

## PILGRIMAGE TOURIST'S PERCEPTION TOWARDS SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS OF HOTELS IN KUMBAKONAM- THE TEMPLE CITY OF INDIA.

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*Service quality is well thought-out to be a decisive accomplishment factor which is one of the outstanding accomplishment features that sway the core competencies of the hotel industry. The Hotel industry in Temple city of the old Cauvery delta Kumbakonam has been escalating in recent years. In spite of the growth, the industry also countenances problems with regard to service quality. The most imperative rationale of this study is to examine the aspects that determine the service quality with reference to the physical environment, interaction and behavior quality of employees towards customer satisfaction, and brand image. The primary data have been collected by means of a questionnaire tool from the guests visiting Hotels in Temple city Kumbakonam. The data collected has been analyzed using SPSS software, and the tools used are frequency analysis, Correlation and Regression. The major findings of this study are Interaction and behavior quality of employees influences customer satisfaction by 21.6% and customer loyalty by 28% and brand image by 67.2%.*

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**Keywords:** service quality, interaction behavior quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, brand image



## **INTRODUCTION**

The service sector and its performance could be a major contributor to India's gross domestic product and influence the economy of the Asian country to a larger level. The Services sector encompasses for 52.97% of total India's GVA (Gross Value Added) which equals 115.50 lakh crore rupees.

The commercial service enterprises and direct service sector's contribution to gross domestic product totalled US\$ 44 billion as per 2014 statistical information inveterate by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of the Asian country. The service sector in India has been growing at a compounded growth rate of 14% each year, adding a huge amount of foreign exchange to the economy and in line with an Asian country. This segment encompasses a number of industries of which hotel and lodging are one among them. Hotels are an imperative part of the tourism and hospitality industry and have turned into one of the most cutthroat businesses (Bhattacharya & Arup, 1990). Recently, there has been an increased exploratory insight on the measurement of service efficiency (Sanjeev, 2007) of the hotel and restaurant management and their related marketing strategies.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Service Quality**

Parasuraman et al. (1985) outline the importance of the service quality as an outcome and the association between expectations of a service and what's professed that are received by the customer and the delivery of exceptional or better-quality services that is related to customer expectation (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 1996). The most focus is on meeting the client's desires and the way the service is offered in accordance with customer expectations (Lewis & Booms, 1983). Service quality isn't objectively measured by some

technical standards, however, it is perceived by the customers and deliberated with the customer based values and preferences (Kwortnik, 2005)

### **Customer Satisfaction**

Customer contentment is characterized as a customer's stance of bliss or disenchantment resultant from an association of the customer's discernment towards product's performance (or outcome) to the customer's outlook (Kotler & Keller, 2009). Customer e-satisfaction refers to the customer's realization of response. It is an emotion that customers have as an outcome of the post-consumption assessment of services (Rust & Oliver 1994). Customer satisfaction persuades customer action patterns, specifically repurchase intent and affirmative word-of-mouth (Yeung, Ging & Ennew, 2002).

### **Brand Image**

Brand image is the "discernments regarding a brand replicate and acquaintances which exist in the reminiscence of the consumer (Keller, 1993). Customers build verdict by evaluating company's concert with their preceding individual experience, in a way to expand new relations with reference to the company (Martinez & Pina, 2003). The service excellence of hotels effects the changes in customer contentment, customer reliability, and brand reflection (Li & Jarinto, 2012).

This segment encompasses a number of services, of which accommodation is one. Hotels are an imperative part of the tourism and hospitality industry is one of the best parts of the determined businesses. Bhattacharya and Arup (1990) concluded about the increased exploratory insights on the measurement of efficiency

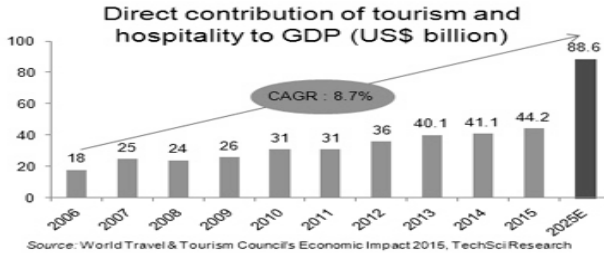
Sanjeev (2007) of the hotel and restaurant management and marketing strategies.

With growing rivalry in the hotel industry and a massive increase in the scale of hotels with extensive service quality has become the top main concern in sustaining competitiveness. To maintain competitiveness, Min, & Min, (1997) the hotel administration frequently wants to build up consistent service excellence and value standards. Possibly one of preeminent way of developing the values to stabilize the hotel's service recital with that of benchmarked services and service leaders and to re-examine its services concert constantly through aggressive practices

The significance of value sub segments and segmentation cannot be ignored by hoteliers. According to (Qu, Ryan, & Chu, 2000) tourist will expect to anticipate hotels to deliver extra value-for-money services and amenities and their purchasing pattern are entirely changed to an economic value basis.

Hotels afford services that are diverse from material goods for the reason that hotel's lodging services are directly consumed and necessitate a customer -intensive and creation practices. The tourism and hospitality segment in India is exceptionally positive with a huge extent of hotel chains encompassed with lots of growth plans. The strategy and revolutions put into practice by the Government of India which has been influential in providing the indispensable advancement to the Indian tourism and hospitality sector's progress and it is gaining its focus for additional foreign tourists every year. The Indian hoteliers are very hopeful and the tourist inflow is anticipated to augment in future. (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Contribution of tourism and hospitality to GDP



## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The current study analyzes the service quality connected to the lodging business of temple city Kumbakonam. Service superiority is characterized as the result of an examination between the desires of a service and what is seen to have been received. Kumbakonam, additionally spelt as Coombaconum in the records of British India, is a town and an uncommon evaluation region in the Thanjavur locale in the southeast Indian condition of Tamil Nadu. Kumbakonam is known as a "temple town" because of the pervasiveness of various temples here and is noted for its Mahamagam celebration which draws on individuals from everywhere throughout the globe . Once in a 12-year function occasion falls on February 13-22nd of 2016. The tremendous group assembles in Kumbakonam to have a dunk in the tank, alongside holy people and scholars. Mahamagam showering celebration focuses on a solitary day, the concourse of explorers being all the more. Every one of the Indians is accepted to go the tank on this day and a purification shower in this tank on this day is viewed as equivalent to the consolidated dunks in all the blessed rivers of India. Festival deities from every one of the temples in

Kumbakonam touch base at the tank and at twelve, all the divinities bathe alongside the aficionados - it is called "Theerthavari".

The rationale of this paper is to look into the most imperative distinctiveness of the service quality factors as perceived by pilgrimage tourist who travels to the Kumbakonam, the old Cauvery delta and temple city, only a few studies have done in this perspective during Mahamagam festival. As travel for religious purposes increases, the study may help to further develop their marketing strategies for pilgrimage based tourist places (Triantafillidou, Koritos, Chatzipanagiotou & Vassilikopoulou, 2010). There are lots of aspects affecting infrastructure as well as service-associated components which should lead to the accomplishment of better quality services (Jauhari & Sanjeev, 2010). (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Demographic classifications of respondents  
(Data source: Primary Data, 2016)

Factors	Number of respondents	Percent
Gender		
Male	129	62.8
Female	77	37.2
Total	206	100.0
Purpose of visit		
Pilgrimage customers	162	78.6
Local public	44	21.4
Age		
less than 25	34	16.5
25-35	54	26.2
35-45	55	26.7
more than 45	63	30.6
Total	206	100.0
Number of days stayed		
1 day	74	35.9
2-3days	80	38.8

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Gender		
Male	129	62.8
Female	77	37.2
more than 3 days	52	25.2

The above table explained pilgrimage tourists included in the current study and their demographic classification and it is understood that 60% of the tourists are above the age group of 35 years, 39% stayed for two to three days and only 25% stayed for more than two days. 63% were male and 37% were female. 79% of the customers who stayed in Kumbakonam hotels are pilgrimage tourists. The following research question was formulated to analyse the factors considered by the pilgrimage tourists who are very vital to determine the service quality and they are shown in table .2.

**Research question #1: What are the most decisive factors of pilgrimage tourist's perception towards hotel service quality?**

**Table 2.** Mean and standard deviation of Factors -Physical Environment, Interaction and Behavior Quality  
(Data source: Primary Data, 2016)

Variables considered for the study	Mean	Mean Rank	Std. Deviation
physical environment of this hotel is the best and ever I have experienced	4.1049	17	.76091
The ambience is excellent.	4.1852	9	.68906
Stylish Interiors	4.1296	14	.73204
Convenient parking spaces availability	3.9321	20	.71476
Convenient location for dining-out facilities	3.9753	18	.67751
Convenient location for retail stores	3.9630	19	.65833
This hotel bathroom and toilet are clean.	4.1284	15	.65251
This hotel's room are clean.	4.1654	13	.61849
This hotel's reception area is clean.	4.1716	11	.65013
This hotel employee looks clean and neat.	4.2346	5	.66448
Food & beverage are of high quality.	3.8642	24	.79209
Variety of food & beverage facilities are available	3.9136	22	.74262
Fire exits at available at this hotel.	3.8395	25	.89104
Sprinkler system at this hotel is good .	3.9012	23	.92723
I feel secure in this hotel	3.9259	21	.81565
Quality interaction with the employees	4.2246	6	.77980
Employee behaviour of this hotel gives me trust	4.2938	1	.83775
Best service for me In this hotel	4.2773	2	.76723
Hotel employees are able to answer my query speedily.	4.1111	16	.86333
Hotel employees try to diminish my waiting time	4.1815	10	.92227
Hotel employees offer service for me punctually.	4.2432	4	.90786
The employees comprehend about the waiting	4.2556	3	.94079
The quality of this hotel is considered superior	4.1667	12	.71584
This hotel provides high quality services.	4.1975	8	.66724
Overall, the value based services provided in this hotel is good.	4.2146	7	.70968

From the above table “the behavior of the employees gives me to trust” (Mean=4.2938) ranked one, “The employees of this hotel always provide the best service for me” (Mean=4.2773) ranked second, “The employees understand that waiting time is important to me” (Mean=4.25560) ranked third. The factors considered for the current study endow with chances to be familiar with and to rank the order of the features that are well deliberated as significant by the pilgrimage tourists who are staying in hotels (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010).

Factor analysis is a regular method followed to determine the appropriate items representing the factors in determining service quality of pilgrimage tourists. The Factor analysis has been used to reduce twenty-five factors determining pilgrimage tourist service quality which also substantiates the inter correlations between the variables (Field, 2000).

In table.3 the KMO and Bartlette’s test of sphericity ensures the measures of sampling adequacy and interdependency of the subscales (Kaiser, 1974; Field, 2000). The value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sample Adequacy (KMO) must be greater than 0.5 and for the current study, it is 0.893, which is considered to be “meritorious” and sufficiently adequate. The Bartlette’s test of sphericity (Sig: 0.00) is a tool that facilitates to predict the existence of significant correlation among variables (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998). The results of KMO and Bartlette’s test confirms that the pilgrim customers’ sample chosen from the place of the Kumbakonam temple city is self-sufficient for further statistical analysis and to proceed with factor analysis.

**Table 3.** KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.893
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5871.650
	Df	253
	Sig.	0.000

The extracted five factors along with the Eigenvalue which is exceeding one for pilgrimage tourist's perception towards service quality of hotels are 12.316, 1.901, 1.646, 1.399, 1.034 and the present solution accounted for 83.16% of Variance. It is an excellent extraction because only 16.64% was the exact loss of content variables towards service quality of hotels in the temple city. The percentages of variance explained by the five factors are 55.981, 8.639, 7.481, 6.360 and 4.701 respectively.

The bigger communalities delegated with a huge variance which was explained for by the factor solutions. The factor analysis from Promax results for the pilgrimage tourists perception factors towards service quality of hotels indicates that after five factors are extracted the retained communality is 0.950 for variable 1, 0.922 for variable 2, 0.900 for variable 3, 0.892 for variable 4 and 0.879 for variable 5. Outsized communalities commend that a bigger variance (Nargundkar, 2002) was expounded by the factor solutions.

**Table 4.** Promax rotated Factor Loading Matrix  
(Data source: Primary Data, 2016)

Reduced Factors	Pattern Matrix							Communalities
	Statements		Component					
			1	2	3	4	5	
Factor 1-Interaction behaviour quality (IBQ)	Best service for me In this hotel	IBQ3	.941					.848
	Hotel employees are able to answer my query speedily.	IBQ4	.940					.827
	Employee behaviour of this hotel gives me trust	IBQ2	.887					.821
	Quality interaction with the employees	IBQ1	.811					.777
	This hotel provides high quality services	SQ2	.830					.743
	Overall, the values ,experience acquired from this hotel is good.	SQ3	.800					.763
	The quality of this hotel is considered superior	SQ1	.834					.702
Factor 2 -Food beverages and safety (FBS)	Variety of food & beverage facilities are available	FB2		.957				.790
	Food & beverage are of high quality	FB1		.887				.779
	Sprinkler system at this hotel is good .	SS2		.869				.843
	I feel secured in this hotel	SS3		.761				.794
	Fire exits available at this hotel..	SS1		.705				.782
Factor 3- Cleanliness (C)	This hotel's room is clean.	C2			.964			.950
	This hotel's reception area and surrounding is clean.	C3			.921			.922
	This hotel's bathroom and toilet are clean	C1			.896			.892
	This hotel employee looks clean and neat.	C4			.804			.804
Factor 4-Ambience(A)	The physical environment of this hotel is the best I have experienced	A1				.893		.900
	Stylish Interiors	A3				.834		.837
	The ambience is excellent.	A2				.820		.851
Factor 5-Location(L)	Convenient location for dining-out facilities	L2					.925	.879
	Convenient location for retail stores	L3					.921	.846
	Convenient parking spaces availability	L1					.868	.828
<b>% of Variance</b>			55.981	8.639	7.481	6.360	4.701	
<b>Cumulative %</b>			55.981	64.620	72.101	78.461	83.163	
<b>Cronbach Alpha</b>			.786	.785	.785	.821	.816	
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Promax with Kaiser Normalization.								
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.								

From the above table.4, it was clear that through Promax analysis five factors were extracted which accounted for 83.16% of the variance. The reliability analysis was used to analyse the constancy of the instrument to all the subscales. Cronbach Alpha is the most commonly used measure of scale reliability and further analysis was done for the extracted sub-factors determining the perception of pilgrimage customers. Cronbach (1951) suggest that alpha should be calculated separately. The Promax rotation has been used because of the benefit of being speedy and abstractly uncomplicated (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2003). The latent root criterion was applied for extraction of factors, and the Eigen-values bigger than one are the only factors which are having latent roots which were regarded as noteworthy; all other factors with latent roots less than one were to be well deliberated as insignificant and hence it will not be considered (Kayastha, Murthy & Adhikary, 2015). The communalities of 25 items ranged from 0.702 to 0.950 demonstrating that a huge sum of variance has been extracted by the factor solution.

The five factors are named as follows.

**Factor 1- ‘Interaction behaviour quality’**

The statements included under factor 1 includes “employees of this hotel always offer the most excellent service”, are able to answer questions quickly, trustable, and high-quality services provided with good interaction.

**Factor 2 – ‘Food beverages and safety’**

The statements included under factor 2 includes Variety of food & beverage facilities with high quality with good safety and security

**Factor 3- ‘Cleanliness’**

Factor 3 includes this hotel’s rooms, bathrooms, toilet, and surroundings are clean.

**Factor 4 – ‘Ambience’**

It comprises the physical environment of this hotel, Interiors, and the ambience is excellent

#### **Factor 5 – ‘Location’**

It comprises a suitable place for dining-out facilities, parking spaces, and shops.

The first factor (Factor 1 – Interaction behavior quality) contains seven components with high factor loadings of 0.80 and above and explains most of the variance which is 55.98% is considered an important determinant for predicting the pilgrim customer’s perception towards service quality of hotels in Kumbakonam temple city. The effect of the reliability analysis was explained by the Cronbach’s alpha coefficients which are quite above the ground and it ranges from 0.821 to 0.785. That is well higher than the bare minimum value of 0.60, which is considered as an acceptable indicator of dependability (Hair et al. 2006). Thus, these values put forward a high-quality internal constancy of the factors. Finally, Cronbach’s alpha value for the overall customer contentment scale is 0.978 and which specify its high reliability.

### **CORRELATION ANALYSIS**

Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship of pilgrim customer’s perception towards customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and Brand image and factors determining service quality of hotels. It was confirmed that there was a significant positive correlation between the pilgrim customer’s perception extracted from the factor analysis and overall factors determining service quality of hotels and the results is shown in table 5

**Table 5.** The Pearson Correlation analysis between pilgrims customer's perception towards customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and Brand image and factors determining service quality of hotels.(Data source: Primary Data, 2016)

Factors	IBQ	FB & S	Cleanliness	Ambience	Location	CS	CL	BI
IBQ	1							
FB & S	.682**	1						
Cleanliness	.648**	.604**	1					
Ambience	.531**	.442**	.531**	1				
Location	.575**	.467**	.639**	.491**	1			
CS	.661**	.590**	.538**	.544**	.460**	1		
CL	.670**	.488**	.494**	.469**	.431**	.750**	1	.
BI	.763**	.575**	.512**	.501**	.472**	.698**	.782**	1
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).								

IBQ = Interaction Behaviour Quality; FB & S = Food Beverages & Safety; CS = Customer Satisfaction; CL = Customer Loyalty; BI = Brand Image

**Research question #3: What is the impact of pilgrim customer's perceptions towards factors determining service quality of hotels and customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and Brand image?**

To answer the research question 3, Multiple Regression analysis has been carried out for Pilgrim customer’s perceptions of factors determining service quality of hotels towards customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and Brand image. All the hypothesized relation was found to be significant which is presented in table.6. The multi-collinearity was not a predicament because no correlation values between the independent and the predictor variables are above 0.6 (Pedhazur 1982, Chiu, Janet & Jerome, 1998). The regression analysis was carried out in the study to each and every one of the factors of Pilgrims customer’s perceptions of factors determining the service quality of hotel which are significantly influencing customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and Brand image.

**Table 6.** Model Summary for regression analysis  
(Data source: Primary Data, 2016)

Independent variables	R	R square	Adjusted R square	F	Sig	Beta Coefficient				
						Dependent variables				
						IBQ	FB & S	Clean	Ambience	Location
Customer satisfaction	0.719	0.517	0.505	42.75	0	0.216	0.136	0.047	0.154	0.017
Customer Loyalty	0.685	0.489	0.456	35.34	0	0.28	0.156	0.06	0.288	0.009
Brand Image	0.774	0.559	0.589	59.7	0	0.672	0.222	0.096	0.296	0.055

From the above table, it is clear that Correlation value is  $R = .719$  which states that there is a high-quality of correlation between factors determining service quality of hotels of pilgrims customer's and customer satisfaction and R-square value = .517 which means that the total variation in the dependent variable (customer satisfaction) can be explained by the independent variable (physical environment) by 51.7%. The P value = 0.000 which indicates that the model is significant. The Customer Loyalty (48.9%), Brand Image (55.9%) is also significantly impacted by factors determining service quality of hotels of pilgrim customers.

Five factors of pilgrim customer's perception towards customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and Brand image – Interaction behavior quality, Food beverages and safety, Cleanliness, Ambience, and Location have been explained in the model with much more statistical significance. So it is concluded that the regression model is statistically, significantly predicting the outcome of customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and Brand image through factors determining service quality which conclude a good fit for the data too.

Beta coefficients for the regression model provide necessary information to predict the level of customer contentment, customer trustworthiness and Brand representation from various service quality factors. In the regression model in the table.6, Interaction behaviour quality is influencing customer satisfaction ( $B=21.6\%$ ;  $\text{Sig}.<.001$ ), customer loyalty ( $B=28.0\%$  ;  $\text{Sig}.<.001$ ) and Brand image ( $67.2\%$ ;  $\text{Sig}.<.001$ ) and Food beverages and safety influencing customer satisfaction ( $B=13.6\%$ ;  $\text{Sig}.<.001$ ), customer loyalty ( $B=15.6\%$ ;  $\text{Sig}.<.001$ ) and Brand image ( $22.2\%$ ;  $\text{Sig}.<.001$ ) are contributing to the maximum in case of pilgrim customer's of temple city.

The regression equation can be formed in determining the level of

- Customer satisfaction as:  $2.96 + 0.216(\text{Interaction behavior quality}) + 0.136(\text{Food beverages and safety}) + 0.047(\text{Cleanliness}) + 0.154(\text{Ambience}) + 0.017(\text{Location})$ .
- Customer Loyalty as:  $2.96 + 0.280(\text{Interaction behavior quality}) + 0.156(\text{Food beverages and safety}) + 0.060(\text{Cleanliness}) - 0.028(\text{Ambience}) + 0.009(\text{Location})$
- Brand Image as:  $2.96 + 0.672(\text{Interaction behavior quality}) + 0.222(\text{Food beverages and safety}) + 0.096(\text{Cleanliness}) + 0.296(\text{Ambience}) + 0.055(\text{Location})$

## **CONCLUSION**

Numbers of studies are there in tourism but service quality, brand image dimensions are comparatively less in number. Despite the high number of individuals interested in religious tourism, it remains the smallest amount of exploration tourist activities in the world of contemporary tourism (Vukonic, 1998). As Timothy and Olsen (2006) noted, "Religiously motivated travel including pilgrimage has grown tremendously during the past fifty years". About 240 million people travel every year to several major pilgrimage destinations, particularly Christians, Muslims, and Hindus (Jachowski, 2000). The study analyzes the service quality dimension of hotels Nadiri & Hussain, (2005) which is the important part of pilgrimage tourism from the perspectives of accommodation and stay.

Cleanliness is an important factor for the accommodation and hotel and it is the main factor that leads to customer contentment, customer trustworthiness, and brand image. So the hotel should maintain cleanliness which is an important factor for creating a brand image. From the study, it is found that waiting time is one of the most important factors for a service delivery process. Interaction and behaviour quality is also an important factor that leads to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and brand image.

So the hotel management must take a keen interest in training the employees about their behaviour and interaction with the guests. From the study, it is clear that the physical environment and outcome quality are positively correlated to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and brand image which mean that if the physical environment and outcome quality are improved it would improve customer satisfaction that leads to customer loyalty and creates a brand image for the hotel.

Marketing in Religious, heritage, and cultural tourism is becoming more crucial (Rojas & Camerero, 2008). The current study is based on the culture of people and their perspectives on going to a number of the temple as an important ritual based religion values. Religious tourism is considered as the matured form of tourism (Rinschede, 1992). The study results have been confirmed by the previous studies Triantafillidou, Koritos, Chatzipanagiotou & Vassilikopoulou, (2010), Jauhari & Sanjeev (2010).

It is a type of heritage tourism that is motivated exclusively or strongly by religious reasons (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Religious tourism has great potential as a growing phenomenon that would benefit from academic advances and applied improvements (Aleen, 2010; Collins -Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006).

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The hotel can improve the level of customer satisfaction by concentrating on ambience, location, cleanliness, food and beverage, safety and security, interaction and behaviour quality, waiting time, service quality and perceived value. Since cleanliness has a greater influence on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and brand image, the hotel needs to concentrate more on cleanliness factor. Interaction and Behaviour Quality will also have a greater influence on customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and brand image so it is recommended that the employees of the hotel should be trained

properly to interact with the guests of the hotel. The hotel can have a periodical evaluation of the training process.

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