The Impact of Quality of Destination Attributes on Tourist Satisfaction – The Case of Bhutan

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Abstract- Tourism is one of the world's largest industries. In Bhutan, tourism is the second largest source of foreign exchange after hydroelectricity and the numbers of visitors are increasing. When destinations around the world are getting increasingly competitive calling for improved tourism destination attributes to attract international inbound tourists. This study sought to find out relationship between attributes and overall visitor satisfaction. The main questions that seek to find answers are whether the six attributes play role in determining the visitor satisfaction; to determine the influencing nature of socio-demographic features of international visitors to their satisfaction; and to determine if there exist relationship between tourist's expectation and satisfaction. The analysis was carried out using secondary data collected by tourism council of Bhutan in 2016. A total of 34 variables with 6 attributes were chosen to test hypotheses. The findings show that all the attributes have significant relationship with overall satisfaction while the socio-demographic characteristics do not differ to affect the satisfaction.

Keywords: destination attributes, overall satisfaction, expectations, multiple regressions, bhutan.

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I. Introduction

Bhutan as tourism destination over last few years has seen increasing number of inbound tourists. Starting with only few hundred in 1970's, the number of tourists has risen to over hundred thousand in 2016 according to report of tourism council of Bhutan (2016). According to some studies, the major selling points for tourists are the culture and traditions and also the pristine natural environment offering aesthetic values.

There are many push and pull factors that can affect the growth of number of visitors and one of such significant determinants is the quality of products and services offered that can uphold or enlarge consumer satisfaction and also the retention. Within the tourism industry, there are number of services which are made of many components and each with varying levels of quality. However, there is information gap that ascertain the relationship between the quality of tourism products and services and intention to revisit Bhutan since the former affects later in a significant way.

a) Bhutan as a Tourist Destination

Bhutan is located in the eastern Himalayan sharing borders with China in the north and India in all other directions. Possessing a rich culture and traditions

and unparalleled natural landscape and beauty, Bhutan is now increasingly known as a land of gross national happiness. Tourism is one of the mainstays of Bhutanese economy. It is also major source of foreign exchange and revenue. According to tourism council a total of more than 200,000 tourists visited Bhutan out of which around one-third are international leisure arrivals. Visitors mainly come to Bhutan to witness the Buddhist influenced culture, festivals and architecture manifested in the all aspects of lives of the Bhutanese. Bhutan is also gaining popularity for its pristine natural environment and activities such as bird watching, trekking and rafting are offered by most tour operators. One distinguishing nature of tourism industry is that the visitors pay a flat tariff rate which includes guided tours, boarding, transportation and a royalty to the government.

II. Research Problem

Service Quality has been defined differently by different authors. Parasuraman et al. (1985) defined service quality as "the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers` perceptions and expectations", and "Perceived service quality" as "the gap between customers` expectations and perceptions, as a measurement of service quality". So, the smaller the gap, the better the service quality provided, and the greatest the customer satisfaction.

These services quality play a vital role in marketing Bhutan as a tourism destination. Literature including service quality in the hospitality industry can be categorized into three major groups: human resource related, strategy and management related, and service quality measurement issues. Some examples of the service quality articles related to the measurement of service quality using instrument to identify the perception of service quality in the hospitality industry (Douglas, Connor, 2003: Juwaheer & Ross, 2003).

The subject of service quality and customer satisfaction is of utmost importance to a country like Bhutan which considers tourism as top revenue generator for the government. However till now, no research for this particular topic has been conducted specifically in the context of any tourist services provider in Bhutan. But there are lots of research done on other developing nations, for instance on Jordan (Al-Rousan, et al., 2010; Hersh, 2010), on India by Rao &

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Sahu(2013), Sri Lanka (W.H.D.P, 2014), Pakistan (Shafiq, et al., 2012).

III. Literature Review

a) Service quality

The main purpose of this project is to investigate relationship between quality of service and customer satisfaction amongst the inbound international tourists. Service quality is believed to influence the satisfaction and attitudes of the customers towards the business. Likewise, many studies can be found that analyses the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction and retention (Minh et al., 2015; Rao & Sahu, 201). Among them, many studies have found positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction and retention (Tawinunt et al., 2015; Khan & Fasih, 2014; Bhat & Qadir, 2013).The tourism sector is no different in this regard, but as it's becoming more service oriented and customer conscious, it is more geared towards improving service quality and satisfying their customers. Tourism industry in Bhutan is growing at a rapid pace, and also the second biggest contributor to revenue (GNHC & RMA, 2016).That so why assessment of quality of various eight attributes.

b) Measurement of satisfaction

Customer satisfaction plays an important role as a marketing tool to attract the most variable segments of the market. According to Bitner and Hubbert (1994), customer satisfaction is the term used for the measure of the extent to which the product or service provided by the organization meets customer expectations, or, in other words, customer satisfaction is the fulfillment of the wants, needs and expectations of customers, thereby create customer loyalty to the product or service offered. Pascoe (1983) also stated that customer satisfaction is the response concerning the state, the process and the result of the experience of services received. Therefore, satisfaction is important to successful destination marketing (Kozak & Rimmimgton, 2000).In terms of tourism, tourists are customers who generate income for the country. Thus, in respect of continuing to develop the tourism sector emphasis should be given to the assessment of tourist satisfaction pertaining to the service quality provided.

Eraqi (2006) identified that the quality of the consumed products and services greatly affect tourists' satisfaction and vice versa. There are two types of qualities such as product features which enhance the customer satisfaction and the freedom from deficiencies which increase customer satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2010). Tourists like to pay for the added costs of the additional product features that make the tourists more loyal to the business. Measurement of the service quality depends on the personal judgments about the quality and product features related to the tourists

'expectations. Quality can be viewed in another way and a distinction can be made between technical and functional quality."Technical quality refers to what the customer is left with after the customer employee interactions have been completed. For example technical quality relates to the guest room in the hotel, the meals in the restaurant. Functional quality is the process of delivering the service or product. While the service is being delivered, customers go through many interactions with the firm's employees. A guest makes a reservation, is greeted by the door attendant, is escorted to the room. The experience of checking into a hotel is an example of functional quality. Excellent functional quality may make up for a room that is not quit up to expectations. If functional quality is unpleasant, a high quality room might not overcome the guests' previous dissatisfaction" (Kotler et al., 2010, p. 407).In addition to the technical and functional quality, Kotler et al. (2010) introduced a third quality element as societal quality. Societal quality is a credence quality which cannot be evaluated by the tourists before buying the products and is often impossible to evaluate after purchase. Business organizations should consider their ethical responsibilities when developing and delivering products and services, avoiding product features that can cause harm and potential safety hazards for the consumers. These features may not affect customer dissatisfaction immediately, but in the long run, it can bring more undesirable situations. Hotel and restaurant managers need to be more concerned about these issues since negative publicity destroys their goodwill hastily.

There are many studies which have been carried out by different researchers in different countries to identify the factors that affect the tourists' satisfaction and associated consequences. According to Alegre & Garau (2010), the negative attributes of the destination considerably cause the dissatisfaction among the tourists. Such attributes include too much construction, street prostitution, polluted resorts, queues and delay services, unavailability of favorite foods and drinks, overcrowding, lack of sanitary facilities, foreign currency exchange problems, slow customer clearance, etc.

c) Relationship between destination attributes and tourist satisfaction

A study by Mukhles (2013) concerning tourist satisfaction examined the impact of the quality of the tourism product on overall tourist satisfaction, and measured tourists' perceptions concerning the quality of tourism services provided at the Petra historical site. The findings noted that service quality, including destination facilities, destination accessibility and destination attraction, directly impacted tourist satisfaction. Another study conducted by Hossain and Leo (2008) revealed that service quality is a strong antecedent and is significantly related to customer satisfaction in the

banking industry in Qatar. Similarly, Jihad and Majeda (2012) confirmed that service quality has a significant impact on tourist satisfaction. Ivyanno and Nila (2013) examined the influence of service quality and tourist satisfaction on the future behavioral intentions of domestic local tourists to the Borobudur temple using the SERVQUAL model and multiple regression analysis. The study found that service quality has a positive influence on tourist satisfaction. In other words, maintaining service quality is important to maximize tourist satisfaction. Norazah (2013) found that five elements of service quality, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, tangibles and empathy are significantly correlated with tourist satisfaction in the hotel industry in Malaysia.

While in the tourism industry, Perunjodi (2011) examined visitor satisfaction with respect to nature-based tourism attractions in Mauritius, and found that nature-based tourism attractions have significant impact on and positive relationship with the overall visitor satisfaction. Bassey and Vivian (2009) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between tourists overall satisfaction and cultural festival attributes. Nine festivals attributes, organization, promotion, facilities, shopping, facilitates, refreshment, food, infrastructure, environmental ambience and safety and security, were investigated. Four of these nine attributes showed a significant relationship with overall satisfaction.

Munir et al. (2013) investigated whether travelers were satisfied with their visit to Malaysia and also highlighted factors that contribute to tourist satisfaction. The results showed that the overall tourist satisfaction gave a mean score of 3.74. Among the factors that attracted tourists to visit the country were beautiful scenery, customs and culture, hospitality of the service providers, the quality of food and the friendliness of the local population. Ghazal (2012) also pointed out that tourists were satisfied with the tourism products and market in Nepal.

IV. Research Hypothesis

The main objective of this study is to design and observe quality of tourism services in Bhutan objectively and evaluate the success of their service performance. Therefore, in order to gauge the perceptions of visitors, the research questions are framed appropriately as follows.

1. What is the satisfaction level for various tourist destination attributes ?
2. What factors determine the level of quality of tourism services and destination attributes ?
3. Are there differences in satisfaction level among different attributes ?
4. Do demographic characteristics matter to the satisfaction level ?

V. Methodology and Instruments

The study used the secondary data collected by Tourism council of Bhutan (TCB) in 2016 where survey questionnaires were used to compile responses from about 7500 tourists of different nationalities and backgrounds. Primary data were collected by TCB using exit survey questionnaires for international tourists comprising of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Administered exit surveys were used as the primary survey tool as they provide richer data than un-administered or online surveys. Further it also yields higher response rates, with departing visitors generally more willing to participate in one-to-one interviews over other survey methodologies.

a) Target Population

The first step of sampling is to identify the target population; the complete group of specific population elements that is relevant to the research project (Zikmund & Babin 2007). Specifying the target population is a crucial part of the sampling plan. International visitors of all other countries (other than those from India, Bangladesh and Maldives) arrivals to Bhutan for leisure, official, business and visiting friends and relatives in the year 2016 is the population of this survey and study.

b) Sample size and selection

Sample size is referred to the number of elements included in a research. The data for the study was collected by means of a questionnaire survey using self-administrated questionnaires (Song et.al. 20011; Yu & Goulden, 2006. A total of 7500 international tourists were approached, with at least 7487 agreeing to participate and to complete in providing data on the questionnaire. The respondents were selected randomly at Paro international Airport

c) Variables Measurements

Using SPSS 20, the acquired data will be used to carry out descriptive analysis to get the mean satisfaction level for each of the service attributes. The descriptive output is derived from a 5-point Likert scale encoded as 1 for "strongly disagree" and 5 for "strongly agree" with quality of a particular service as experienced by tourists. The scale used for expectations or importance range from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). By adopting this method, it will enable to test theories pertaining to the research and the hypotheses proposed by researcher regarding service quality dimensions and its impact on customer satisfaction (Hong Kong tourist satisfaction Index, 2015).

The questionnaire comprise of three parts: tourists demographic characteristics, perception towards attributes and the overall satisfaction. For the purpose of testing hypothesis and to run the multivariable regression there are 37 independent

variables. They are destination image (7), attractions (6), safety and security (5), accommodation & food (5), guide services (6), transportation (5) and demography of tourists (3). This is the model adopted by Krishna and Sangeeta (2011) to evaluate the significance of attributes at Mumbai and Pune cities.

i. *Mean Score of Variables*

Table 1: Mean score of variables

Variables	Items	Mean*	St.Dev	Skewness	
				Statistic	SE
Image	Bhutan is a safe tourist destination	4.40	.916	-1.802	.028
	Bhutan has a unique brand destination image in the region	4.26	.895	-1.237	.028
	Bhutan is known for its eco-tourism destination	4.09	.953	-.925	.028
	Bhutan is an adventure destination	4.00	.986	-.873	.028
	Bhutan's people and culture is a tourist attraction	4.25	.909	-1.228	.028
	Bhutan offers wide range of visitors products/services	4.04	.990	-.933	.028
	Bhutan offers affordable travel destination	3.91	1.128	-.904	.028
Accommodation	Quality of accommodation	3.84	1.088	-.775	.028
	Quality of Food & Beverages	3.85	1.003	-.603	.028
	Offer and availability of local cuisine	3.73	1.007	-.524	.028
	Quality of hotel services by the staff	3.88	.973	-.625	.028
	Quality of other services (Entertainment)	3.81	1.034	-.674	.028
Transportation	Organization of tourist transport services	3.88	1.144	-.887	.028
	Safety & Comfort of the tourist transport services	3.82	1.012	-.613	.028
	Road & trail safety	3.60	1.105	-.515	.028
	Driver's professionalism	4.04	.984	-.844	.028
	Road worthiness of the vehicle	3.83	1.074	-.816	.028
Safety & Security	Emergency service response	3.76	1.167	-.686	.028
	Medical safety & preventions	3.76	1.058	-.566	.028
	Security procedures	3.75	1.118	-.666	.028
	Availability of Safety information	3.76	1.012	-.653	.028
	A sense of security during the visit	3.95	1.108	-.999	.028
Guide Services	Guide services quality (Professionalism)	4.31	.992	-1.587	.028
	Knowledge content of the guide on Bhutan	4.33	.926	-1.507	.028
	Trust worthiness of the guide	4.40	.864	-1.504	.028
	Guide behavior and presentation	4.38	.903	-1.608	.028
	Guide Communications skills	4.36	.879	-1.457	.028
	Client care knowledge & skills	4.39	.894	-1.630	.028
Attractions	Culture & tradition	4.14	1.088	-1.186	
	Adventures	4.05	.973	-.860	.028
	Nature & Ecology	4.02	1.020	-.884	.028
	Spiritual	4.08	.986	-.923	.028
	GNH philosophy	4.02	1.032	-1.011	.028
	Hobbies	4.06	1.020	-1.044	.028

*1=strongly disagree…5=strongly agree, p-value<.01

- It is evident from the table that a majority of the respondents are distributed towards higher side regarding the image of Bhutan as a tourist destination for international tourists in 2016. The mean value of the responses is on the higher side than the average standard score at five-point scale. The standard deviation and Skewness noted are on higher side. The negative Skewness for all the items within this attributes shows that most tourists agree on higher point i.e) from agree to strongly agree. Thus perception is not equally distributed. The chi-square value is significant at 1% level. It is concluded that majority of the respondents have similar opinion but the higher scores are noted for "Bhutan is a safe destination" (4.41) while the mean score for "Bhutan offers affordable travel destination" is lowest (3.91).

- It can be observed that visitors are high on satisfaction scale of Accommodation & Food with mean of 3.8 for 5 items within it with variability of 0.76. Since the standard deviation is quite same for all the items, the perception about accommodation and food by most respondents must also be same. The negative Skewness ranging from -.60 to -.90 validates the agreement about the satisfaction score on higher scale which is confirmed by chi-square value at 1% with p=0.00.

- A majority of respondents are distributed towards the higher side indicating their agreements with the feel of safety and security during their visit to various places around Bhutan. The mean score of safety and security is around 3.8. However the security procedures at places of visit scored less than the overall mean. The Skewness for all the variables are negative indicating that distribution is negatively skewed and the scores are between agree and strongly agree for most visitors.

VI. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is done to test whether there is positive relationship between independent variable (attractions, safety & security, image of Bhutan, accommodation & food, transportation and guide services) to the dependent variable (tourist satisfaction). To test the proposed hypothesis, the statistical models used are the multiple regression, ANOVA and coefficient of determination. The purpose of the multiple regressions is to find out of the multiple regression more about the relationship between more independent variables (factors related to the Bhutan as a destination) and the dependent variable (tourists satisfaction).

Table 2A: Regression analysis of attributes with overall Satisfaction

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.561[a]	.314	.314	.63639

a. *Predictors: (Constant), Guide Services, Accommodation & Food, Attractions, Image, Safety & Security, Transportation*

Table 2A shows that 31.4% (R2=.314 and p-value<0.05) of the variation in overall tourist satisfaction is explained by the six attributes and the 34 variables and the predictors strength is reasonable for a 5 point Likert scale. The details of the regression results for each of the hypotheses are explained below.

Table 2B: Results of overall satisfaction of tourist's visit to Bhutan

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.630	.066		9.501	.000
Attractions	.088	.010	.091	8.831	.000
Safety & Security	.067	.010	.070	6.525	.000
Image	.136	.013	.111	10.793	.000
Accommodation & Food	.343	.011	.341	31.211	.000
Transportation	.151	.010	.173	15.886	.000
Guide Services	.026	.010	.025	2.499	.012

a. *Dependent Variable: Overall Satisfaction*

Table 2A and 2B have demonstrated the results of the regression analysis. According to the coefficient of determination (R2 = 0.203), the six destination related factors gave an acceptable results in predicting the tourists are satisfied about quality of tourist's product and services offered in Bhutan. Furthermore, the

analysis has indicated that tourists have experienced and satisfied with the six factors related to the destination, as shown in the multiple correlation coefficients (R) of 0.561. The result has indicated that the t-test shows the multiple regression models that have been tested here is acceptable. The result of the regression analysis gives us the following equation using the unstandardized coefficients.

$$SATISFACTION = 0.63 + .088X_1 + .067X_2 + .136X_3 + .343X_4 + .151 X_5 + .026X_6$$

Based on the result of linear regression, it can be shown that all of the six independent variables of this study contributed to overall satisfaction. Each independent variable has effect on the SATISFACTION as shown by the B of unstandardized coefficients. According to the result, accommodation and food provided the strongest effect to SATISFACTION (B = .343), followed by Transportation (B = .151), Image (B = .136), Attractions (B = .088), Safety & Security(B = .067) and Guide Services (B = .026). All had significance value less than .05. We can conclude from these statistics that the entire hypothesis, H1 to H6 is accepted since B is not equal to zero and t-test is significant at 0.01 except for guide services.

Table 2C: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1388.159	6	231.360	571.278	.000[b]
Residual	3029.302	7480	.405		
Total	4417.461	7486			

a. *Dependent Variable: Overall Satisfaction*
b. *Predictors: (Constant), Guide Services, Accommodation & Food, Attractions, Image, Safety & Security, Transportation*

The F-ratio of 571.278 shown in Table 2C, which is very high, signals that the regression model that is adopted is reliable and significant.

a) *Relationship between expectations and tourists satisfaction*

The regression analyses have been carried out for determining relation between expectation level of destination attributes and overall satisfaction. The output for the multivariable regression with expectations as independent variables and overall satisfaction shows that there is significant relationship at 1% level of significance (p=.000) and F= 571.27.

Table 6 shows regression coefficients for the independent variables and B values for all variables are positive. However, the relationship between expectation level of accommodation & food and overall satisfaction is not significant since p>0.05.The relationship is positive and significant between all other destination attributes and overall satisfaction. Attributes such as attractions, safety & security, image, transportation and guide services are significant predictors of overall satisfaction.

Table 3: Regression analysis of expectations of attributes and satisfaction

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.167	.292		.573	.567
	Expected Attractions	.292	.011	.290	26.012	.000**
	Expected Safety	.242	.085	.038	2.862	.004*
	Expected Image	.110	.045	.028	2.437	.015*
	Expected Accommodation	.024	.078	.004	.302	.763
	Expected Transportation	.312	.057	.068	5.423	.000**
	Expected Guide services	.123	.051	.029	2.386	.017*

a. *Dependent Variable: Overall Satisfaction*

$R^2 = .092$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, F = 571.27

In order to test the hypothesis, the tourist satisfaction is measured using paired t-test. The mean difference signifies the deviation of satisfaction level from the expectations. Satisfaction is measured using 5 point Likert scale which ranges from 1(strong disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) while the expectations ranges from 1(not important) to 5 (highly important).

Table 3.1: Paired t-test of tourist's expectations and satisfaction

Variables	Mean Difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Satisfaction Level
Attractions	-.00043	-.238	.812	Low
Safety & Security	.7974	85.506	.000	High
Image	1.105	145.906	.000	High
Accommodation & Food	.8250	93.736	.000	High
Transportation	.748	72.38	.000	High
Guide Services	1.327	149.145	.000	High

The results of the paired t-test are shown in table 6.1. In this hypothesis testing, high satisfaction level are defined as those attributes with positive mean difference and with t-value significant at 5% (p < 0.05).In this study, five variables are found to be with high satisfaction level where the mean differences are positive and high with p<.05.The attributes are safety & security, destination image, accommodation & food, transportation and guide services. For one attribute-attractions, the mean difference is negative, therefore its expectations and satisfaction for the tourists is not significantly related.

b) *Influence of socio-demographic characteristics on overall satisfaction of international tourists*

One Way ANOVA and t test are used to perform means comparisons in order to determine if the socio-demographic factors are likely to influence the perception of tourist about the various destination attributes. The factors considered in this paper are age, gender and employment status.

H_o: Socio-demographic factors do not influence the overall satisfaction level.

H_a: Socio-demographic factors influences the overall satisfaction level.

Table 4: Analysis of influence of employment status on satisfaction level

Status Employment	Full Time	Part Time	Unemployed	Student	Retired	F	Sig.
Satisfaction Score	3.56	2.75	3.59	3.12	3.69	1.174	.317

The result of ANOVA (Table 4) shows that employment status has no significant relationship with the satisfaction level of the destination attributes. With F=1.174 and p>0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted which indicates that employment status of tourists doesn't affect the mean satisfaction score.

Table 5: Analysis of influence of Gender on Satisfaction level

Factor Gender	Male	Female	F	Sig.
Satisfaction Score	3.71	3.79	1.322	.265

There is no significant differences in the mean scores between the gender (Satisfaction score: F=1.322, p>0.05). Similarly, age of the tourists doesn't matter much for the mean satisfaction score (F=1.727, p>0.05)

Table 6: Analysis of influence of Age on Satisfaction level

Factor Age	Less than 18	18-25	26-35	36-45	56-60	>60	F	Sig.
Satisfaction Score	3.65	3.13	3.74	3.21	2.86	3.70	1.727	.055

VII. Conclusion

The main goal of the study was to find whether the level of tourist satisfaction was determined by quality and features of what Bhutan has to offer as a growing destination to visitors of many nationalities. Most of them were satisfied with all attributes showing highly and negatively skewed distribution in their perception about various items within major attributes. The correlation and multiple regression analysis has revealed that all of the attributes can significantly impact the overall satisfaction level. Such findings from the research can be used as evidence by all stakeholders involved in providing better tourism services and products. Road and travel conditions were perceived by visitors to be in bad shape that required urgent attention of the government to give a facelift to national highways. While tour guides were doing well in all areas of duties, the accommodation facilities scored badly. The hotel and restaurants managers must take note of this

revelation and make improvements in all departments. Much of the improvement is needed in the areas of offering better quality food and also give choice of local cuisine in their menus.

The study has also revealed the fact that demographic factors such as age, gender and employment status doesn't significantly affect the agreement with quality of attributes. This fact is likely to be a newest revelation for tourism literature in Bhutan. Another noteworthy finding was the conformation between what tourists expected and what they experienced about Bhutan as destination. The only exception to this rule was the attractions attribute where the expectations exceeded the satisfaction which only means that more and varied tourism products and services has to be offered besides culture and the beauty of the natural environment. This study used the secondary collected by Tourism council where the sample size was quite large covering Bhutan as a destination which might have altered the results favourably. Thus, future researches can focus on tourists visiting a specific destination, experiencing a product or a festival.

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