

THE DYNAMICS OF
PERSUASION
COMMUNICATION AND ATTITUDES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

RICHARD M. PERLOFF

SIXTH
EDITION



THE DYNAMICS OF PERSUASION

The Dynamics of Persuasion has been a staple scholarly resource for teaching persuasion for nearly two decades. Author Richard M. Perloff speaks to students in a style that is engaging and informational, explaining key theories and research as well as providing timely and relevant examples. The companion Web site includes materials for both students and instructors, expanding the pedagogical utilities and facilitating adoptions.

The sixth edition includes:

- updated theoretical and applied research in a variety of areas, including framing, inoculation, and self-affirmation;
- new studies of health campaigns;
- expanded coverage of social media marketing;
- enhanced discussion of the Elaboration Likelihood Model in light of continued research and new applications to everyday persuasion.

The fundamentals of the book—emphasis on theory, clear-cut explanation of findings, in-depth discussion of persuasion processes and effects, and easy-to-follow real-world applications—continue in the sixth edition.

Richard M. Perloff, Professor of Communication, Psychology, and Political Science at Cleveland State University, has been on the faculty at Cleveland State since 1979. He has written scholarly textbooks on persuasion, political communication, and the communication of AIDS prevention. Dr. Perloff is a nationally known expert on the third-person effect, the divergent perceptions of mass media impact on others and the self. He also wrote the book *The Dynamics of Political Communication* (Routledge, 2014).

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THE DYNAMICS OF PERSUASION

Communication and Attitudes in the 21st Century

Sixth Edition

Richard M. Perloff

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Preface

“Whatever is has already been,” declares Ecclesiastes, one of the classic books in the Old Testament, some of its poetry famously put to song by the musical group, The Byrds, in the 1960s.

The book’s prophetic words describe human behavior over the centuries, reminding us that “there is nothing new under the sun.” So it is with many aspects of social reality, not the least of which is persuasion. If we consider hallmarks of persuasive communication—credibility, authority-based appeals, fear arousal, cognitive dissonance, and strong attitudes—we recognize these date back to antiquity and have been empirically studied for more than six decades, an instructive point to remember when we imagine that all has changed in an era of Twitter, Facebook, social media posts, and 24–7 media. And yet one would have to be tone-deaf, a Luddite steeped in a romanticized past, and oblivious to changes in communication to argue that some of the content and form of persuasion are no different now than in previous times.

The changes and continuities of persuasion, and the dynamics of the interface, are among the many new issues discussed in the sixth edition. When you write a new edition, you get a chance to look at phenomena through different eyes, improving, refining, clarifying, and correcting. So it is with this sixth edition, where I have updated and improved many sections, elaborating on new research, discussed contemporary theoretical issues, pondered new applications, and provided a wealth of new examples encompassing social protests, political persuasion, racial issues, new advertising developments, and current health campaigns. I have also added many new cites and described findings that eluded me before (or I neglected), but deserve to be included in the book. From a peripheral perspective, there are new pictures, and, from a central processing viewpoint, there are numerous elaborations, crystallized explanations, research findings, social media applications, and added nuance, borne of appreciation of the endless complexity of persuasion effects. Naturally, new features added in the

fifth edition, like the theory primers and glossary, remain in this edition, with updates. In addition, following the publisher's style change, references appear at the end of each chapter rather than at the end of the book.

Let me highlight the major changes, chapter by chapter.

Chapter 1 expands on the subtlety and deviousness of persuasion, with new examples of contemporary marketing and manipulative efforts to subvert consensus on climate change. I try to uncover the particularly novel facets of persuasive communication in an era of tweets and terse messaging that invokes heuristics, symbolically packed social media posts like the Black Lives Matter hashtag, and the tendency to receive messages that reaffirm what we already believe. While not all social media is persuasion, some is, and borderline, interactive, online communication that fits into the persuasion domain has altered the content and fabric of contemporary persuasion. The chapter complements the focus on time-honored continuities with exploration of the distinctive aspects of persuasion in contemporary life.

The first chapter expands on propaganda, drawing new distinctions between persuasion and propaganda gone viral, modernizing the discussion by bringing up ISIS, and discussing how terrorist cults (horribly with tragic consequences) use classic persuasion strategies and contemporary social media to recruit and influence new members.

Chapter 2 continues to offer a historical and ethical overview, adding consideration of the ethics of marketing memorabilia of tragic terrorist incidents, linking rhetoric to social media-based communications, and noting shortcomings and strengths of social science research on persuasion. Chapter 3 bolsters the attitude structure discussion and offers a new application of attitude structure to reducing ethnic prejudice. The fourth chapter expands the discussion of social judgment theory, offering applications to shed light on how persuasion changed attitudes toward gay marriage. The discussion of strong attitudes is expanded to include recent research and applications, such as divergent perceptions of New England quarterback Tom Brady's Deflategate controversy. A new box takes a positive note by articulating research-based ways to change strongly held attitudes, in the interest of forging more tolerant perspectives toward social issues.

Chapter 5 features offers new applications of functional and attitude-behavior theories to persuasion-related issues that emerge with Facebook, Snapchat, and iPhones. On a more conceptual level, the chapter extends the discussion of matching of message to function by discussing research demonstrating mismatching effects, adding a layer of complexity. Chapter 6 offers a more comprehensive introduction to neuroscientific

methods (moving the measurement discussion of neuroscientific research from Chapter 4 to Chapter 6), and greatly expands—clarifying, critiquing, and updating—discussion of the Implicit Association Test, or IAT.

Chapter 7 introduces the second part of the book on changing attitudes and behavior by expanding on the strengths, shortcomings, and everyday applications of the Elaboration Likelihood Model to domains ranging from presidential politics to a job interview. In Chapter 8, I do a lot of updating, with discussion of new scholarship on the classic Milgram study, along with a couple of engaging new examples. The section on credibility is expanded by offering new applications of the knowledge bias, replacing the problematic Bill Cosby exemplar, and the reporting bias, with plenty of applications to the 2016 political campaign. The book went to press just after Donald Trump was elected president of the U.S. I also enhance the discussion of similarity with new examples, and greatly expand the discussion of physical attractiveness by bringing in gender role research on sexual objectification and an ELM-based example of actress Jenny McCarthy's ethically problematic claims about vaccines and autism.

Chapters 9 and 10 feature new research and examples to illuminate the richness of persuasive message effects. Calling on new studies, I expand the discussion of one-versus two-sided messages by examining implications of research that suggests how media can create misinformation by offering false balance on issues like vaccines and autism. The section on narrative and transportation is enriched with new research and applications of studies on MTV's *16 and Pregnant*. The discussion of powerless speech is considerably expanded by bringing in gender issues, as well as limits imposed by forceful language, enhancing the focus on reactance. I elaborate on language-intensity effects, also describing how Twitter messages, as in Black Lives Matter and Love Wins hashtags, enrich our understanding of the role played by language in social media persuasion. I expand on the framing discussion, calling on new psychological research on how to harness frames persuasively, and a host of new political applications both in the United States and Europe, examining how political language can be harnessed for positive and darker purposes. The box on the sleeper effect is clarified and enhanced.

Chapter 10, with its focus on fear appeals, is updated with new research-based insights on the Extended Parallel Process Model, expansion of the fraught gain-loss issue, and an application to popular, but problematic, indoor tanning.

Chapter 11 remains fundamentally as is. Cognitive dissonance is cognitive dissonance, and the research has not changed appreciably. However, dissonance continues to have important implications for persuasion, and the chapter is enhanced by discussion of cultural intersections with dissonance, and new research-based applications of hypocrisy induction.

Chapter 12 continues the focus on interpersonal persuasion by adding a new section on verbal sleights of hand that discusses research on the semantics of compliance. In addition, the chapter offers an enhanced discussion of culture and compliance-gaining, a social media application to intimacy effects on compliance-gaining, and expanded explanations of how an understanding of psychological processes can enhance the effectiveness of interpersonal message effects.

Chapters 13 and 14, with their focus on marketing and media, necessarily include a number of key updates. I apply a small facelift to the subliminal section, discussing new research, expanding on the intricacy of subliminal persuasion, emphasizing anew (and with added appreciation for complexity of the issue) that advertising effects are not attributable to subliminal influences. I try to help students and scholars appreciate the delicate point that subliminal processing can occur, but subliminal advertising effects remain more chimera than substance. The chapter also calls on new research and applications in a host of areas, elaborating on explanations of mere exposure, and offering a variety of examples of how repeated exposure and associational concepts operate in the interactive world of social media (e.g., geofilters on Snapchat and celebrity appeals on Twitter and Facebook). The chapter takes pains to emphasize that social media are not magic bullets, discussing them in the context of theory, research, and inevitable impediments to advertising effects. Discussions of legal and ethical aspects of marketing are updated and strengthened.

Chapter 14 brings in a variety of new issues, calling attention to online campaign effects, with new studies, methodologically based evaluation concerns and examples, ranging from President Obama's appearance on Zach Galifianakis's irreverent Web-based program to promote the Affordable Care Act to a text message-focused campaign on literacy. I also discuss the other side of the social marketing of breast cancer prevention, describing criticisms of pink ribbon commodification, noting how this fits into the challenge of waging a health marketing campaign. The chapter provides a contemporary bookend to the text, showcasing the ways persuasion theories work in concert with real-world structural constraints, politics, and complicating edges. It continues to provide a focus on ethics, bringing early and later sections of the book together at the end of the chapter.

I hope the sixth edition offers an interesting, thought-provoking account of persuasion, leaving you with enhanced knowledge of theory and research, and new insights about the ethics and complexity of the dynamics of persuasion in the dazzling whorl of 21st-century life.

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My undergraduate students in the persuasion class always enrich my appreciation of persuasion, and the graduate students in the persuasion seminar are a continuing source of stimulation. In particular, the students in the Spring 2016 class were full of insights and critical ideas. I enjoyed their perspectives immensely and appreciated the questions they asked, as they pushed me to see contemporary issues in new ways and laugh at the incongruous or unexpected aspect of persuasion in everyday life. Thanks also to my colleague Gary Pettey for his insights on contemporary health campaigns.

On a more personal note, I continue to appreciate the lessons learned from my late father, Robert Perloff, an irrepressible optimist, who role-modeled a wise, intellectual appreciation for life and ideas, and showcased an indefatigable determination to boundlessly pursue one's dreams. My mother, Evelyn Perloff, continues to serve as a role model for intellectual perseverance, with her dedication to work. Her unflagging

concern for finding the right answer and the right result have stuck with me as I completed this revision, and in so many other pursuits.

And to my own family, thank you: Michael, for his compassion, humor, dedication to well-crafted advocacy and moral eloquence, all valued traits in a lawyer; Cathy, for her emotional effervescence, openness to challenge, and uncompromising determination to ferret out truth, important traits in a journalist, scholar, or whatever profession she chooses; and my wife, Julie, for her intellectual acumen, ability to dexterously juggle any number of important tasks, and general tolerance of writers, academics, and persuasion scholars.



Part One

Foundations



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Chapter 1

Introduction to Persuasion

When someone mentions persuasion, what leaps to mind? Advertising perhaps? Commercials for fantasy sports that blanket the television airwaves? Those creative but pesky product ads on Instagram? Perhaps a series of political images come to mind: Charismatic leaders who captivate an audience through the cadence of their speech, or those slick politicians with perfectly coiffed hair, blow dried for television, always accompanied by a sinuous, insincere smile? That's persuasion, right? Powerful stuff—the kind of thing that wields strong effects on society and spells success for its purveyors. But what about you? What does persuasion mean to you personally? Can you think of times when the media or attractive communicators changed your mind about something? Anything come to mind? “Not really,” you say. You've got the canny ability to see through what other people are trying to sell you.

Well, that's perhaps what we like to think. “It's everyone else who's influenced, not me or my friends—well, maybe my friends, but not me.” But wait: What about those Levi's jeans, UGG boots, Juicy Couture sweater, or Nike sneakers you bought? Marketing had to play a role in that decision somehow. What about the book you purchased on Amazon after reading all the favorable customer reviews? You have to admit that other people's comments may have swayed you more than a smidgeon. And, if you search your mind, you probably can think of lots of times when you yielded to another's pushy persuasion, only to regret it later—the time you let yourself get talked into allowing a car repair that turned out to be unnecessary or agreed to loan a friend some money, only to discover she had no intention of paying you back.

But that's all negative. What of the positive side? Have you ever been helped by a persuasive communication—an antismoking ad or a reminder that it's not cool or safe to drink when you drive? Have you ever had a conversation with a friend who opened your eyes to new ways of seeing the world or a teacher who said you had potential you didn't know you had?

You see, this is persuasion too. Just about anything that involves molding or shaping attitudes involves persuasion. Now there's another term that may seem foreign at first: attitudes. Attitudes? There once was a rock group that called itself that. But we've got attitudes as surely as we have arms, legs, cell phones, or Facebook pages. We have attitudes about music, politics, money, sex, race, even God. We don't all share the same attitudes, and you may not care a whit about issues that intrigue your acquaintances. But we have attitudes and they shape our world in ways we don't always recognize. Persuasion is the study of attitudes and how to change them.

Persuasion calls to mind images of salespeople and manipulators, such as clever strategists on classic TV shows like *Survivor*, *The Apprentice*, and *The Celebrity Apprentice*, hosted by Donald Trump and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Persuasion may also conjure up images of con artists, such as the swindlers who devise false profiles on dating sites like Match.com by using photos of attractive women and men they pilfer from Instagram, allure lonely victims to click onto the site, sweet talk them, and a few weeks later, hit them up for money (Murphy, 2016). It may also bring to mind those innumerable Web sites hoping to hoodwink people or offering questionable instructions on how to manage your money, fix your car, represent oneself in court, or live a happy life. Or, for those who like to free-associate, persuasion may call to mind the hopelessly gullible people who fall prey to scams, such as those playfully perpetrated by *Candid Camera* television host Peter Funt: the Denver residents who believed they would be getting mail delivered via drone, and the folks from Scottsdale, Arizona who fell for the policeman's story that he was enforcing a "2 m.p.h. pedestrian speed limit" (Funt, 2014, p. A21)!

There is another side too: persuasion harnessed in the service of social change. Activists have doggedly employed persuasion to help change racial and gender role attitudes. Consumer advocates have tirelessly warned people about dishonest business practices. Health communicators have launched countless campaigns to change people's thinking about cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and unsafe sex. Political leaders have relied on persuasion when attempting to influence opinions toward policy issues or when trying to rally the country behind them during national crises. Some of our greatest leaders have been expert persuaders—Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Franklin Delano Roosevelt come immediately to mind, as do the crop of current political persuaders, working in the thicket of the social media age. (See Figure 1.1.)

Persuasion at once intrigues and repels us. We are fascinated by charisma, why some people have it and others don't. We are riveted by courtroom trials, both in television fiction and in real life. Many women waited in line to watch the 2011 trial of Casey Anthony, charged with killing her 2-year-old daughter Caylee with chloroform and duct tape. Some curiosity-seekers longed to see if the prosecution could make the case that



■ **Figure 1.1 Steve Jobs, the Computer and Marketing Guru, Showcased the Ways That Persuasion Could Be Harnessed for Positive Purposes, Unleashing His Communication Skills to Develop and Promote Apple Computers, the iPod, iPhone, and iPad. Like all people and professional persuaders, Jobs was imperfect: He was widely viewed as contemptuous and disparaging of others. Yet he was also a visionary whose ideas—and captivating persuasive abilities—revolutionized the world of products and technology**

Image courtesy of iStock photos

Casey killed her daughter because she grew frustrated with motherhood, which kept her away from the sybaritic life of cocktails and men. Others found themselves drawn in by the courtroom drama, intrigued by the strategies her lawyers ingeniously devised to poke holes in the prosecution's arguments. At the same time as we are piqued by persuasion in cases like the Anthony trial, we recoil when reading about its horrific excesses, such as its use by charismatic cult leaders and terrorists who lure vulnerable young people into their lairs, only to later exploit their innocence in a deadly fashion. The power of persuasion—its ability to captivate and connive—fascinates people the world over.

This book explores these issues. It examines persuasive communication and the dynamics of attitudes that communicators hope to change. It takes you through theories, classic applications, and subtle implications of the persuasion craft. On a more personal note, I try to show how you can use persuasion insights to become a more effective persuasive speaker, a more critical judge of social influence attempts, and a more sensitive, ethical communicator.

PERSUASION: CONSTANCIES AND CHANGES

The study and practice of persuasion are not new. Persuasion can be found in the Old Testament—for example, in Jeremiah’s attempts to convince his people to repent and establish a personal relationship with God. We come across persuasion when we read about John the Baptist’s exhortations for Christ. John traveled the countryside, acting as Christ’s “advance man,” preaching that “Christ is coming, wait till you see him, when you look in his eyes you’ll know that you’ve met Christ the Lord” (Whalen, 1996, p. 110).

Long before professional persuaders hoped to turn a profit from books on closing a deal, traveling educators known as the Sophists paraded through ancient Greece, charging money for lectures on public speaking and the art of political eloquence. Five centuries before political consultants advised presidential candidates how to package themselves on television, the Italian diplomat Niccolo Machiavelli rocked the Renaissance world with his how-to manual for political persuaders, entitled *The Prince*. Machiavelli believed in politics and respected crafty political leaders. He offered a litany of suggestions for how politicians could maintain power through cunning and deception.

In the United States, where persuasion has played an outsized role in politics and commercial sales, it should come as no surprise that communication campaigns are as American as media-advertised apple pie! The first crusade to change health behavior did not occur in 1970 or 1870, but in 1820. Nineteenth-century reformers expressed concern about increases in binge drinking and pushed for abstinence from alcohol. A few years later, activists committed to clean living tried to persuade Americans to quit using tobacco, exercise more, and adopt a vegetarian diet that included wheat bread, grains, fruits, and vegetables (Engs, 2000).

As they say in France: *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose* (the more things change, the more they remain the same). Yet, for all the similarities, there are important differences between our era of persuasion and those that preceded it. Each epoch has its own character, feeling, and rhythm. Contemporary persuasion differs from the past in the following ways.

The Number and Reach of Persuasive Communications Have Grown Exponentially

Online advertising, public service announcements, negative political commercials, and those daily interruptions from telephone marketers are among the most salient indicators of this trend. Eons ago, you could go through a day with precious little exposure to impersonal persuasive messages. This is no longer true during an epoch in which messages are conveyed through mediated channels, via colorful language, emoticons, and emoji. People frequently showcase persuasive messages on their bodies, on T-shirts, bracelets, and tattoos. Even tragedies have become fair game. Shortly after terrorists slaughtered 12 people in an attack on the French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, in 2015, “Je Suis Charlie” (“I Am Charlie”) items began selling on Amazon, Etsy, and other online retail sites. Appearing at the Golden Globe Awards, the elegant Amal Clooney sported a black-and-white “Je Suis Charlie” button, all the more eye-catching since it fit with her black Dior dress and her white gloves; she and other communicators showed their affinity for a persuasive cause “by wearing it, literally,” on their sleeve (Friedman, 2015).

Persuasion’s reach extends well beyond the United States, to countries and communities linked into worldwide media marketing and attuned to sports celebrities. Some years back, a U.S. college student traveling in remote areas of China reported that, while stranded by winter weather, he came across a group of Tibetans. After sharing their food with the student, the Tibetans began to discuss an issue that touched on matters American. “Just how,” one of the Tibetans asked the young American, “was Michael Jordan doing?” (LaFeber, 1999, p. 14). In our own time, another basketball superstar—LeBron James of the Cleveland Cavaliers—has become an international phenomenon, known for his basketball prowess worldwide.

In an example of global persuasion’s full-court press, James was a sensation in China some years back, where National Basketball Association stores promoted his image, his Nike commercials were seen everywhere, and a man in a park wore a LeBron James jersey with the word “Cleveland” embossed on the front (Appelbaum, 2014; Boyer, 2006). The iconic appeal of LeBron James—athletic superstar, hometown devotee, graceful actor in a blockbuster movie—is emblematic of the power of a brand, the image of triumph in sports, and the symbolic stuff that lies at the heart of so much mediated persuasion (see Box 1.1).

Persuasive Messages Travel Faster Than Ever Before

Advertisements “move blindingly fast,” one writer observes (Moore, 1993, p. B1). Ads quickly and seamlessly combine cultural celebrities (Beyoncé), symbols (success, fame,

and athletic prowess), and commodity signs (the Nike swoosh). By pressing “send,” political marketing specialists can recruit volunteers. During the 2016 presidential campaign, the digital organizing director for Democratic candidate Bernie Sanders asked each of the some 100,000 followers who were attending house parties across the country on the candidate’s behalf to mobilize supporters by texting the word “work” into their smartphones. Within hours, the campaign received 50,000 responses (Corasaniti, 2015).

Texts, tweets, and short posts have become the signatures of instantaneous contemporary persuasion, characterized as much by their brevity as their speed. Consider how, in the wake of police killings of unarmed African American men, tweets sprang up almost instantly. Tweets with hashtags like the now-famous “Black Lives Matter” diffused across the nation soon after the death of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014, arousing passions and activating attitudes. These simple metaphoric statements, emblematic of time-honored outrage at racial injustice, spread like wildfire across social networks, allowing social activists to mobilize the committed, as activists have done for centuries. There was a contemporary twist: They could reach millions instantly with messages packed with powerful words and vivid pictures, perhaps changing attitudes and winning converts, without once directly exchanging a persuasive message face-to-face.

Twitter is the epitome of terse persuasive messaging. The hashtag #lovewins, joyously developed to celebrate the Supreme Court’s ruling in favor of same-sex marriage, moved with warp speed to convey, distill, and mobilize attitudes toward racial prejudice and gay rights. #lovewins took off like few other hashtags. The Supreme Court announced its same-sex marriage decision on Friday morning, June 26, 2015. By 3 p.m. on Friday, 2.6 million tweets with that hashtag had been posted, at the rate of about 20,000 tweets per minute (Flynn, 2015). While the metaphoric hashtag undoubtedly stimulated tweets among those who already agreed with the Court’s decision, its popularity and emotional content likely affirmed attitudes toward same-sex marriage in ways not possible before the current era.

Persuasion Has Become Institutionalized

No longer can a Thomas Jefferson dash off a Declaration of Independence. In the 21st century, the Declaration would be edited by committees, test marketed in typical American communities, and checked with standards departments to make sure it did not offend potential constituents.

Numerous companies are in the persuasion business. Advertising agencies, public relations firms, marketing conglomerates, lobbying groups, social activists, pollsters,

BOX 1.1 Pervasiveness of Persuasion

Persuasion is part of the fabric of everyday life, so much so that it is hard to escape its tentacles. One observer tried to count the number of direct attempts to influence his behavior over the course of a day. These included people asking him to do favors, countless requests to buy things, and assorted ideological appeals. “By the time I reached my office at mid-morning, I lost count somewhere around 500,” he says (Rhoads, 1997).

That was some two decades ago, and persuasion has become more frenetic on social media. The first thing most people do when they wake up is check their smartphones (Greenfield, 2015), and when they do, before they’ve had their morning coffee or taken a shower, they are greeted with ads—and plenty of them—on Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat, blogs making social arguments, political advocacy posts sent by colleagues from work, and the borderline persuasion attempts from friends, pestering us to “like” their latest profile pix. Once we get to work, driving past countless billboards and stores with signs promoting the latest merchandise, we come across more attempts at persuasion, amplified when we shop at the mall. Persuasion is unavoidable today, and it can come from quarters you don’t ordinarily expect. Consider the examples below.

Example 1

Pastor Lee McFarland is an evangelical Christian who is part marketer and part true believer. He quit a well-paying job at Microsoft to lead a church, splitting from Redmond, Washington, to a town with the unlikely name of Surprise, Arizona.

McFarland left before completing the correspondence classes he was taking to become an evangelical pastor. Knocking on doors, sending out fliers with the help of a direct mail company, and developing billboards that showed a smiling family next to the caption, “Isn’t it time you laughed again?” McFarland plied his communication skills to attract people to a church he called Radiant. Recognizing that the young White residents of the Arizona exurbs were in search of a sense of community, McFarland built the church so that it would feel warm and inviting, with five plasma-screen TVs, a bookstore, and café. “We want the church to look like a mall,” he says. “We want you to come in here and say, ‘Dude, where’s the

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