

## Career Performance of Muslim Female Bachelor of Hospitality Management Graduates

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### ABSTRACT

*Islam is the second largest religion in the world and its representation is growing in the workplace. Islam is the largest religion in Malaysia. However, little is known about how it affects work performance of those who adhere to the faith especially for those in the hospitality industry. Career in the hospitality industry is perceived not suitable for Muslim women due to the nature of the jobs in the industry that is physically exhausting, demands long working hours and serves non-halal food. Jobs in the industry also require employees wearing uniforms that hardly comply with the Muslim women dress code. Despite the contradictory nature of the industry with Muslim women, studies assessing Muslim female Bachelor of Hospitality Management (BHM) graduates' career performance in comparison to the non-Muslim graduates are scarce. The purpose of this study is to assess and compare the Muslim and non-Muslim female BHM graduates' career performance by finding the graduates' employment rate, areas of employment, employment level and monthly salary. A quantitative survey method was used for data collection. It is discovered that the percentage of Muslim female graduates working in the hospitality industry is higher compared to the non-Muslim female graduates. However, regardless the type of industry, a low percentage of graduates manage to attain management position, and the Muslim female BHM graduates' average monthly salary is also low. The findings imply that Islam may have some influence, but it is not the main barrier to the Muslim female graduates' career performance. The information provided from this study signals the Muslim female BHM students to better equip themselves for the industry.*

**Keywords:** Career, Hospitality, Graduates, Muslim, Women

### INTRODUCTION

Hospitality graduates employment rate in the hospitality industry is low, despite the mushrooming growth of higher learning institutions offering Bachelor of Hospitality Management (BHM) program (Kang & Gould, 2002; Lashley, 2011; Zahari, Hanafiah, Othman, Jamaluddin & Zulkifly, 2010). Hospitality graduates either never took a hospitality job after graduating or left the industry due to poor working conditions, workplace bullying, poor compensation, high pressure, physically exhausting repetitive job, long working hours, lack of motivation, training programs, and development opportunities, and unfulfilled expectations (Richardson & Butler, 2011; Zahari et al., 2010). Many posts in the industry do not possess intrinsically high levels of satisfaction for many workers (Ryan, Ghazali & Mohsin, 2011).

A specific characteristic of the hospitality industry is the high number of female workers (Richardson & Butler, 2011). However, women's salary and career advancement in the industry is more stagnant compared to the male workers who are more likely to be offered a "fast-track" career development and higher pay (Burgess, 2003). The small number of women in senior management position is caused by engendered attitudes towards women,

and women's attitude towards work (Abdul Ghani Azmi, Syed Ismail & Basir, 2014; Burgess, 2003; Jamali, Sidani & Safieddine, 2005; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). Women have different goals than men, and some women are not willing to take extra responsibilities even when offered promotion due to their obligation to their family (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Burgess, 2003). Women also cited negative attitudes towards them as managers (Burgess, 2003; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). The negative attitude towards women as managers is also evident in Lebanon and Indonesia where the majority of the population is Muslim (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010; 2011).

Muslim women in the hospitality industry have to face additional challenges due to the nature of the industry. The nature of the jobs in the hospitality industry is physically exhausting, repetitive, and demands long working hours. Hotels and restaurants serve liquor, and some of the food products contain non-halal ingredients. Most large hospitality businesses provide employee uniforms and these uniforms hardly comply with the Muslim women dress code. Although Islam is the second largest religion in the world, and the number of Muslim women is increasing in the workplace, little is known about Muslim female graduates' career performance in the Hospitality Industry even in countries where the majority is Muslim. Despite the contradictory nature of the industry with Muslim women, studies assessing Muslim female Bachelor of Hospitality Management (BHM) graduates' career performance in comparison to the non-Muslim graduates are scarce. The purpose of this study is to assess and compare the Muslim and non-Muslim female BHM graduates' employment rate and career performance by finding the graduates' areas of employment, employment level and monthly salary. The research questions are:

1. What is the Muslim female BHM graduates' employment rate compared to the non-Muslim?
2. How successful are the Muslim female BHM graduates compared to the non-Muslim?

This study was carried out in Malaysia. While there have been studies on Muslim women career in Lebanon and Indonesia, studies on Muslim women BHM graduates career in Malaysia is yet to be found. Similar to Lebanese and Indonesian women, Malaysian women can be categorised as modern, are given the liberty to choose either to wear or not to wear the veil, and are allowed to interact with men and participate in economic and political activity (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). The majority of Malaysians are Muslim and the majority of Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) BHM graduates are Muslim female. UUM started offering the BHM program in 2004. It is one of the few public universities in Malaysia offering the BHM program.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The discriminatory nature of the organizational culture and practices where female managers attributed negative attitudes, perceptions, and stereotypes is a barrier for women career advancement not only in Western countries but also in Middle Eastern and Asian countries (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Burgess, 2003; Jamali et al., 2005; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010; 2011). Female managers in comparison to their male colleagues, experience the lack of support, trust, and opportunities for development. Women are clustered at the junior and middle management levels, while the top levels are dominated by men (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010). Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) discovered that regardless of the women's management level, Lebanese female managers confirmed their organisation is unsupportive and discriminating towards women. Even the female Lebanese managers prefer having male

senior managers compared to female and this could be due to the patriarchal structure of the Middle Eastern countries.

Based on the patriarchal structure, women's main role is as a wife and mother (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010). Support from her husband and family is very important for a women to continue and excel in her career (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). The culture in the Middle Eastern countries is different from the Western countries where women usually have to choose either to excel in their career or to be married and raise children. In the Middle Eastern countries, marriage is perceived as a social necessity and it increases the responsibilities of women thus impacts their career development (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014). The constraints reported by the women in the Middle Eastern countries are similar to those reported worldwide, where the majority of the population is Muslim (Jamali et al., 2005). However, the move towards moderate liberalism in the majority of the Arab world, and the need for additional sources of income to support the family are slowly giving women more freedom and allowing them to assume roles in the society and economy (Jamali et al., 2005; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010).

Islam does not prohibit Muslim women from being active in social and professional arena. However, Islam demands women to give priority to their families instead of their career (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014). This is consistent with the patriarchal structure that is largely practised in the Middle Eastern countries, where family responsibilities, marriage, and children are the priorities for women (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). Thus, conflict between work and family is common, as married women managers have to face additional pressure meeting social expectations, such as taking care of their family (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). Muslim women are culturally socialized to adopt these traits and behaviours and the majority of women with children considered marriage, children, and family important despite the increased responsibilities (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014). As in many Western countries, these women do not see a trade-off between family responsibilities and a successful career. Nevertheless, their preference for family can slowdown their career progression while childless and single women have more time to focus on their careers and their personal success (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011).

With spousal and family support, educated women have the desire for independence, are more eager to undertake managerial roles, and are not content with being low level staff (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). However, career advancement it is also crucial for Muslim women to have traits such as leadership, self-esteem, self-confidence, hard-work, patience and persistence (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). While the Lebanese women managers clarified that these are the personality traits that contributed to their career success, Indonesian Muslim women believe that they are lacking in these traits, and it hinders them from having advancement in their career. Abdul Ghani Azmi et al. (2014) concluded that capabilities and characters play a more significant role for career advancement compared to gender and religion.

Women also need support from the organisation. Facilities and policies have some impact on Muslim women career advancement (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Jamali et al., Sidani & Safieddine, 2005). While Abdul Ghani Azmi et al. (2014) discovered that facilities such as child care, and policies such as job sharing, have some impact on the Muslim women career advancement, Jamali et al. (2005) suggested that the policy to permit Muslim women wearing the hijab at the workplace might make the employees to be more engaged with their work and they may serve clients better. Veils, hijab, or headscarves are a woman's most striking signifier of the Muslim religious identity.

Muslim families are anxious to preserve the identity which demonstrates the family's commitment to Islamic values and ideals (Siann & Clark, 1992). The hijab covers the hair,

neck, and shoulders. As stated in the Al Qur'an, wearing the hijab is compulsory to the Muslim women. A study by Reeves et al. (2013) in the United States discovered that there are prejudices, discrimination, or barriers in the workplace due to the wearing of the hijab. Those wearing the hijab experiences hiring difficulties, prejudice or discrimination, and fear. They felt uncomfortable wearing the hijab in the workplace. According to Reeves et al. (2013), they lack the courage, confidence, or strength required in wearing the hijab, and this level of discomfort may lead to a negative workplace engagement. Reeves et al. (2013) suggested that organizations should prevent discrimination and accommodate employees' religious beliefs and practices, unless such accommodation would interfere with business operations.

Muslim women perceived that high educational attainment increases their chances for managerial positions and promotion within the hierarchy (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). According to the Muslim women in Indonesia, experience is the critical success factor for them to be successful in their career progression as longer tenure means deeper knowledge and higher skills (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014). However it was found that education and work experience are no guarantee of career success for Lebanese women and it plays a limited role in women's career progression (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). Women need to have informal network or social connection (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). According to Tlaiss and Kauser (2011), social connection has been found to infuse the business activities of Asian countries, including China, Indonesia and Malaysia where the families from high social status usually have influential connections that facilitate the advancement of women's careers. Although it is unfair and it makes the necessity to have qualification questionable, social connection has a strong impact on women career advancement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Quantitative method was used to answer the research questions of this study. Self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. This was a population study and the population of this study was UUM BHM graduates who graduated at the beginning of the year 2008 until 2012. These graduates were identified from UUM's Alumni office. Population study was used to maximize the number of potential respondents.

Students were contacted through Facebook, e-mail and phone calls. Based on the list given by the Alumni office, 165 Muslim female graduates and 82 non-Muslim female graduates were contacted. Data collection began in June 2012. A total of 168 female graduates were not reachable and eliminated from the population. This technique was as done by McKercher, Williams and Coghlan (1995). The graduates were unreachable for several reasons such as not replying to e-mails, not answering phone calls, changed phone numbers, and working abroad.

The questionnaire consists of close-ended questions on demographic factors and employment profile. The questionnaire was in English because all graduates were expected to comprehend English for three reasons. Firstly, English language is widely used in the hospitality industry. Secondly, the English requirement for BHM enrolment is at least a Band 3 for Malaysian University English Test. Thirdly, English language is officially used for the teaching and learning of UUM BHM students.

Initially, questionnaires were circulated through the graduates' e-mail and Facebook account but the response rate was very low. To increase the response rate, graduates who did not respond were contacted via telephone. A phone survey interview was conducted using the same questionnaire and this method increased the response rate. All graduates who were reachable through phone calls responded to the survey interview.

The data collected in this study was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science version 19.0 for Windows software program. Descriptive statistics and T-test were utilized to provide summaries of the data. This study focused on female respondents. The respondents were categorised into two groups, Muslim female graduates and non-Muslim female graduates.

## FINDINGS

### Profile of the Respondents

Overall, 79 questionnaires were usable to answer the first research question. Majority of the respondents are Muslim female graduates (63.3%). The percentage of non-Muslim female graduates is 36.7%. Most of the graduates (77.2%) are single and only 22.8% are married. Almost all of the graduates (96.2%) have a Bachelor's degree and only 3.8% have a Master's degree. The highest percentage of respondents (46.8%) graduated in 2012, and this is followed by 2011 (21.5%), 2009 (16.5%), 2010 (11.4%) and 2008 (3.8%). The descriptive statistic of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for demographic variables (n = 79)**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Gender	Female	79	100.0
Religion	Muslim	50	63.3
	Non-Muslim	29	36.7
Marital Status	Single	61	77.2
	Married	18	22.8
Education	Bachelor's Degree	76	96.2
	Master's Degree	3	3.8
Year of Graduation	2008	3	3.8
	2009	13	16.5
	2010	9	11.4
	2011	17	21.5
	2012	37	46.8

### Muslim and Non-Muslim Female BHM Graduates' Employment Rate

From a total of 79 female graduates 64 are employed, and 15 are unemployed. Most of the unemployed graduates are Muslim (13) and only 2 are non-Muslims. They have never been employed. Therefore, out of 50 Muslim respondents, only 74% are employed. As for the non-Muslims, the employment rate of 29 respondents is 93%. Seven of the unemployed Muslim respondents are married and six are single. One of the unemployed Muslim respondents has a

Master's degree. Seven of the unemployed Muslim respondents have just graduated during the time of data collection while one graduated in 2008, one in 2010, two in 2009 and two in 2011. As for the two unemployed non-Muslim respondents, both are single and have just graduated at the time of data collection. The descriptive statistic of unemployed Muslim and non-Muslim respondent is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistic of Muslim and non-Muslim unemployed respondents (n=15)**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Non-Muslim</i>
Gender	Female	15	13	2
Marital Status	Single	8	6	2
	Married	7	7	0
Education	Bachelor's Degree	14	12	2
	Master's Degree	1	1	0
Year of Graduation	2008	1	1	0
	2009	2	2	0
	2010	1	1	0
	2011	2	2	0
	2012	9	7	2

### Muslim Female BHM Graduates' Areas of Employment

A higher percentage of Muslim graduates are working in the hospitality industry compared to the non-Muslim. The percentage of Muslim graduates in the hospitality industry and other industries is 43.2%, and in education sector is 13.5%. The non-Muslim graduates' percentage in the hospitality industry is 33.3%, other industries are 37%, and education sector is 29.6%. The graduates' area of employment percentage is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Female Muslim and non-Muslim BHM graduates area of employment**

<i>Religion</i>	<i>Hospitality Industry</i>		<i>Education</i>		<i>Other Industries</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	
Muslim	16	43.2	5	13.5	16	43.2	37
Non-Muslim	9	33.3	8	29.6	10	37	27
Total	25		13		26		64

### The Employment Level of Muslim and Non-Muslim Female BHM Graduates

The non-Muslim female BHM graduates employment for management position in organisations is better compared to the Muslim female BHM graduates. Majority (56.8%) of the Muslim female BHM graduates are working at non-management level. This is followed

by management level (37.8%) and supervisory level (5.4%). As for the non-Muslim graduates, majority (66.7%) is at management level, followed by non-management (25.9%) and supervisory (7.4%) level. An independent t-test on the graduates' level of employment revealed that there is a significant difference ( $t(62) = 2.52$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Muslim female BHM graduates employment level is lower ( $t(62)=1.811$ ,  $SD=0.967$ ) than non-Muslim female BHM graduates ( $t(62)=2.407$ ,  $SD=0.888$ ).

**Table 4. Employment level of Muslim and non-Muslim female BHM graduates**

Religion	Non-Management		Supervisory		Management		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Muslim	21	56.8	2	5.4	14	
Non-Muslim	7	25.9	2	7.4	18	66.7	27
Total	28		4		32		64

**Table 5. T-test for employment level of Muslim and non-Muslim female BHM graduates**

		t-test for Equality of Means								
Level of Employment		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T	Df	Sig. 2-tailed	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.						Lower	Upper
			Equal variances assumes	2.739	0.103	-2.521	62.000	0.014	-0.597	0.237
	Equal variances not assumes			-2.555	58.708	0.013	-0.597	0.233	-1.064	-0.129

**Average Monthly Salary of the Muslim and Non-Muslim Female BHM Graduates**

The average monthly salary for the Muslim female BHM graduates is RM1547 and the non-Muslim female BHM graduates is RM2059. An independent t-test on the graduates' salary revealed that there is a significant difference in the salary received by the Muslim and non-Muslim female BHM graduates ( $t(62) = 3.57$ ;  $p \leq 0.001$ ). The Muslim female BHM graduates' salary is lower ( $t(62) = 1547$ ,  $SD=569.51$ ) compared to the non-Muslim ( $t(62) = 2059$ ,  $SD=562.45$ ). Therefore, it is concluded that the non-Muslim female BHM graduates earned better salary compared to the Muslim female BHM graduates.

**Table 6. Average monthly salary of UUM BHM female graduates**

Religion	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Muslim	37	1546.68	569.51	93.63
Non-Muslim	27	2059.26	562.45	108.24

**Table 7. T-test for monthly salary of UUM BHM female graduates**

		t-test for Equality of Means								
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. 2- tailed	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Level of Employment	Equal variances assumes	0.159	0.691	-3.574	62.000	0.001	-512.584	143.402	-799.240	-225.927
	Equal variances not assumes			-3.582	56.583	0.001	-512.584	143.118	-799.219	-225.949

Data on the salary of each respondent revealed that Muslim female BHM graduates are willing to work for low salary. The lowest salary received by a Muslim female BHM graduates is at RM550 monthly while the lowest salary the non-Muslim female BHM graduates is willing to work for is RM1000. The percentage of Muslim female BHM graduates who are willing to work for salary lower than RM1000 is 16%.

**Table 8. Muslim and Non-Muslim female BHM graduates monthly salary**

Monthly Salary in RM	Muslim	%	Non-Muslim	%	Total
550	1		0		1
700	1		0		1
750	2		0		2
900	1		0		1
970	1		0		1
1000	2		2		4
1100	1		0		1
1200	2		0		2
1300	4		0		4
1350	1		0		1
1400	2		0		2
1500	2		3		5
1600	3		1		4
1700	2		1		3
1757	1		0		1
1800	1		2		3
1900	0		1		1
2000	4		7		11
2200	0		1		1
2300	1		2		3
2400	1		2		3
2500	3		1		4
2800	1		0		1
3000	0		3		3
3200	0		1		1
Total	37		27		64



## **DISCUSSION**

### **Low Employment Rate of the Muslim Female BHM Graduates**

Muslim female BHM graduates employment rate is low compared to the non-Muslim. While all of the unemployed non-Muslims are at the stage of starting their career, almost half of the unemployed Muslim graduates have graduated for more than a year, and they are married. This suggests that married female Muslim graduates prefer being a housewife compared to working in an industry that requires them to do mundane jobs that are physically exhausting, working on shifts and offer low salary. Being married, the low salary paid to them is either not enough, or not good enough for them to support their family. This is consistent with previous studies on Muslim women that stated the main roles of a woman are as a wife and mother, and their preference to choose family over career (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010). The decision to choose family comes easy especially when the work reward and atmosphere are undesirable. The un-Islamic nature of the hospitality business further strengthens their justification to leave the industry. According to UUM BHM graduates, they left the hospitality industry for several reasons and among them are unattractive compensation, lack of career development opportunities, poor working condition, uniform not fulfilling the Muslim dress code, social problem, and reluctance to work on shifts (Ahmad, Basri & Nurhazani, 2014). Thus, some of the Muslim female graduates stay at home and focus on taking care of their family and educating their children.

### **Inferior Career Performance of the BHM Muslim Female Graduates**

There are more Muslim graduates in the Hospitality Industry compared to the non-Muslim despite the fact that the industry is less conducive for the Muslim especially the female. This includes uniforms that do not allow the wearing of the headscarf, and serving liquor, which are against the teachings of the Al-Quran. The high number of non-Muslim female graduates being lecturers and managers, regardless the type of industry suggests that the Muslim female graduates are either forced to be in the industry because they are not assertive enough to venture better opportunities in other industries, or they lack the personality traits required for career advancement. This is supported by the higher average salary of the non-Muslim female graduates, and the willingness of the Muslim graduates to work for low salary, as low as RM550 per month. However, the salary statistic also shows that there are Muslim female graduates who performed better compared to the non-Muslim. As suggested by Abdul Ghani Azmi et al. (2014) capabilities and characters play a more significant role for career advancement compared to gender and religion. Thus, to succeed in their career Muslim women need to have a leadership charisma, self-esteem, self-confidence, high work commitment, patience and persistence (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011).

### **Implications of Study**

In order to succeed in their career, Muslim female graduates need support from their spouses, family, and organisations. Organisations can establish facilities and policies that could trigger significant improvement for Muslim women career advancement (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014). Improved compensation and working condition, facilities such as childcare at the workplace, and policy that allows women to wear the hijab, do not only help reduce Muslim female graduates unemployment and increase their retention in the hospitality industry, but it may also help them succeed in their career. The suggestion for the policy to permit Muslim women wearing the hijab at the workplace is consistent with Jamali et al. (2005) and Reeves et al. (2013). Reeves et al. (2013) suggested organisations to accommodate employees'

religious beliefs and practices, and Jamali et al. (2005) suggested that the policy might make the employees to be more engaged with their work.

In order to convince hotel operators to allow Muslim graduates to wear the headscarf at work, the graduates need to prove that companies are losing potentially excellent employees by possessing and portraying excellent attitude and soft skills, such as communication and leadership skills. When the graduates are lacking in the capabilities and personality traits required for career advancement, they are not in the position to demand (Abdul Ghani Azmi et al., 2014; Ahmad & Zainol, 2011). They can only accept what is given to them. As in India, hotel companies in Malaysia have a big pool of hospitality graduates to choose from (Jauhari, 2006). To attain management positions in hotel companies, the female BHM Muslim graduates are not only competing with the non-Muslim female graduates, they also have to compete with the opposite gender, graduates from other areas of studies, and those without a degree but with a vast working experience in the industry (Ahmad & Zainol, 2011; Burgess, 2003).

## **CONCLUSION**

This research has theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to the Malaysian hospitality education literature by providing knowledge of female Muslim BHM graduates career performance in comparison to the non-Muslim, an under researched perspective in the hospitality industry. Tracing the female BHM graduates career performance and comparing them with the non-Muslim benefits hospitality students especially among the Muslim female. It also benefits the universities with high number of female Muslim BHM graduates and the Muslim society. This study provides information of UUM BHM female Muslim graduates rate of employment, employment areas, level of employment and their salary. Similar to the study on Indonesian Muslim women, the findings suggest that capability, personality traits and soft skills strongly influence the female Muslim BHM graduates career advancement. This information educates BHM students on what to expect, guide them in their career plan and prepares them to face the industry. It also signals to the Muslim female graduates to be more assertive and continuously seek for better opportunities. As for the industry, the findings are useful for them to take corrective actions while the university grooms the students to better match with the industry needs.

This study has several limitations. The context of this study is the UUM BHM female Muslim who are mainly among the Malays. This may explain their similarities with the Indonesian Muslim female but not the Lebanese. Studies on female Muslim in other parts of the world would have different findings. Secondly, this is merely a descriptive study with the objective to assess UUM BHM Muslim female graduates level of employment, area of employment and career performance. Thus, respondents were not directly asked about the cause of unemployment and career achievement. Future studies can address this question and examine the religious level, academic achievement and personality influence on graduates' career achievement. Future studies can also adopt quantitative method in order to generalise the findings.

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