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Marketing of Organic Food Products at Madurai City

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Abstract

The organic farming sector in developing countries is still diminutive. However, the traditional practice of organic farming by the indigenous farmers is an advantage that would help India to become a global market leader in this sector. India has the potential to emerge as a major exporter of organic produce. Organic products mature without the use of fertilizers, artificial chemicals, and pesticides. The Indian organic food market, although in its nascent stage, has started growing rapidly. Generally, consumers prefer organic food due to safety, human health, and ecological concern. Sometimes it could also be due to attributes like nutrition value, taste, originality and look of organic food. Worldwide trade in organic products is growing incredibly which has prompted experts to project consumption of organic food to be more than 25% of total food consumption by 2020. Universal consumption growth rates over the next 3-5 years will be fairly high (25 - 30%) when compared to most other categories of food. In the last decade, organic food products have been measured to do a healthier business than conventional food products. Thus the expansion of organic agriculture is seen as a part of promising promotion trends. This research reveals the percentage

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consumption of organic food products and provides suggestions to implement the various marketing strategies adopted by the retailers to sell the products and other factors impacting the preference of the consumers in the various strata of the society.

Keywords: Marketing strategies, Organic food products, Consumer preference and availability.

Introduction

Organic manufacture has been emerging as an important sector in India and in other parts of the developing world. It is seen as an important strategy to facilitate sustainable growth. A country like India can enjoy a number of reimbursements from the adoption of organic manufacture. Financially viable and social benefits like generation of rural employment, increased earning capacity of household, poverty mitigation, social enriching, ensuring the health of juvenile generations, women empowerment, sustainable development, avoidance of disasters caused by pesticides, improving environmental conditions, protection of natural resources, enhanced soil fertility, prevention of soil erosion, preservation of natural and agro-biodiversity are the major benefits.

Though 50% of organic food production in India goes towards exports, there are many who look towards organic food for domestic utilization. India was among the top ten countries where health food, including organic food, is in demand from the consumers. Concern for the health of one's own children is the most important reason for buying organic food. Organic food is expensive than conventional food (Bonti - Ankomah and Yiridoe, 2006) and customers have to pay a premium, generally 20 -30% more than what they pay for regular farm produce. However, this has not deterred customers who are willing to pay a higher premium owing to the perceived health benefits of organic products. Rising incomes, urbanization, the development of retail trade, changing lifestyles, and rapid economic growth have been the other key drivers of the increase in the sale of organic foods.

Globally, Australia is the largest producer of organic manufacture (Shukla U N, Manju Lata Mishra, K.C. Bairwa, 2013). In India, Chennai ranks highest in organic cultivation. Among the countries of the world, India ranks tenth in terms of having cultivable land with organic certification (Dinesh Kumar and Y.S. Shivay, 2014). The total area at present under organic certification is 4.72 million Hectare (Dr M Uma Maheswari and D Chandrashekar, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, organic food is preferred by many for reasons such as health and abstinence from the use of pesticides or fungicides on the crops. Today, consumers prefer to buy products that do not involve modern imitation inputs and instead choose products that would be beneficial to them in the long-term. This could be a reason for the phenomenal growth of the organic product stores in India.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the factors influencing consumer behavior towards organic food in Madurai.
- To analyze the marketing strategies adopted by organic shop retailers.
- To ascertain marketing related problems perceived by the retailers.
- Finally, this study highlights the factors influencing consumer preference towards organic food purchase, so that organic producers and marketers can benefit while doing strategic market planning.

Review of Previous Studies

The main reasons for purchasing organic food product is the expectation of a healthier lifestyle and to encourage environment-friendly means of production. Buyers of organic produce tend to be older and higher educated than those who do not buy them (Ramesh S.V and Divya M, 2015).²The study by Shashikiran.L and Madhavaiah.C, (2014) examined the willingness of the respondents to pay a premium for organic food products. The researchers found

that the customers have positive attitude towards organic products and they exhibit an increased willingness to pay higher prices for these products. About 53% of the consumers were aware that organic produce was available in the market. The consumers are eager to pay even 20-30 per cent more for organic food products and were heavily influenced by the perception that organic product is worth the money and their belief on the safety and health aspect of the product.

Ragavan N. and Mageh R. (2013) in their study found that the perceptions towards organic products, beliefs about product safety for use, beliefs about product friendliness to the environment and availability of product information are the major determinants for the consumers' purchase intention towards organic products.

Fatima Baby D. (2013) in her research found that the problems faced in organic tomato cultivation are lack of irrigation, the issues involved in marketing, lack of storage facility, price fluctuation and lack of financial support. The researcher suggested that the government should conduct awareness programme on organic farming, the subsidies available for agriculture and loan facilities meant for farmers. It also needs to ensure that at least one cold storage centre is setup for each major tomato selling market.

Lockie et al (2002) in his study involved focus groups and laddering interviews with 181 regular and occasional consumers of organic food. They found that the main motives which was mentioned by the focus groups were health consciousness, the assumed higher health value, and social aspects including support for local farming, fair trade, and, further down the scale, environmental protection.

Research Methodology

a) Conceptual framework

There are various factors that influence consumer attitude towards buying organic food products due to consumer perceptions like, organic food products are healthy and safe, environment-friendly, economically priced, and trust in product certification and availability of the products. Therefore, the conceptual model for the present research is depicted in Figure 1.

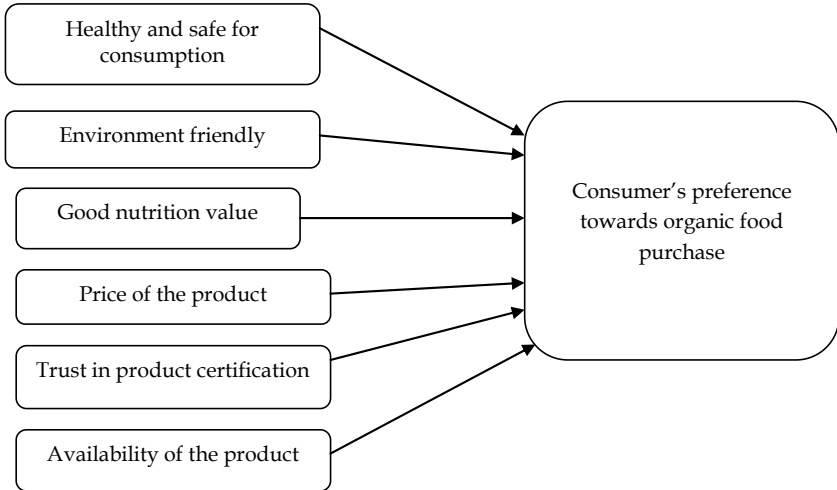


Fig 1 Conceptual framework

b) Sampling and Data Collection

With reference to the objectives of the study, Secondary and Primary data collection techniques were implemented. Primary data was collected with the use of structured questionnaires based on the five point Likert scale, which ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. An exploratory study was conducted after an extensive literature survey. The study was conducted among 125 consumers to identify the factors influencing consumer preference towards organic food purchase. 15 retailers have been selected from 22 organic shops in Madurai. Simple random sampling method is used with the usage of statistical tools like percentage, chi-square and Garrett ranking method for the analysis of data.

Table 1 Demographic profile of the respondents (125 consumers)

Particulars	Categories	Number of respondents	Percentage
Age	20-30	27	21.6
	31-40	64	51.2
	41-50	17	13.6
	Above 51	17	13.6
	Total	125	100
Gender	Male	53	42.4
	Female	72	57.6
	Total	125	100
Marital status	Married	82	65.6
	Unmarried	43	34.4
	Total	125	100
Education Qualification	Below SSLC	5	4.0
	SSLC	8	6.4
	HSC	11	8.8
	Diploma	1	.8
	Under Graduate	71	56.8
	Post Graduate	20	16
	Professional Degree	9	7.2
	Total	125	100
Occupation	Professional	22	17.6
	Business People	11	8.8
	Government Employees	14	11.2
	Private Employees	42	33.6
	Homemaker	27	21.6
	Other	9	7.2
	Total	125	100
Income (in Rupees) per month	Below 15,000	42	33.6
	15, 000- 30,000	41	32.8
	30,000- 45,000	9	7.2
	Above 45,000	33	26.4
	Total	125	100
Family size	Below 2	9	7.2
	3-5	107	85.6
	Above 6	9	7.2
	Total	125	100

Source: Primary Data

Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 provides the details of demographic profile of the consumers. As per table 2, more number of female respondents prefer to buy organic food products as compared to male respondents. With reference to below mentioned age groups, the age group 20-30 years prefers to buy more organic food products as compared to other age groups of respondents. 65.6% of the married respondents prefer to buy organic food and on the other hand only 34.4% of the unmarried respondents prefer to buy organic food. Majority of the respondents earning below Rs. 15000 per month prefer to buy organic food products.

Table 2 Demographic Profile and Preference to Purchase Organic Food Products

Factors	Categories	Customer preference to buy organic food products			Total	Per centage
		Low	Medium	High		
Age	20-30	12	24	6	42	33.6
	31-40	5	31	5	41	32.8
	41-50	2	1	6	9	7.2
	Above 51	4	27	2	33	26.4
	Total	23	83	19	125	100
Gender	Male	11	33	9	53	42.4
	Female	9	55	8	72	57.6
	Total	20	88	17	125	100
Marital Status	Married	7	66	9	82	65.6
	Unmarried	13	22	8	43	34.4
	Total	20	88	17	125	100
Monthly income (in Rupee)	Below 15,000	12	24	6	42	33.6
	15,000- 30,000	5	31	5	41	32.8
	30,000 -45,000	1	6	2	9	7.2
	Above 45,000	2	27	4	33	26.4
	Total	20	88	17	125	100

Source: Primary data

Table 3 Frequency of visiting organic shops

Duration	Number of respondents	Percentage
Daily	21	16.8
Weekly	51	40.8
Monthly	50	40.0
Occasionally	3	2.4
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary data

Frequency of purchasing products from organic shops is a very important factor because sales increase when people visit organic shops frequently. Therefore, it is evident from the above table that out of 125 respondents, majority of the respondents visit organic shop weekly because they suggested that organic food products are perishable in nature.

Table 4 Factors that influence to buy organic food products

Factors	Number of respondents	Percentage
Advertisement /Media	15	12.0
Doctor	16	12.8
Family	32	25.6
Relative	22	17.6
Friends	34	27.2
Others	6	4.8
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary data

It is inferred from the above table that majority of the respondents are influenced by word-of-mouth.

Table 5 Amount spent on organic food products per month

Particulars	Number of respondents	Percentage
Below Rs. 1,000	38	30.4
Rs.1,000 – Rs. 2,000	42	33.6
Rs. 2,000 – Rs. 3,000	26	20.8
Rs. 3,000 – Rs. 4,000	9	7.2
Above Rs. 4,000	10	8.0
Total	125	100.0

Source: primary data

Amount spent on organic food products by the consumers are dependent upon their purchasing ability. It is observed from the table that out of 125 respondents, majority of the respondents belong to middle class families and spend between Rs.1000-Rs. 2000 per month on organic products as they are more conscious about their family.

The Association between Income and Amount Spent On Organic Food Products per Month

In order to test whether there is a significant association between family income and amount spent on organic food products, chi-square test has been applied.

H₀ - There is no relationship between income and amount spent on organic food products

It is evident from the table given below that the chi-square value is 22.37 and the p-value is 0.33 which is more than 0.05 and significant at 5% level. Therefore there is no association between family income and the amount spent on organic food products and proves that the hypothesis is accepted.

Table 6 Family Income and Amount Spent on Organic Food Products

Family income (in Rupee)	Amount spent on organic food products					Total	Chi-square value	P value
	Below Rs. 1,000 (%)	Rs.1,000 Rs.2,000 (%)	Rs.2,000 Rs.3,000 (%)	Rs.3,000 Rs.4,000 (%)	Above Rs.4,000 (%)			
Below Rs.15,000	20 (48)	13 (34)	5 (19)	2 (22)	2 (20)	42	22.379	0.33
Rs.15,000 - Rs.30,000	10 (24)	18 (47)	10 (38)	1 (11)	2 (20)	41		
Rs.30,000 - Rs.45,000,	4 (9)	1 (3)	1 (4)	2 (22)	1 (10)	9		
Above Rs. 45,000	8 (19)	6 (16)	10 (38)	4 (45)	5 (50)	33		
Total	42	38	26	9	10	125		

Source: primary data

Reason for Consuming Organic Food Products

There may be one or more reason for buying organic products. But the real fact is that it is more nutritious and eco-friendly. Consumers generally make their choices after considering product information, product attributes and evaluating the consequences of using a product. Consumers consider health as an important parameter when they buy a product. Sometimes consumers prefer organic food due to their demographic characteristics. Households with graduates were less likely to buy organic produce, while households with children under 18 were more likely to buy organic produce.

Table 7 Garret’s Ranking- Factors that Influence Consumption of Organic Food Products

Particular	No of respondents						Total Score	Mean score	Rank
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI			
Family Health	78	22	14	7	2	2	8588	23.20	I
Minimize Health Problem	22	48	17	21	14	3	7175	19.38	II
Taste	12	17	21	30	27	18	5895	15.92	III
Environment Friendly	6	19	35	20	28	17	5868	15.85	IV
Quality	7	16	34	36	20	12	5675	15.33	V
Affordability	0	3	4	11	34	73	3814	10.30	VI

Source: primary data

It is clear from the table that majority of the respondents prefer to buy organic food products taking their family’s health into consideration.

Marketing Strategies and Problems Faced by Organic Shop Retailers

Table 8 Demographic Profile of Organic Shop Retailers (15 Retailers)

Demographic factors	Categories	Number of respondents	Percentage
Age	20-30	1	6.7
	31-40	10	66.7
	41-50	3	20.0
	Above 51	1	6.7
	Total	15	100.0
Gender	Male	10	66.7
	Female	5	33.3
	Total	15	100.0
Educational Qualification	HSC	1	6.7
	Under Graduates	9	60.0
	Post Graduates	3	20.0
	Prof. Degree Holders	2	13.3
	Total	15	100
Family Size	Below 2	1	6.7
	3 - 5	12	80.0
	Above 6	2	13.3
	Total	15	100.0

Source: Primary Data

From the above table, it is clear that majority of the retailers belong to the age group of 31-40 years who run the organic shop in Madurai. Gender-wise, 66.7% of the respondents running organic shops in Madurai are male and most of them possess at least an undergraduate degree.

Table 9 No. of Years in Business

Duration (Years)	Percentage
Below 1 Year	26.7
1 - 2 Years	33.3
2 - 3 Years	13.3
Above 3 Years	26.7
Total	100.0

Source: Primary data

As mentioned earlier, the popularity of organic food products has only been on the upswing. Duration of running the business of organic food products (the number of years they have been in the organic produce selling business) indicates the experiences of the people in this sector. It is evident from the above table that 26.7% of the retailers started their organic shop recently and 26.7% of the retailers are running shops for duration of above 3 years.

Table 10 Sources of Fund

Source of fund	Percentage
Own Investment	80.0
Bank Loans	6.7
Money Lenders	6.7
Relatives and Friends	6.7
Total	100.0

Source: Primary data

Investment is a main source to start a business. As various sources of investment exist to start a business, this study has taken into consideration options like own funds, bank loans, lending from moneylenders, and relatives and friends. Therefore from the above table it is evident that majority of the respondents started their organic shop with their own investment.

Table 11 Monthly Sales by the Retailers

Monthly Sales	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Below Rs.30,000	1	6.7
Rs.30,000 – Rs.60,000	4	26.7
Rs.60,000 – Rs.90,000	4	26.7
Above Rs. 90,000	6	40.0
Total	15	100

Source: Primary data

It is evident from the above table that 40% of the respondents had sales above Rs. 90,000 per month.

Table 12 Advertisement Media- Garret Ranking

Media of Advertisement	Total Score	Mean Score	Rank
Pamphlet/ Handbills	968	25.43	I
Newspaper	863	22.67	II
E-advertising	741	19.46	III
Television	722	18.96	IV
Radio	513	13.48	V

Source: primary data

Advertisements are very important to promote products. People are aware of different media for advertisements like television, radio, magazines, newspaper, pamphlets, websites and also banners. Advertisement helps in reaching the consumers effectively. It is a well-known fact that marketing strategy is an important tool to increase sales. Organic shop retailer’s work is to concentrate on marketing their organic food products in different media, in order to gain customers’ confidence towards consumption of organic food products. It is clear from the table that pamphlet/handbill advertisements are more effective advertisement than other media of advertisements.

6. Sales Promotional Techniques adopted by the Retailers

Promotional techniques are one of the tools to attract the customers, by issuing credit, discount, or gifts. This analysis is to evaluate the suitable techniques to catch the attention of customers to consume the organic products.

Table 13 Sales Promotional Techniques

Sales promotional technique	Number of respondents	Percentage
Sale on discount	2	13.3
Selling product on credit	0	0
Gift	2	13.3
Reasonable price	11	73.3
Total	15	100

Source: primary data

Majority of the retailers preferred to sell their products at reasonable price because, as it is, organic products are more expensive than non-organic products. It was also found that the retailers do not sell their products on credit.

Problems Faced by the Retailers towards Marketing Organic Food Products

The problems faced by organic shop retailers towards marketing the products in Madurai city has been classified into 3 categories namely low level problems, medium level problems, and high level problems for analytical purpose. The Table shows the marketing related problems faced by organic shops retailer. If the respondent's scores are less than mean minus standard deviation (mean- S.D) is said to be low level. If the respondent's scores are more than the mean plus standard deviation (Mean + S.D) is said to be high level. And if the scores fall between the (Mean- S.D) and (Mean + S.D), then it is said to be medium level of consumer satisfaction.

Table 14 Problems Faced by Organic Shop Retailers

Marketing related problems	Number of respondents	Percentage
Low	4	26.7
Medium	9	60.0
High	2	13.3
Total	15	100.0

Source: Primary data

It is observed from the above table that majority of the shop retailers (60%) have medium level marketing related problems on organic food products, 26.7% of the shop owners have low level marketing related problems on organic food products, and 13.3% of the shop owners have high level marketing related problems on organic food products.

The Association between Monthly Sales and Marketing Related Problems of Organic Shop Retailers

H_0 - There is no significant relationship between monthly sales and marketing related problems of organic shop owners.

Table 15 Monthly Sales and Marketing Related Problems of Organic Shop Owners

Factors	Categories	Marketing related Problems of Organic Shop Owners			Total	Chi-square	P value
		Low	Medium	High			
Monthly sales	Below Rs. 30,000	0	1	0	1	4.965	0.548
	Rs.30,000 Rs.60,000	1	3	0	4		
	Rs. 60,000 Rs.90,000	0	3	1	4		
	Above Rs.90,000	3	2	1	6		
	Total	4	9	2	15		

Source: Primary data

The value of χ^2 is 4.965 for owners and marketing related problems. The P value ($0.548 > 0.05$) is greater at 5% significant level. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted at 5% level of significant and it proves that there is no significant association between the monthly sales and marketing related problems of organic shop owners.

Scope for Further Research

This research was limited to Madurai city, and in particular the respondents who consume organic food products. This could be

further expanded to various cities of India. Future research could be undertaken to study the various marketing strategies by the marketers and other factors impacting the preference of the consumers in the various strata of the society.

Findings

The major findings of the research are:

Consumers

- 51.2 % of the respondents belong to the age group of 20 - 30 years.
- 57.6 % of the respondents are female, and visit organic shops frequently.
- It is observed that 65.6% of the respondents who visit the organic shops frequently for buying food products are married.
- 56.8% of the respondents who visit organic shops are undergraduates.
- It was observed that 33.6% of the people who visit the organic shops are private employees.
- 33.6% of the respondents earn income below Rs.15, 000 monthly.
- 85.6% of the respondents' have 3 to 5 members in their family.
- 40.8% of the respondents visit the organic shop weekly.
- 73.6% of the respondents purchased organic food products from organic stores because of quality, freshness, and price. It is also evident that most of the respondents are influenced by their friends to buy organic products
- 40.8% of the respondents had purchased organic products from priority organic shops, 33.6% of the respondents had spent Rs.1, 000 per month on organic food products, 69.6% of the respondents recommended organic food products to

others and 40.8% of respondents had consumed organic food products for a period of less than 6 months.

- When asked for the reasons for consumption of organic food products, the respondents ranked their family health first with a mean score of 23.20 and second rank goes to minimize health problems with a mean score of 19.38.
- When asked to rate the level of awareness towards organic food products, the first rank goes to Rice varieties with a mean score of 25.5, second rank goes to Dal varieties with a mean score of 24.92 and the least mean score of 19.29 goes to palm products.
- On the level of consumption of organic food product the respondents ranked Rice varieties first with a mean score of 36.6, second rank goes to Dal varieties with mean score of 36.3 and the least mean score of 22.5 goes to beverages.

Retailers

- 66.7% of the retailers belong to the age group between 31-40 years.
- 66.7% of the organic shop retailers who are running the organic shop at Madurai city are male, 60% of the organic shops retailers who run the organic food products business are graduated, 33.3% of organic shop retailers had started their business between 1 - 2 years ago, 80% of the organic shop retailers are funding the business with their own source of investment, 53.3 % of the retailers were motivated to start the business to sustain a healthy environment and 40 % of the shop owners were earning a profit above Rs.90,000 per month.
- 60% of the organic shop retailers purchase their organic food product from wholesalers and local farmers, 73.3% of the retailers earned profits by selling non-perishable goods and 60% of the organic shop retailers guarantee their product competent by the government authorization and NPOP agencies.

- Amongst the different options available to the retailers to advertise their products, they chose pamphlet/handbill to be the most effective, followed by newspaper advertisements, E-advertising, television and radio advertisements, in that order.
- 40% of the organic shop retailers preferred to advertise through pamphlet/handbills, 73.3% of the retailers do not provide discount facility to their customers and would sell at reasonable price, 86.7% of the organic shop retailers deliver the products at their customer's place and 40% of the organic shop retailers reach their customers through their personal selling and word-of-mouth.
- It was found through Friedman test that the problem faced by the retailers while marketing is due to the product and promotion. Another set of difficulty is the place and price.
- All the retailers said that the government is not taking any initiative to provide any basic amenities to run the profitable business.

Suggestions

- Advertisements and sales promotions should be raised by the retailers, since their influence on the consumers has been less, though they have the potential to be a powerful medium, when compared to the word-of-mouth reference from friends and family, as seen in the results.
- Promotional advertisement of organic products can lead to an increase in daily and weekly consumers.
- There is a need to open organic shops in every extension area of Madurai city.
- It is necessary to create awareness on the health benefits of organic food products among Madurai consumers.
- Sustained improvement in product features would lead to increase in consumption of organic food products.

- Increased frequency of viewing advertisements on organic food products, and better taste would influence many to purchase more organic products.
- To have a greater influence on consumers buying organic food products, variables like familiarity, personal ideology, social interaction, monetary cost, and habits are necessary among the retailers.
- The familiarity of the organic food products among customers depends on the promotional efforts of the marketers. The availability of organic food products need to be advertised widely.
- The products initially should be made available in prominent market places and also in organic shops.
- Ensuring quality of the organic products by the farmers through certification of NPOP agencies helps the retailers acquire a good profit.
- Increased cultivation of organic farming will help the retailers to sell more organic products in the market and would consequently influence the consumers' buying behaviour.
- Banks should provide loans to organic shop retailers to enhance their business.

Conclusion

India is rapidly emerging as one of the fastest growing and largest market for organic food products in the world. The study assessed the customer preference towards organic food products, marketing strategies and promotional techniques adopted by the retailers. In this regard, it can be concluded that the customers are well aware of all the products and they prefer to consume organic food because it is healthy and environment friendly. It was found that majority of respondents are influenced by their family members to buy organic food products and they suggested that organic food products are fresh, better in quality and safe to use. The study also indicated that the customers of organic food products are very

conscious about their family health. Hence, for the benefit of the customers, the retailers market their products by adopting sales promotional techniques like direct marketing, door-to-door selling and e-advertising. The study shows that the major sales promotional techniques adopted by the retailers are selling the products at reasonable price, and door delivery to their customers. The retailers adopt marketing strategies such as personal selling and word-of-mouth. While marketing the organic food products all the retailers faced problems like shortage of products and customers' willingness to purchase such products. Hence, it can be concluded that it is in hands of the retailers to market their products in such a way that the customers can be easily attracted.

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