

An empirical study on CRM in Hospitality Sector with special reference to Domestic Tourists in Vijayawada, A.P.

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction – Tourism is an industry with a highly fragmented nature of operations with too many players competing each for the same tourist share. Coordination between channel partners is becoming more complex, as too many services are available to cater for and each player has different commercial and strategic interests. Hotels and travel agencies have become inevitable in fulfilling the tourists' needs by mutual cooperation and improving their relationships. **Need for the Study** – The present research is an attempt to evaluate the efficacy of e-CRM strategies practiced in the industry in order to build stronger relationships. **Research Objectives** – the researchers aimed to explore the concept of CRM in hospitality sector and to examine the strategies adopted for acquiring and retaining the hotel guest(s) as well as to build relationship with the help of People, Process and Technology in Hospitality Sector. **Research Hypothesis** - The research investigated the primary data with an assumption that the customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary among the demographic variables (gender, age, marital status, occupation, and monthly income) of the customers. **Research Methodology** – The primary data has been collected from a sample of 828 guests of five, four and three star hotels located in Vijayawada City. **Statistical Tools** – Analysis of Variance for one factor "Tourist Hospitality Services" is considered for identifying the significant differences among the guests classified by various demographic variables. **Research Findings** – The common research finding observed from the results obtained through statistical analysis reveal that the opinions of the customers' (for all demographic variables) are significantly varying on the tourism hospitality services.

Keywords: Tourism, Hospitality Services, Customer Relationship Management, e-CRM.

Introduction:

The Indian tourism industry has emerged as one of the major drivers of growth among the Indian services sectors. This contributes 6.23 per cent of the national GDP and 8.78 per cent of the country's total employment. Relentless development, realistic growth and improved standards of the Indian hospitality industry have attracted the share of tourists around the world. The industry is usually defined in two segments, i.e. the tourism sector that includes health and medical tourism, heritage and adventure tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism, wildlife and pilgrimage tourism, the hotels that include business hotels, airport hotels, suite hotels, homestays, resort hotels, convention centers and conference centres, hotels with time sharing, apartments.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has described tourism as a temporary tourist staying in a country visited for at least twenty-four hours when the object of the trip is listed under one of the following headers:

- i) Leisure that includes recreation, holiday, health, study of religion and sports or
- ii) Business, family, mission meetings.

Tourists in the tourism industry are searching not only for services or value offered but also for the facilities provided. If they are happy or pleased with their previous experience in using the service, they will come back again and recommend the services to others as well. The businesses must be concerned with the services offered to the consumer and must meet the needs of the customers. To thrive, tourism companies need to prioritize developing stronger relationships.

Relationship Marketing

The American Marketing Association (2004) describes marketing as an organizational activity that involves a collection of processes that develop, communicate and deliver value to their customers and help manage relationships in a way that benefits the company as a whole, as well as its stakeholders. It means that alongside other traditional marketing mix factors, the whole process of managing relationships is one of the key factors in marketing. Traditional marketing concepts concentrate on customer needs, but relationship marketing emphasizes customer relationship life cycles, thus refocusing marketing strategy away from goods and their life cycles to life cycles of relationships.

Importance of Relationship Marketing

Acquisition of new customers is one of the challenging tasks facing every business today. Gaining a client's interest, making an engaging presentation and thus increasing sales leads to huge expenditures when all of these steps are taken into account. Companies with limited or finite resources cannot afford to embark on this tedious process to maintain their market share. Alternatively, they should concentrate on maintaining their existing clients. A business will work on building customer trust by consistently delighting customers with robust service delivery that comes with the outstanding quality of service provided and making the whole service delivery cycle 'hassle-free.' The company builds the trust of its customers who, in effect, begin to show the first signs of dedication by sending good word of mouth referrals to a high group. This conduct, in effect, provides more business opportunities to the organization, which in turn gives its customers their payment for 'service delight.' This whole cycle begins with the building of the partnership and proceeds to form a network of relationships throughout. This cycle continues to flow through the whole network of the business that also involves other members. Marketing partnerships and marketing relationships are two different concepts and they share completely different ideas. Marketing relations is an age-old concept that is in use for an extended period of time. The nature and specificity of marketing relationships completely set it aside and distinguishes it from other marketing practices.

Key constituents of Relationship Marketing:

The partnership reflects the connection between its consumers and other stakeholders, in a very simple term. While the word 'relationship' implies contact, it may also include disputes and may occur between enemies of equal importance since communication may not always imply a relationship. The relationship is more of a strategy that seeks long-term development, maintenance, and enhancement of relationships with people to be loyal and supportive of the organisation. Relationship marketing attributes, Relationship Marketing Outcomes, and Relationship Marketing Values are the key aspects of relationship marketing mostly revolve around three core issues.

Relationship Marketing in Tourism Sector in India:

Service organizations shift their focus from the word ' transactional exchange' to ' relational exchange' for emerging mutually fulfilling customer relationships. It is stated that extended relationships have a significant impact on the cost and profitability of transactions, and the duration of the lifetime of the customer. The need of the hour to serve customers in the right way is as true as the customer was, is and will remain the overriding focus of all organizational activities. At present, customer service is the most important factor in the tourism industry as interactions in this field are being marketed.

Review of Literature:

T.D. Juwaheer (2000) conducted a study in Mauritius to understand the implementation of relationship marketing in the selected organisations and observed that the majority of the study organisations are not implementing the relationship marketing and it is in infancy stage in some companies. According to the author, the reasons for not effective implementation of relationship marketing in Mauritius are lack of conceptual clarity of relationship marketing, poor communication networks, and ineffective control systems. Author has given various suggestions for the effective development and implementation of relationship marketing like, educating the stakeholders on the concept of relationship marketing, segmenting the customers based on the value propositions, technological developments, etc.

Fyall et al. (2003) opined that the relationship marketing in becoming a potential advantage to the most competitive tourism industry in this modern era in spite of emerging new destinations and variety of options to tourists in making their choice.

Gummeson (2004) conducted conceptual research on relationship marketing to assess the state of development of the subject area and its application. He found that the concept is in infancy stage and needs further development. He also found that very little research has been conducted so far on its definition and application in various sectors. He presented the existing gaps in the conceptual framework of the subject matter and also the constraints in the application of relationship marketing in various sectors.

Flambard-Ruaud (2005) emphasised on need for application of relationship marketing. According to him, the present day business scenario with respect to globalisation of markets, stiff competition, proliferation of brands, changing customer attitude, lifestyles, tastes and preferences has compelled the businesses to design and implement innovative strategies to retain the existing customers and making them more loyal. These factors have enforced the businesses to design and implement the concept of relationship marketing.

Tony Ward et al. (2007) advised the marketers not to implement the relationship marketing strategies in all types of businesses and in all types of transactions. According to them, the application and use of relationship marketing varies with the type of businesses and type of transactions taking place between the marketer and clients.

Statement of the Problem

Tourism is an industry with a highly fragmented nature of operations with too many players competing each for the same tourist share. Coordination between channel partners is becoming more complex, as too many services are available to cater for and each player has different commercial and strategic interests. Hotels and travel agencies have become inevitable in fulfilling the tourists' needs by mutual cooperation and improving their relationships.

Need for the Study

The Indian population is growing and there is a rapid increase in the amount of disposable travel income available. The growth of the tourism industry has brought many businesses and emerging markets. Indian tourists respect money and look to every point for best service. And in a country like India where relationships and human values are given the utmost importance, building a strong one becomes the need of the hour. Within their respective industries, hotel chains and travel agencies working in the tourism industry face a lot of internal problems. Despite the issues found in their internal operations, the OTA's (Online Travel Agencies) posed quite a threat to hotel companies and the unorganized travel agencies operating in the tourism industry, and each year the fight becomes ferocious. These issues can be avoided when all the players in the tourism industry work together to force out the currently existing unhealthy competition and fight in the industry and put strong emphasis on the marketing partnership practices in the tourism industry. The study is conducted to describe the relationship building activities followed in the tourism industry in the light of three key Relationship Marketing aspects, namely Relationship Marketing Attributes (service value), Relationship Marketing Outcomes (service experience) and Relationship Marketing Values (service relationships). Adding to this, the research sought to evaluate the efficacy of e-CRM strategies practiced in the industry in order to build stronger relationships.

Objectives:

1. To know about the concept of CRM and its practices in hospitality sector.
2. To examine the strategies adopted for acquiring and retaining the hotel guest as well as to build relationship with the help of People, Process and Technology in hospitality sector.
3. To study the relationship between Socio-demographic profile of the hotel guest with their satisfaction level on various facilities and services.
4. To find out the important Critical Success Factor for implementing CRM and to offer appropriate suggestions for improving enhanced CRM in hospitality sector.

Hypothesis:

H₀₁: The customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary among the demographic variables of the customers.

Sub-Hypotheses of H₀₁:

H_{01a}: The customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary among the male and female customers.

H_{01b}: The customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary with the customers' age.

H_{01c}: The customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary with the customers' marital status.

H_{01a}: The customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary with the customers' occupation.

H_{01e}: The customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary with the customers' monthly income.

Sources of data

Primary data were collected using a well-structured questionnaire from Five, Four and Three Star Hotels hotel guests in Vijayawada City.

The secondary data was collected from various sources like Journals, Magazines, Publications, Reports, Books, Articles, Research Papers and Websites.

Sample

Sample is drawn from the population. There are different types of hotels in Vijayawada. To restrict the number of hotels, star hotels were chosen for the study. At first, the total numbers of hotels in each category is taken into consideration to decide about the hotels to be selected and the ratio has been determined for the purpose of the study is given below in table 1.

Type of Hotel	Five Star	Four Star	Three Star	Total Hotels
Total Number of Hotels in Vijayawada	2	6	75	83
Number of Hotels considered for the study	1	3	30	34

Sample technique

The primary data is collected using Stratified Random Sampling Process. Population was divided into various strata to pick the sample according to the hotel's Star Rating. A sample was calculated from the various strata, consisting of 1 Five Star, 3 Four Star and 30 Three Star hotels, using simple random sampling.

Sampling Size

The sample size under each stratum chosen is exhibited in the following table 2.

Type of Hotel	Number of Hotels Selected	Number of Hotel Guests
Five Star	1	24
Four Star	3	152
Three Star	30	652
Total	34	828

The researcher took 34 hotels located in City of Vijayawada. The population consists of 652 three-star hotel guests, 152 four-star hotel guests and 24 five-star hotel guests making a total of 828 hotel guests reacting to this report.

Table 3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

S.No	CHARACTERISITC	FREQUENCY (N=828)	PERCENTAGE
Gender			
1	Male	509	61.47
2	Female	319	38.53
Age (in years)			
1	Under 25	150	18.12
2	25-44	498	60.14
3	45-60	146	17.63
4	Above 60	34	4.11
Marital Status			
1	Single	249	30.07
2	Married	579	69.93
Occupation			
1	Business	73	8.82
2	Job in Private Sector	494	59.66
3	Job in Public Sector	32	3.86
4	Professional	172	20.77
5	Others	57	6.88
Monthly Income (in Rupees)			
1	Upto Rs. 15,000	150	18.12
2	Rs. 15,001 – 30,000	285	34.42
3	Rs. 30,001 – 45,000	215	25.97
4	Above Rs. 45,000	178	21.50
Family Size			
1	One	17	2.05
2	Two	64	7.73
3	Three – Four	509	61.47
4	Five – Six	196	23.67
5	Above Six	42	5.07
Number of Children in the Family			
1	None	379	45.77
2	1 – 2	382	46.14
3	3 – 5	59	7.13
4	Above 5	8	0.97
Per Head Budget for Annual Trip (in Rupees)			
1	Upto Rs. 15,000	411	49.64
2	Rs. 15,001 – 30,000	262	31.64
3	Rs. 30,001 – 45,000	64	7.73
4	Rs. 45,001 – 60,000	66	7.97
5	Above Rs. 60,000	25	3.02

Interpretation:

The above table 3 furnishes the information about the demographic profile of the respondents. In the present study, majority of the respondents (61.47 %) are male and only 38.53 percent of the respondents are female. Around 60 percent of the respondents are in the age group of 25 – 44 years, followed by under 25 years age group with 18.12 percent and 45-60 years age group with 17.63 percent. Only negligible percent of respondents are above 60 years of age.

Nearly 70 percent of the respondents are married while the remaining 30 percent of the respondents are single (either unmarried or divorced or widowed). Around 60 percent of the respondents are doing job in private sector and 20.77 percent of the respondents are doing professional jobs. Remaining job categories are having respondents less than ten percent, among which business people occupy the higher percentage (8.82%).

The majority of respondents making the tours and travel are having income levels more than Rs. 15,000 per month. 34.42 percent of the respondents are having a monthly income between Rs. 15,000 – Rs. 30,000 followed by Rs. 30,000 – Rs. 15,000 income group with 25.97 percent, Rs. 45,000 and above with 21.50 percent of respondents. Only 18.12 percent of respondents, who are making tours and travels, are having income less than Rs. 15,000

Majority of the respondents (61.47%) in the present study are having three-four members in their family followed by five to six-member family by 23.67 percent of the respondents. The remaining family size categories are having less than 10 percent of respondents.

The above table also provides the information about the number children the respondents are having, which infers that 46.14 percent of respondents are having one to two children in their family whereas 45.77 percent of respondents are not having children in their family. The remaining categories are having negligible percent of respondents.

Nearly half of the respondents (49.64%) are spending less than Rs. 15,000 per annum per head for the tours and travel closely followed by 31.64 percent of respondents who are spending between Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 30,000 per annum per head. Remaining 20 percent of the respondents are spending more than Rs. 30,000 per head per annum for tours and travel.

Testing of Hypotheses:**Gender:**

H_{01a}: The customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary among the male and female customers.

Table 4 Summary of Hypotheses testing Results of H_{01a} factors

S.No	Tourist Hospitality Services	Mean Values (Gender)			p-value	Result
		Male (n=509)	Female (n=319)	Overall (N=828)		
1	Transportation	4.09	4.18	4.12	0.0506	Accepted
2	Location and construction style of the hotel	3.67	3.87	3.75	0.0004	Rejected
3	Staff services at the hotel	3.28	3.61	3.41	<.0001	Rejected
4	Food, Beverages and Restaurant services	3.09	3.47	3.24	<.0001	Rejected
5	Cleanliness & Hygiene	2.99	3.19	3.07	0.0193	Rejected
6	Theme Parks	2.32	2.64	2.44	0.0004	Rejected
7	Tourism event planning	2.60	3.00	2.75	<.0001	Rejected
Overall Mean Score		3.15	3.42	3.25	<.0001	Rejected

Table 4a: Analysis of Variance for factor “Tourist Hospitality Services” classified by variable Gender of the respondent

Gender	N	Mean
Male	509	3.15
Female	319	3.42

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Value	Pr > F
Among	1	14.621450	14.621450	25.668547	<.0001
Within	826	845.124572	2.468992		

Interpretation:

Summary of the ANOVA test presented in the above table, 4, 4a indicates that p-value (<.0001) is lesser than 0.05 and hence the hypothesis stating “The customers’ opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn’t significantly vary among the male and female customers” is rejected at 0.05 level of significance, so there are significant differences between the male and female respondents.

Age:

H_{01b}: The customers’ opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn’t significantly vary with the customers’ age.

Table 5: Summary of Hypotheses testing Results of H_{01b} factors

S.No	Tourist Hospitality Services	Mean Values (Age)					p-value	Result
		Under 25 (n=150)	25 - 45 (n=498)	45 - 60 (n=146)	Above 60 (n=34)	Overall (N=828)		
1	Transportation	4.15	4.08	4.52	4.16	4.17	0.0025	Rejected
2	Location and construction style of the hotel	3.60	3.83	3.76	3.60	3.77	0.0010	Rejected
3	Staff services at the hotel	3.44	3.45	3.23	3.27	3.40	0.0387	Rejected
4	Food, Beverages and Restaurant services	3.34	3.20	3.23	3.26	3.23	0.4122	Accpeted
5	Cleanliness & Hygiene	3.34	3.02	3.23	2.88	3.11	0.0052	Rejected
6	Theme Parks	2.90	2.43	2.47	2.00	2.50	<.0001	Rejected
7	Tourism event planning	2.55	2.89	2.47	2.58	2.74	0.0010	Rejected
Overall Mean Score		3.33	3.27	3.27	3.11	3.28	0.0005	Rejected

Table 5a: Analysis of Variance for factor “Tourist Hospitality Services” classified by variable Age of the respondent

Age	N	Mean
Under 25	150	3.33
25 – 45	498	3.27
45 – 60	146	3.27
Above 60	34	3.11

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Value	Pr > F
Among	3	16.340689	2.452167	3.2854	0.0005
Within	824	194.666457	1.425740		

Interpretation:

Summary of the ANOVA test presented in the above tables, 5, 5a indicates that p-value (0.0005) is lesser than 0.05 and hence the hypothesis stating “The customers’ opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn’t significantly vary with the customers’ age” is rejected at 0.05 level of significance, so there are significant differences between the selected age groups.

Marital Status:

H_{01c}: The customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary with the customers' marital status.

Table 6 Summary of Hypotheses testing Results of H_{01c} factors

S.No	Tourist Hospitality Services	Mean Values (Marital Status)			p-value	Result
		Single (n=249)	Married (n=579)	Overall (N=828)		
1	Transportation	4.16	4.11	4.13	0.3878	Accepted
2	Location and construction style of the hotel	3.72	3.75	3.74	0.6041	Accepted
3	Staff services at the hotel	3.52	3.36	3.41	0.0057	Rejected
4	Food, Beverages and Restaurant services	3.40	3.16	3.23	0.0003	Rejected
5	Cleanliness & Hygiene	3.54	2.86	3.06	<.0001	Rejected
6	Theme Parks	3.03	2.19	2.44	<.0001	Rejected
7	Tourism event planning	2.89	2.70	2.76	0.0305	Rejected
Overall Mean Score		3.47	3.16	3.25	0.0020	Rejected

Table 6a: Analysis of Variance for factor "Tourist Hospitality Services" classified by variable Marital Status of the respondent

Marital Status	N	Mean
Single	249	3.47
Married	579	3.16

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Value	Pr > F
Among	1	6.578411	6.578411	4.6981	0.0020
Within	826	1156.594294	1.400235		

Interpretation:

Summary of the ANOVA test presented in the above tables, 6,6a indicates that p-value (0.0020) is lesser than 0.05 and hence the hypothesis stating "The customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary with the customers' marital status" is rejected at 0.05 level of significance, so there are significant differences between the selected marital groups of customers.

Occupation:

H_{01a}: The customers' opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn't significantly vary with the customers' occupation.

Table 7: Summary of Hypotheses testing Results of H_{01d} factors

S.No	Tourist Hospitality Services	Mean Values (Occupation)						P-value	Result
		Business (n=73)	Job in Private Sector (n=494)	Job in Public Sector (n=32)	Professional (n=172)	Others (n=57)	Overall (N=828)		
1	Transportation	4.19	3.85	4.29	4.12	4.25	3.98	<.0001	Rejected
2	Location and construction style of the hotel	3.86	3.56	3.57	3.67	3.50	3.61	<.0001	Rejected
3	Staff services at the hotel	3.49	3.47	3.14	3.32	2.50	3.36	<.0001	Rejected
4	Food, Beverages and Restaurant services	3.35	3.23	3.15	2.87	2.50	3.11	<.0001	Rejected
5	Cleanliness & Hygiene	3.30	2.63	3.57	2.65	1.75	2.67	<.0001	Rejected
6	Theme Parks	2.61	2.33	2.70	2.00	1.00	2.21	<.0001	Rejected
7	Tourism event planning	2.94	2.81	2.56	2.10	1.50	2.57	<.0001	Rejected
Overall Mean Score		3.39	3.13	3.28	2.96	2.43	3.07	<.0001	Rejected

Table 7a: Analysis of Variance for factor “Tourist Hospitality Services” classified by variable Occupation of the respondent

Occupation	N	Mean
Business	73	3.39
Job in Private Sector	494	3.13
Job in Public Sector	32	3.28
Professional	172	2.96
Others	57	2.43

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Value	Pr > F
Among	4	100.670247	25.167562	19.4945	<.0001
Within	823	1062.502458	1.291011		

Interpretation:

Summary of the ANOVA test presented in the above tables, 7, 7a indicates that p-value (<.0001) is lesser than 0.05 and hence the hypothesis stating “The customers’ opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn’t significantly vary with the customers’ occupation” is rejected at 0.05 level of significance, so there are significant differences between the selected occupational groups of customers.

Monthly Income:

H_{01e}: The customers’ opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn’t significantly vary with the customers’ monthly income.

Table 8: Summary of Hypotheses testing Results of H_{01e} factors

S.No	Tourist Hospitality Services	Mean Values (Monthly Income)					p-value	Result
		Up to 15,000 (n=150)	15,000 – 30,000 (n=285)	30,000 – 45,000 (n=215)	Above 45,000 (n=178)	Overall (N=828)		
1	Transportation	4.11	4.04	4.10	4.20	4.10	0.1137	Accepted
2	Location and construction style of the hotel	3.87	3.31	3.69	3.91	3.64	<.0001	Rejected
3	Staff services at the hotel	3.48	3.54	3.09	3.48	3.40	<.0001	Rejected
4	Food, Beverages and Restaurant services	3.15	3.44	2.94	3.37	3.24	<.0001	Rejected
5	Cleanliness & Hygiene	2.93	3.72	2.30	3.29	3.12	<.0001	Rejected
6	Theme Parks	2.61	2.60	2.05	2.48	2.43	<.0001	Rejected
7	Tourism event planning	2.76	3.24	2.19	2.85	2.80	<.0001	Rejected
Overall Mean Score		3.27	3.41	2.91	3.37	3.25	<.0001	Rejected

Table 8a: Analysis of Variance for factor “Tourist Hospitality Services” classified by variable Monthly Income of the respondent

Monthly Income	N	Mean
Up to 15,000	150	3.27
15,000 – 30,000	285	3.41
30,000 – 45,000	215	2.91
Above 45,000	178	3.37

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Value	Pr > F
Among	3	95.018797	31.679232	24.4333	<.0001
Within	824	1068.153908	1.296303		

Interpretation:

Summary of the ANOVA test presented in the above table, 8,8a indicates that p-value (<.0001) is lesser than 0.05 and hence the hypothesis stating “The customers’ opinion on the tourist hospitality services doesn’t significantly vary with the customers’ monthly income” is rejected at 0.05 level of significance, so there are significant differences between the selected income groups of customers.

Conclusion:

Customers are the cornerstone of any type of business operations, providing better results in maintaining partnership with them. CRM helps a company to identify new performance issues by collecting, monitoring, and analyzing customer service data. Customer data will help a firm identify new product development opportunities, provide customer-based personalized services based on its behavior and responses.

CRM is a powerful management tool that can be used to optimize sales potential and enhance consumer loyalty to the hospitality sector. In the long term, CRM creates constant analysis of the hospitality business with the client, thereby the the value of the business of the client. The greatest assets of the hospitality sector are its understanding of its clients. By retaining those customers who represent the highest lifetime value and profitability, they can use this asset and turn it into a key competitive advantage. They can develop relationships with customers across a broad spectrum of touch points such as their franchise branches. It is not enough just to implement a solution designed to achieve organizational goals to achieve CRM success. The process should ensure the achievement of those goals. More importantly, optimization of CRM should be encouraged through proper practices, resource optimization and the ability to adapt to change. Objectives must be identified and CRM goals must be established before embarking on a CRM project. Business processes need to be incorporated with CRM software before implementation actually takes place. The solution chosen should fit the hilt in with the organizational goals. But for the hospitality sector to be successful, it requires a holistic CRM plan in which all departments within the hospitality sector integrate.

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