



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***ATTITUDINAL PROFESSIONALISM AND PROFESSIONAL
COMPETENCIES AS PREDICTORS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
PRACTITIONERS' SELF-EFFICACY***

AHMED LAWAL GUSAU

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By

AHMED LAWAL GUSAU

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

September 2017

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DEDICATION

To my late father Alhaji Lawal Muhammad (Koramar Boko) and my Mother Hajiya Maimunat Bint Abubakar for their care, training, and endless support



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Chairman : Associate Professor Zulhamri Abdullah, PhD
Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

This research examined the PR practitioners' attitudinal professionalism and competencies as predictors of their self-efficacy. This conceptualization was in response to scholars' lamentation of practitioners' low ability, low self-confidence, low competency and acute shortage of researches on practitioners' personal development. Six research questions, six research objectives, and eight hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Thus, using a probability sampling technique, six hundred (600) public relations practitioners in North-Western Nigeria were selected to serve as a sample for the research, out of which four hundred and thirty-three (433) responded to the self-administered questionnaire which constituted the quantitative data of the research. This study used the quantitative approach as the best option to test a relationship. The instruments used for this study were adapted from previously developed instruments by other scholars to measure the constructs under study. Descriptive statistics using mean and standard deviation was employed to analyze the first three research objectives while structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted to test the remaining three research objectives of the study under which 8 hypotheses were developed. The research findings indicate that practitioners have *moderate* attitudinal professionalism, *moderate* competencies and *high* self-efficacy. Similarly, when causal relationship was tested, it was found that attitudinal professionalism, and competencies have significant influence on self-efficacy, and that there is *high* level relationship between attitudinal professionalism and professional competencies. However, when independent analyses between five (5) attitudinal professionalism dimensions and self-efficacy was conducted, it was found that *belief in public service* and *autonomy* have no causal effect on self-efficacy but a correlation between the two dimensions and self-efficacy were established. Findings of this research work have raised the need for PR scholars to focus on attitudinal and behavioral professionalism as a way of improving public relations as a profession.

Practitioners have been aspiring for strategic position but they are not found highly committed to mastering strategic competencies neither are they found highly committed to PR profession's development, even though they have reported to have high ability in their professional duties. This work has found that though there is progress on the way PR is practiced in Nigeria, however, practitioners are do not practiced strategic PR. Thus, the practical implication lies on the fact that, for practitioners to attain the position of autonomy, they have to make a deliberate effort towards self-development. This work have also tested and confirmed the heurism of social cognitive theory. Conceptualizing Hall's Attitudinal professionalism model, Competency model and Grunig and Hunt model under same framework have introduced a unique design which contributed in theory expansion used structural equation modeling which is characterized by rigorous tests for reliability and validity of instrument. Finally, studying the concept of self-efficacy in the domain of PR has remained the originality of this research work.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PROFESIONALISME SIKAP DAN KECEKAPAN PROFESIONAL
SEBAGAI PREDIKTOR KECUKUPAN KENDIRI BAGI PENGAMAL
PERHUBUNGAN AWAM**

Oleh

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Penyelidikan ini mengkaji profesionalisme sikap dan kecekapan pengamal PR sebagai prediktor kecukupan sendiri mereka. Konseptualisasi tersebut dibuat sebagai hasil keluhan ahli kesarjanaan mengenai kobolehan rendah, keyakinan diri rendah, kecekapan rendah, dan kekurangan akut penyelidikan ke atas perkembangan personal pengamal. Enam soalan penyelidikan, enam objektif penyelidikan dan lapan hipotesis telah diformulasikan bagi melaksanakan kajian tersebut. Oleh sebab itu, dengan menggunakan teknik persampelan kebarangkalian, enam ratus (600) pengamal perhubungan awam di Utara Barat Nigeria telah dipilih untuk dijadikan sampel bagi penyelidikan tersebut, empat ratus dan tiga puluh tiga (433) memberi respon pada soal selidik swaguna yang mengandungi data kuantitatif. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif kerana ia melibatkan ujian perhubungan. Begitu juga, terdapat instrumen yang sebelum ini dibangunkan oleh sarjana bagi mengukur konstruk yang terlibat dalam kajian. Statistik deskriptif menggunakan min dan sisihan lazim telah diguna pakai bagi menganalisis tiga objektif yang pertama, manakala model persamaan struktural (SEM) telah digunakan bagi menguji tiga objektif kajian yang selebihnya, dan seterusnya 8 hipotesis telah dibangunkan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pengamal mempunyai profesionalisme sikap yang sederhana, kecekapan yang sederhana dan kecukupan sendiri yang tinggi. Begitu juga, apabila perhubungan penyebab diuji, didapati bahawa profesionalisme sikap dan kecekapan mempunyai pengaruh yang signifikan ke atas kecukupan sendiri, dan terdapat hubungan yang tinggi antara profesionalisme sikap dan kecekapan profesionalisme. Walau bagaimanapun, apabila analisis bebas antara lima (5) dimensi profesionalisme sikap dan kecukupan sendiri dijalankan, didapati bahawa kepercayaan dalam perkhidmatan awam dan autonomi tidak mempunyai kesan penyebab ke atas kecukupan sendiri tetapi terdapat korelasi antara kedua-dua dimensi dan kecukupan sendiri. Dapatan kajian ini memperkukuh keperluan bagi sarjana PR memfokus

terhadap profesionalisme sikap dan tingkah laku sebagai cara untuk memperbaiki perhubungan awam sebagai suatu profesion. Pengamal menghasrati kedudukan strategik tetapi didapati mereka tidak komited sepenuhnya bagi kecekapan strategik, juga didapati mereka tidak komited sepenuhnya pada pembangunan profesion PR, walaupun mereka telah melaporkan bahawa mereka mempunyai kebolehan yang tinggi dalam tugas profesional mereka. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa walaupun terdapat kemajuan dalam cara PR diamalkan di Nigeria, namun, pengamal tidak mengamalkan strategik PR. Oleh sebab itu, implikasi praktikal bergantung pada kenyataan bahawa, bagi seseorang pengamal, untuk memperoleh kedudukan autonomi, mereka harus melakukan banyak perkara dalam pembangunan sendiri. Kajian ini juga telah menguji dan mengesahkan heurisme teori kognitif sosial. Dengan mengkonseptualisasikan model Profesionalisme Sikap Hall, Model Kecekapan dan model Grunig dan Hunt di bawah kerangka yang sama telah memperlihatkan reka bentuk yang unik dan ini telah menyumbang pada perluasan teori. Hal ini khususnya bagi kajian yang menggunakan model persamaan struktural yang mempunyai ujian rapi bagi tujuan reliabiliti dan validiti instrumen. Akhirnya, pengkajian konsep kecukupan sendiri dalam domain PR masih dapat mengekalkan keaslian penyelidikan ini.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APR	ACCREDITATION IN PUBLIC RELATIONS (APR)
ASSOREL	ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA AGENZIE DI RELAZIONI
CFA	CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS
EUPRERA	EUROPEAN PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION AND RESEARCH ASSOCIATION
FERPI	FEDERAZIONE RELAZIONI PUBBLICHE ITALIANA NIPR NIGERIA INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
GA	GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT
MEPRA	MIDDLE EAST PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION
PRSA	PUBLIC RELATIONS SOCIETY OF AMERICA (PRSA)
PR	PUBLIC RELATIONS
PRO	PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER
SEM	STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELING

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Studying the progress of public relations practice would be incomplete without recourse to the giant efforts made by scholars, through their perpetual interest and agitation for professionalizing the discipline of public relations as a field of study. Profession is described as an occupational term that shows a domain of expertise (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008; W. Chung & Choi, 2012); Grunig and Hunt (1984); (Meyer & Leonard, 2014; Sha, 2011a). Profession thus is imperatively different from craft or technician given the fact that the knowledge acquired would determine the competence of a particular individual in carrying out a specific task.

A cursory look into public relations literature will reveal that many works have been conducted to strengthen the discipline as a profession, (Cameron, Sallot, & Lariscy, 1996; W. Chung & Choi, 2012; Cornelissen, 2000; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Meyer & Leonard, 2014).

It can, however, be argued that most of these works and others specifically revolve within the scope of the structural professional school of thought; whose main focus are building strong public relations institutions, code of ethics, accreditation, and research theories (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Houle, 1981; Wilensky, 1964).

On the other hand, looking at profession from a more attitudinal and behavioral perspective, scholars emphasized the need for the development of peoples' capacity to passionately undertake careers (Evans, 2011; Evetts, 2011; Lee, 2014). This is essential, particularly with today's rapid challenges of organizational demand.

As described in Botan, Hazleton, Botan, and Hazleton (2006) scholarly research move forward by competition between divergent perspectives, not by the dominance of one perspective. It is therefore against this background that this work specifically settled to study public relations profession from the viewpoint of practitioners' commitment to their profession (attitudinal professionalism) and their mastery of skills, knowledge alongside their personal attributes (professional competencies) for the advancement of their profession. These two important variables are hypothesized to predict the capacity of PR practitioners to act well in the discharge of their organizational duties; which is technically referred to as *self-efficacy*.

As can be seen in the works of Alexander D. Stajkovic and Fred Luthans (1998) Frank Webb, Vandiver, and Jeung (2016) Hassall, Arquero, Joyce, and Gonzalez (2013) Parker, Marsh, Ciarrochi, Marshall, and Abduljabbar (2014), self-efficacy has proven to predict the performance of the people. Incidentally, in the past two decades, self-efficacy construct has received considerable attention among researchers. Visible

evidence as articulated by Hallak, Brown, and Lindsay (2012), could be traced in the works of many scholars (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994; Chandler & Jansen, 1992; Hmieleski & Baron, 2008). In the interim, despite the importance of self-efficacy as ability assessment mechanism, studies on PR practitioners' self-efficacy are not easily traceable. As such this work tends to contribute towards filling this existing gap.

1.1 Background

The attainment of professionalization in any field can be achieved as a result of continued research exploration, particularly given the status of a full-time occupation, theory building, and demonstration of expertise by way of association which give way to distinction (Wilensky, 1964). Public Relations discipline is not an exception, as it is in the process of transformation (L'Etang, 2013).

However, the level of preparedness of practitioners themselves would speak volumes of how far such dreams can be translated into concrete reality. Unlike other PR works that focus on structures, this work tends to focus on practitioners attitudes, competencies and self-efficacy.

Attitudes predispose how people behave (Douglass, Fishbein, & Ajzen, 1977), and learned competencies undoubtedly help in the attainment of organizational goals (Gregory, 2008). This would build their ability to show how distinct they can act; which gives them a well-deserved recognition (Wilensky, 1964) and therefore creates a boundary and space for those professionals in today's competitive workspace. In a more specific term, this work looks into the self-efficacy of public relations practitioners; by delineating how their confidence and capacity can enhance their performance to achieve organizational objectives.

Self-efficacy studies are thus timely since currently the occupation has been popularized by its stakeholders through a deliberate effort to prove its relevance not only in the managerial level but also in projecting how it contributes to strategic management role of the organizations (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008; Grunig, 2009).

Building employees self-efficacy has a tremendous positive impact on organizational development (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2014; Kamali, Vaezi, Shafiee, & Mollavali; Alexander D. Stajkovic & Fred Luthans, 1998). The professional attitude which also translates to professional behavior, in the end, leads to work engagement and organization productivity (Lee, 2014).

Apart from attitudinal traits, mastering special competencies would also lead to that achievement. In fact, Knowledge tells what an employee should acquire to qualify for a particular job, but personal attributes of employee and his ability to organize himself,

through self-investment is another prerequisite which underscores his performance in an organization (Tench & Moreno, 2015).

Hence, public relations practitioners' self-development focusing on building their confidence to be able to accomplish the organizational task in a professional manner remains the main focus of this research effort. And this represents the necessity of this work which was conducted based on the aspect of self-efficacy.

By the way, it must be quickly pointed out that this conceptualization does not relegate the importance of other personality and motivational constructs such as self-esteem, expectancy concepts, or locus control. In essence, the choice to focus on self-efficacy was prompted by the recognition of its importance as employees' source of power, accounting for up to 28% of their performance (Alexander D. Stajkovic & Fred Luthans, 1998) which by extension contributes to achieving their organizational objectives.

1.2 Problem Statement

Scholars have indicated tremendous development experienced in the field of public relations within few decades. On the other hand, they lamented a deteriorating short-fall in the practitioners' ability in their organizational performance (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008; Cernicova, Dragomir, & Palea, 2011; J. Y. Chung, Lee, & Heath, 2013; Otubanjo, Amujo, & Melewar, 2014).

Cernicova et al. (2011), unveiled the lack of self-confidence for new PR employees to undertake their duties efficiently. Amujo and Melawar (2011), on the other hand, described PR practitioners as mere technicians, who are not sophisticated enough (Abdullah and Threadgold 2008) to serve at the strategic level. Even though some PR practitioners were found to hold strategic developing positions, their predominant roles are still linear journalistic or technician in nature (Chay-Nemeth 2009, Idid 2004, Sriramesh 2004) which shows their weak ability to serve at high levels.

This, therefore, serves as a shortfall in the practice of public relations. Practitioners with low levels of ability choose a less challenging job to perform. They tend to perceive difficult roles as threats not as challenges that should be mastered (Bandura, 1994). They held the notion that difficult jobs are beyond their capacity, and persist on failures and negative outcome. Hence, they quickly lose confidence in their ability (Albert, 1986). With this kind of practice, PR would not be appreciated by CEO's or other organizational heads, and thus capable of retarding the progress of public relations as an independent area of study which requires rigorous training. As a result, PR profession studies should be extended to look into the perceived ability of practitioners which self-efficacy represents.

Self-efficacy is the practitioners' belief in their capability to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1994). Numerous studies have depicted how the efficacy of employees impacted positively on their workplace, these include organizational productivity; work performance, adaptability to new technology (Lee, 2014), work engagement (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2014) learning outcome (Guo, Piasta, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2010) and so on.

However, studies on public relations practitioners' self-efficacy seem to be totally neglected as evidenced in the existing literature, despite the apparent need for such research. Thus, the necessity of studying the level of PR practitioners' self-efficacy and the factors that influence practitioners' self-efficacy is what lends credence to this study and makes it not only timely but necessary.

Studies have described the relations between professionalism and self-efficacy (Herbert and Anastasia 2007, Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, et al. 2011, and Canrinus et al 2011, Lee 2014, Kamali, Vaezi, Shafee et al. 2014). Similarly, PR scholars have tremendously conducted researches on public relations professionalism (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008; Cameron et al., 1996; W. Chung & Choi, 2012; Cornelissen, 2000; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Molleda & Alhassan, 2006).

However, while PR scholars largely focused on Structural professionalism (comprising the body of knowledge, theories, accreditation and code of ethics) other scholars (not in PR) focused on attitudinal professionalism as mentioned above which is found to have a positive link to self-efficacy (Lee 2014, Kamali et al. 2014). Therefore, focusing on attitudinal professionalism is another gap that PR literature should strive to fill.

In recent years, some scholars have reiterated the argument that study of professionalism should not be monolithic but rather viewed from multiple points of views (Evans, 2011; Evetts, 2011; R. H. Hall, 1968). In connection to that, public relations professions research should be viewed from not only structural perspective; but also attitudinal perspective.

Attitudinal professionalism deals with PR practitioner's personal commitment to his own professional values and obligations to certain expectations relevant to publics who form part of important stakeholders in the society (Kamali et al 2014). It deals with the summary of his own commitment to his professional career and its advancement.

An attitudinally professional person is such individual who is personally committed to his/her profession. This is the act of ethically and fervently distinguishing a practitioner as well-behaved (Parkan, 2008); being ambassador to PR field through dedication to duty and commitment to its progress (Hammer, 1996); feeling the

indispensability of the field and the need for its autonomy (Forsyth & Danisiewicz, 1985) and serving the public to the best he/she can.

Hence, when a practitioner is found not attitudinally professional, it automatically suggest that such a practitioner would not be committed to his professional roles (Hassankhani, Hasanzadeh, Power et al. 2016), and professional development; and thus, would miss the changing trends of his profession and would fall short in practicing excellence in PR (Grunig, 2009).

Thus, this conceptualization intends to identify the level of PR practitioners' attitudinal professionalism and whether or not attitudinal professionalism influences the self-efficacy of the practitioners.

In a related development, Abdullah and Threadgold (2008), reported that the competencies of practitioners are found to be very low. Tench and Moreno (2015) also lamented the vacuum and deficiencies in the development of individual practitioners' competencies. Competencies represent the hard and soft skills, personal attributes and how they are put in practice of PR. It is the behavioral repertoires or sets of behaviors that support the attainments of organizational objectives (Gregory, 2008).

However, for the fact that PR practitioners are found to have weak competencies, it will be difficult for them to be part of the dominant coalition. As described in Coombs and Halladays (2007), that a technician role is a typical way large multi-national organizations value the role of PR. This might be blamed on the inability of practitioners to demonstrate their competencies; which led to their elimination from the managerial composition.

In recent years, PR scholars have conducted lots of studies to verify the necessary competencies that should be learned by PR practitioners (Gregory 2008, Sha 2011, Watson and Sreedharan 2010, Cernicova et al 2011, Scholz and Collen 2014, Tench and Moreno 2015). However, while delineating the competencies that provide a guide to what should be mastered, it is found necessary to determine whether practitioners have effectively and efficiently mastered the said competencies. In another word, this work tends to verify the current competencies level of PR practitioners.

Similarly, in the work of Bandura (1994), the author argued that mastery of skills (competencies in our case) is the most effective way of boosting ones self-efficacy. Lee (2014), also found a causal relationship between knowledge pursuance (which reflects competencies and skills) and functional and services efficacy. Hassankhani, Hassanzadeh, Powers, Zadeh et al (2017), have also found a relationship between competency and performance of nursing staff. Thus, this study is also conceptualized to identify whether mastery of competencies influences self-efficacy of PR practitioners.

Finally, attitudinal professionalism which deals with practitioners' personal commitment and professional competencies which deal with a set of behaviors (skills, knowledge and personal attributes) are conceptualized as independent variables of this study. Moreover, contemporary studies have found relationships between attitudes and behavior (Baser, Ture, Abubakarova et al 2016, Thachery and Magnusson 2016, and also Liu, Chen, Hsiao et al 2017).

Hassankhani, et al. (2016), have found a relationship between employees' competencies and their performance. The authors also reported that employees have positive attitudes towards expanding their professional role. Thus, if employees are found to have high competencies with positive attitudes then there might be a relationship between attitudinal professionalism and professional competencies of PR practitioners which this study also intends to empirically verify.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the level of public relations practitioners' attitudinal professionalism?
2. What is the level of professional competence of public relations practitioners?
3. What is the level of public relations practitioners' self-efficacy?
4. Does attitudinal professionalism of public relations practitioners predicts their self-efficacy?
5. Do professional competencies of public relations practitioners predicts their self-efficacy?
6. Is there any relationship between attitudinal professionalism and professional competencies?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to identify the influence of attitudinal professionalism and professional competencies in predicting public relations practitioners' self-efficacy. To achieve this, the following specific objectives were outlined and they include:

1. To determine the level of public relations practitioners' attitudinal professionalism
2. To determine the level of public relations practitioners' professional competencies.
3. To determine the level of public relations practitioners' self-efficacy.
4. To determine the influence of attitudinal professionalism of Public Relations practitioners in predicting their self-efficacy.
5. To determine the influence of professional competencies of Public Relations practitioners in predicting their self-efficacy.
6. To determine the relationship between attitudinal professionalism and professional competencies.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Most of the previous studies conducted in PR focused on the structural professionalism (Abdullah & Threadgold, 2008; Cameron et al., 1996; W. Chung & Choi, 2012; Cornelissen, 2000; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Meyer & Leonard, 2014; Molleda & Alhassan, 2006). However, this study focuses on attitudinal professionalism and behavioral professionalism (competencies) as a divergent view of studying PR which is another way of contributing to its development.

Studies on self-efficacy, which is a construct within the social cognitive theory (SCT), are numerous. Its ability to predict employees' performance has been expounded in different conceptualizations but it is not easily traceable in the field of public relations; coupled with the lamentations of scholars on PR practitioners' low ability. This study tends to test SCT by way of hypothesizing how attitudinal professionalism and competencies have a causal effect on person's ability in relations practitioners. It is hoped that the result would be very significant as a second generation method of data analysis called *structural equation modeling* would be used to confirm the relations among the variables. It also serves as theory expansion.

The significance of self-efficacy studies on PR practitioners in this time of rapid technological dynamism cannot be over-emphasized. Self-efficacy would build the practitioners ability to perceive difficult tasks as challenges that need to be mastered; prepare them to set more tasks that need to be accomplished; sustain efforts in times of crisis by committing to their jobs, and help them recover quickly from risks or crises and attribute their failure to deficient competencies and lack of positive predisposition towards a given goal (Bandura, 1989, 1994).

The practical implication of this study is the idea of focusing on employees to strengthen their ability to discharge their duties diligently. It will also appraise areas of competencies and differentiation of PR work as practitioners clamor to defend their relevance in an organizational setting among other competitors.

The originality of this work is reflected in the idea of bringing the concept of "self-efficacy" in the domain of PR, as a motivational force to practitioners. Similarly, attitudinal professionalism and professional competencies contribute to our understanding of self-efficacy, which is part of the theory extension.

Finally, this research work would also reflect the African case where scholars have lamented about the dearth of PR research (Amujo & Melewar, 2011; Kiambi & Nadler, 2012; Molleda & Alhassan, 2006; Oksiutycz & Enombo, 2011). The findings would also serve as a guide to the formulation of policies that are related to public relations.

1.6 Scope

PR practitioners in Kano Kaduna Katsina and Sokoto and Zamfara states were involved in this study to represent the North-Western Nigeria. PR practitioners in Public organizations, private organizations, and public relations consultants were, therefore, the population of this study.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Attitudinal professionalism: deals with PR practitioner's personal commitment to his own profession. It deals with a summary of his own commitment to his professional career and its advancement.

Professional Competencies: or simply called competencies is the "behavioral repertoires or sets of behaviors that support the attainment of organizational objectives" Gregory (2008). Thus, it has to do with how knowledge, skills and personal attributes are acquired by PR practitioner to satisfy the organizational objectives.

Self-efficacy: self-efficacy is the public relations practitioners' perceived ability to carry out his professional duties and satisfy the vision and mission of his/her organization/client as an expert.

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