for the statistical analysis, we used the SPSS 18.0 software. Finally, we undertook the three stages of scale purification, reliability analysis and regression analysis.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

In order to test the six hypotheses, regression analyses were used. As a reminder, Participants rated the items using a five-point Likert scale anchored by Strongly Disagree (1) and Strongly Agree (5). This latter scheme is the most used format to probe opinions (Descriptive Statistics of the Scales)

Table 1: Unidimensionality and Reliability Test

| | Reputation | Fidelity | Image | Implication | Attitude | Intention | Trust | Satisfaction |
|----------------------------|------------|----------|--------|-------------|----------|-----------|-------|--------------|
| % of variance | 90,533 | 81,804 | 93,619 | 77,839 | 68,991 | 76,070 | * | 65,586 |
| Scale reliability | 0,979 | 0,965 | 0,921 | 0,938 | 0,883 | 0,823 | | 0,518 |
| KMO | 0,906 | 0,769 | 0,5 | 0,599 | 0,613 | 0,654 | 0,653 | 0,707 |
| Bartlett's sphericity test | 0,000 | 0,000 | 0,000 | 0,000 | 0,000 | 0,000 | 0,000 | 0,000 |

Factor analysis of all measures, except trust, is undertaken on items, extracting one factor which explains a high proportion of variance. Trust has been divided into three components. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) provided us with a 3-factor solution which explains more than 88,817% of variance. KMO obtained values indicate a psychometric integrity between items. It seems that the items score coefficients greater than 0,5 (acceptance threshold). All dimensions of the scale score good homogeneity estimates as indicated by Cronbach's Alpha reliability index. All of Bartlett's sphericity tests are statistically significant. After having tested and validated the measurement scales of our variables, we proceeded to testing our research hypotheses about the effects of the different independent variables on the dependent variable (testing hypotheses H1, H2 and H3). We use simple and multiple linear regressions to test our 3 hypotheses.

Testing H1:

Brand equity of a sponsoring brand positively influences Tunisian consumers' attitude during a sports event.

In the first analysis; attitude was used as the dependent variable and the four attitudinal constructs (reputation, fidelity, brand image and situational implication) were included as the independent variables.

H1-a: Referring to the sum of squares and mean squares presented by SPSS, the F-statistic is 418,215 is significant at $p = 0,000 < 0,0005$. The likelihood of obtaining an F of this size at random is inferior to 0,05 %. The F test indicates significance equal to 0,000 which is below the critical threshold. We therefore can generalise the results on our population confirming the obtained factorial structure.

H1-b: R is 0,902 indicating that data is fit to the model. The coefficient of determination R^2 is 0,813, which indicates that the proportion of dependent variance (y) explained by the regression, i.e. attitude in our model. We can conclude that reputation, fidelity, brand image and situational implication explain 81,3% of variance in Tunisian consumers' attitude towards the sponsor "Sabrine".

H1-c: In our model, R^2 is high which explains that the model has a high explanatory power.

H1-d: The Beta coefficient allows us to compare the contribution of each variable as it is a regression coefficient put into a standard scale between -1 et + 1. Reputation variable is the most determining as its Beta value is 0,989 and its variables have a positive effect on attitude.

The t-test should have a value greater than 1,96 to be significant. By observing the outputs of the impact of the independent variables (reputation, fidelity, brand image and situational implication) on the dependent variable (attitude), all variables confirm statistical significance as it is below 5%.

Therefore, through these outputs and interpretation, we can validate H1-a, H1-b, H1-c and H1-d. The model is generally significant.

Testing H2:

Tunisian consumers' attitude towards the sponsoring brand influences their purchasing intention.

Simple Regression Analysis for Purchase Intention as dependent variable to explain the attitude. The coefficient of determination R^2 is 0,752. Then, the model's predictive quality is very good, as 75,2 % of the variance in purchasing intention may be predicted by consumers' attitude. The regression shows that the dimension "attitude" positively and significantly influences purchasing intention as the value of T-student is 34,222. This dimension explains 86,7 % of the variance in purchasing intention, hence H2 is confirmed.

Testing H3: The dimensions (reputation, fidelity, brand image and situational implication) of brand equity create value of a sponsoring brand in Tunisia.

In the third analysis; satisfaction and trust were used as the dependent variable and the elements of brand equity (reputation, fidelity, brand image and situational implication) were included as the independent variables.

H3-a: To test H3-a et H3-b, we proceed by a multiple linear regression. The model is statistically significant as the value of Fisher F is 845,486 and a significance level equal to zero.

H3-b: Coefficient of determination R^2 is 0,729. Therefore, the model's predictive quality is very good as 72,9% of variance in satisfaction may be predicted by the variables of brand equity.

H3-c: The regression analysis shows that the dimensions "reputation" and "fidelity" significantly and positively influence spectators' satisfaction with the sponsoring brand with a significance level below the critical threshold. Only the variable "brand image" is non-significant and therefore could not influence Tunisian consumers' satisfaction with the brand 'Sabrine'. H3-a is partially confirmed. The model is statistically significant as Fisher F = 855,368 with a significance level equal to zero.

H3-d: The model's predictive quality is very good as 89,9% of the variance in trust may be predicted by the variables of brand equity. Whatever the position of the trust dimension, the variables of brand equity significantly influence consumers' trust of the sponsoring brand. H3-b is confirmed. As H3-a is partially confirmed and H3-b is confirmed, we cannot validate H3 in its entirety. It is partially validated. Table 2 below reports a summary of our hypotheses testing.

Table 2: The Results

| Hypotheses | Results | |
|--|-----------|----------|
| | Accepted | Rejected |
| H1-a: Reputation significantly and positively influences consumers' attitude. | X | |
| H1-b: Fidelity significantly and positively influences consumers' attitude. | X | |
| H1-c: Brand image significantly and positively influences consumers' attitude. | X | |
| H1-d: Situational implication significantly and positively influences consumers' attitude. | X | |
| H1- Brand equity significantly and positively influences consumers' attitude. | X | |
| H2- Consumers' attitude towards the sponsoring brand influences their purchasing intention. | X | |
| H3-a: Brand equity significantly and positively influences Tunisian consumers' satisfaction with the sponsoring brand. | Partially | |
| H3-b: Brand equity significantly and positively influences Tunisian consumers' trust of the sponsoring brand. | X | |
| H3- The dimensions of brand equity create value of a sponsoring brand in Tunisia. | Partially | |

The significant and consistent involvement of sponsorship in predicting all sponsorship outcomes is the most striking finding. This factor has not been widely used as a predictor of sponsorship outcomes (Madrigal, 2001). Consumers who perceive sponsorship as an activity that increases or contributes to the commercialization of sports are less likely to develop positive responses toward the sponsor. As previously discussed, sponsorship has traditionally been seen as a favorable activity for consumers because it involves benefits for society (Meenaghan, 2001).

CONCLUSION

The current study was conducted in the context of a soccer event, which had a qualifying the bests association to Olympic Games in London. The results should be validated by studies conducted in different settings and sports. It appears that sponsorship is an effective form of marketing communication, and one that compares favourably to traditional television advertising.

Considering brand equity, this latter should help brand managers knowing their values in view of taking the strategic decisions on managing sponsoring brands. The present study provide confirmation that reputation, fidelity, brand image and situational implication toward the sport event, about sponsorship have value in sponsoring brand. Our hypotheses are validated. Brand equity significantly and positively influences trust, yet it is not significant on Tunisian consumers' satisfaction with the sponsoring brand "Sabrine". Our paper replicates in part previous conclusions. Sponsorship allows sponsors to benefit from improving evaluation of and beliefs about their brands (which was indicated by the questionnaire on brand reputation, fidelity, brand image and situational implication), provided that the relationship between the sponsor and the event is valued. Moreover, we notice that an increasing number of spectators

expressed their willingness to purchase the sponsoring brand. Investing in sponsorship is in great proportion justified. It is important however to notice that sponsorship bears not only on associations with the event but also on all communication and investments used by the firm to increase returns of sponsoring (Cornwell and Maignan, 1998). Therefore, sports sponsorship seems to give supremacy to the sponsoring brand "Sabrine". According to Harvey (2001), sponsors' products are perceived as better, which increases purchasing intention and real purchasing decisions. We showed that a sports sponsoring action is able to change attitudes towards the sponsor, mainly because of a cognitive transfer mechanism. Spectators of a sponsored event associate more favourable beliefs to the brand "Sabrine". Sponsorship is efficient in changing beliefs about the sponsor. Consumers' attitude is not only useful but it also rests on representations and symbols that the products carry (Desbordes, Ohl and Tribou, 2001). This paper indicates also that evaluation of a Tunisian sponsoring brand, and the same is true for purchasing intentions, change by a sponsorship action. Consumers-based brand equity is multidimensional. This result replicates Aker's conceptualisation (Aaker, 1994) who presented brand equity as a set of different dimensions. These latter dimensions positively influence value of the sponsoring brand equity for consumers particularly increasing trust. This paper leads us to close that managers need to consider the mechanisms through which consumers can become more involved with events (Yue, Des & Kishore, 2014). Some answers were certainly delivered, yet it suffers from a number of limitations that need further scrutiny. For instance, it was difficult to administer the questionnaire just before the game as spectators were focused on the game. Consequently, out of the 500 scheduled questionnaires, we were able to collect 389. Fortunately, we were able to mobilise young Olympics (15) to help us carry out the administration task (it was not obvious to find such an available number of interviewers in a fragile security period, after few months of the Jasmine Revolution). Finally, future studies could investigate more antecedents of sponsorship outcomes. It has, for example, been suggested that sponsorship knowledge can be an important antecedent of sponsorship outcomes (Roy & Cornwell, 2003). A possible other future implication of this study concerns managers. It can help brand managers devise a measurement tool that allows them to measure sponsoring of their brands in order to improve their positioning and their marketing actions (marketing-mix). We can also carry out a dynamic analysis (before-after event). It could be interesting to accomplish a cross cultural study in another time.

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