Workplace Affect as Mediator Between Emotional Intelligence and Job Satisfaction Among Customer Service Representatives

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The present study has been undertaken to assess the mediating role of workplace affects between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction in a convenient sample (N = 232) of customer service representatives of cellular services and banks in Sargodha and Islamabad. The Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law, 2002), Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), and job satisfaction subscale of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Camman, Fichman, Henkins, & Klesh, 1979) has been used for measuring emotional intelligence, negative and positive emotions at work, and job satisfaction, respectively. Path analysis has revealed that after controlling age and job experience, positive affect and emotional intelligence can positively predict job satisfaction. Positive affect has fully mediated between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction suggesting that emotionally intelligent people were more likely to experience positive affect, which in turn might enhance their job satisfaction. The proposed structural model has remained invariant across gender, however, occupation moderated between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction such that emotional intelligence positively predicted job satisfaction among customer service representatives (CSRs) of banking sector only whereas age has been negative predictor of job satisfaction in CSRs of cellular industry. Limitations of this study and suggestion for future research also have been discussed.

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Job satisfaction is considered as the foremost factor in the field of organizational behavior that may have an essential impact on quality of occupational life and efficiency of personnel (Hazrati, Zabihi, & Mehdizadeh, 2013). On the other hand, personal dispositions of personnel influence their occupational performance while personnel's occupation and the organization where they are employed in turn, may interact with their personal attributes (Hazrati et al., 2013). In line with this thesis, the present study was intended to explore how personal attribute of emotional intelligence and situational factors inducing negative and positive emotions at work may influence job satisfaction of employees working in customer services because customer services representatives constitute an occupational group which is frequently exposed to the positive and negative affects of clientele being served (Adil & Kamal, 2013). The choice of these two attributes is well reasoned because both of these entail affective connotations as does the construct of job satisfaction, which primarily focusses upon employees 'feelings of satisfaction about his/her job'. Moreover, this framework may help understand how the situational variable of positive and negative emotional events in the workplace may interact with personal disposition of emotional intelligence in influencing employees' job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction can be defined in terms of s multidimensional psychological responses to one's job which involves affective (or emotional), cognitive (evaluative), and behavioral constituents (Hulin, Judge, Borman, Ilgen, & Klimoski, 2003). The affective component consists of generally positive and satisfying or negative and unpleasant feelings towards the job-object accumulated over time. The cognitive component is formed by the employees' appraisals of their job environment and job characteristics against certain standards (Hulin et al., 2003). Finally, the particular intentions and behaviors emanating from the formation of an attitude gives rise to particular behaviors. The following sections have been framed with the view of delineating the dynamics between emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, and workplace affects.

Emotional Intelligence and Job Satisfaction

According to Wong and Law (2002), emotional intelligence refers to capability of accurate perception, appraisal, and expression of

emotions. It also involves the capacity of comprehending affect-rich information and the appropriate utilization of emotional knowledge; the capability of accessing and generating feelings for facilitating cognition, and the skill of emotional regulation for flourishing intellectual and emotional development and well-being (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 2000). Owing to its simultaneous effects on both cognition and emotion, the present study proposes that emotional intelligence may have a particular role in shaping one's job satisfaction.

capability One's of accurate perception, facilitation, understanding, and regulation of one's own emotions should be quite relevant to one's level of job satisfaction. As being an attitude, job satisfaction involves the accumulation of affective experiences. Emotionally intelligent (EI) employees are more likely to effectively solve emotional problems arising during their work. The emotional information are cognitively processed by employees high in EI. Therefore, highly emotional intelligent individuals should be more inclined towards better utilization of their cognitive capacity of coping with emotions emanating from their jobs and other work related contextual factors which may lead them to make more favorable attitude towards their jobs. EI may buffer the impact of negative emotions at work and make the job more pleasant and satisfying (Krishnakumar, 2008).

Affect and Job Satisfaction

According to Russell and Carroll (1999), rather than thoughts about specific objects or events, affect refers to real personal moods and feelings (e.g., when one says, "I'm feeling blue"). It is not necessary that affect can only be measured when one is getting very emotional, rather affect can be assessed at any given moment. Watson et al. (1988) assert that all positive and pleasant emotional states constitute positive affect (PA) whereas all unpleasant states constitute negative affect (NA). PA is an indicator of one's degree of being enthusiastic, alert, and active. High PA is characterized by high levels of concentration, vigor, and enjoyable engagement, whereas low PA is reflected in despondency and weariness. Contrarily, High NA involves unpleasurable engagement and subjective distress which results in various types of negative mood states, including disgust, anger, fear, contempt, guilt, and nervousness. Low NA is a state of being calm and serene (Watson et al., 1988).

The association between job satisfaction and affect is quite evident in the very definition of job satisfaction. For instance, Locke

(1976) defined job satisfaction as an enjoyable or positive affective state that emanate from one's evaluation of one's job experience. For Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969), emotional responses to various dimensions of the situation constitute satisfactions. These definitions reflect a definite association between affective states and job satisfaction, which enjoys significant empirical support as well.

Brief and Weiss (2002) asserted that job satisfaction stems from one's affective reaction to one's job. George and Jones (1997) noted that affective events constitute an essential part of the work experience. Negative or positive affect arises from working conditions that make people either satisfied or dissatisfied with their work (Meeusen, Brown-Mahoney, van Dam, van Zundert, & Knape, 2010). Positive affect has been related with job-related outcomes such as job satisfaction (Johnson, 2004).

Previous findings have indicated that negative affect is negatively related whereas positive affect is positively associated with job satisfaction (Watson et al., 1988; Judge & Church, 2000). Meta-analytical findings of Bowling, Hendricks, and Wagner (2008) argued that positive affect is related to global job satisfaction as well as to facet satisfaction, namely, satisfaction with work itself, and satisfaction with supervision, promotion, and co-workers.

Moyle (1995) advocated that individuals with high NA generally have a negative perception of the environment because of which they are likely to perceive their job negatively, which may result in lowered levels of job satisfaction. In a similar vein, Iverson, Olelalns, and Erwin (1998) suggested that individuals with high scores on PA are more likely to be satisfied with their job and have lower levels of work strain as compared to their counterparts with lower scores on PA. In contrast, individuals with high NA scores may experience lower levels of job satisfaction and higher levels of work strain as compared to those having lower scores on NA.

Theoretical Framework

All attitudes including job satisfaction do have an affective element. Since previous studies reflected upon the significance of positive and negative affect in biasing one's cognitive judgments, it is also plausible to propose that positive affects may have a positive while negative affects may have a negative influence on one's evaluation of work or job. Therefore, emotional intelligence and affects appeared to be

the prime candidates to be explored in relation to work attitude of job satisfaction.

The central theses of the present research are grounded in the theoretical framework of Affective Events Theory (AET, Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), which proposes that emotions or affects play a pivotal role in attitude formation such as job satisfaction. AET postulates that workplace events may generate emotions. These emotions may have direct and indirect effects on the formation of job-related attitudes. For instance, positive workplace emotions may result in higher levels of job satisfaction as a corollary lower turnover intentions, whereas, negative affects may have an inverse influence (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003). Since job attitudes are shaped by the dynamic and reciprocal interplay among one's emotion, cognition, and behavior, one's tendency of experiencing positive or negative affect, and one's ability to understand and manage one's own and others' emotions; an empirical investigation of the interaction among these factors may enhance our insight into the job satisfaction processes of employees in customer services. More specifically, the present study postulates positive affect and emotional intelligence as positive predictors of job satisfaction whereas negative affect is postulated as a negative predictor of job satisfaction. Moreover, a mediating role of positive affect has been proposed between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction. Finally, a positive relationship is expected between positive affect and emotional intelligence. More specifically, the present study has postulated following hypotheses:

- 1. Positive affect and emotional intelligence will be positively correlated.
- 2. Positive affect and emotional intelligence will have inverse relationship with negative affect.
- 3. Positive affect will predict job satisfaction positively.
- 4. Emotional intelligence will predict job satisfaction positively.
- 5. Negative affect will predict job satisfaction negatively.
- 6. Positive affect will mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction.

Method

The present study has utilized cross-sectional survey research design and all focal constructs were measured through psychometrically sound self-report measures.

Sample

The sample of the present study comprised of 332 (equal number of men and women) customer services representatives of various banks and cellular service providers of Sargodha and Islamabad city. The sample was conveniently drawn and equal number of customer services representatives from banks and cellular services were recruited. The age range of the sample was 19 years to 57 years (M = 26.36, SD = 5.37). The inclusion criteria include baseline education of 14 years with a minimum job experience of one year. 135 participants of the study had a job experience of up to 3 years whereas 197 participants had a job experience of more than 3 years (M = 4.18, SD = 4.26). 400 questionnaire booklets were distributed among participants out of which 340 were returned to the researcher with a response rate of 85%. Eight questionnaires were discarded because of missing responses and response set.

Assessment Measures

The demographic information were collected through a demographic sheet, which was specifically developed in the present study, where participants reported their gender, organization, and job experience. All other variable of the present study were measured through self-report psychometrically established measures. These three scales were chosen because they demonstrated established psychometric properties and provide a theoretically sound operationalization of their focal constructs with relatively short number of items. The details of these measures are as follows:

Emotional Intelligence Scale. Emotional Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law, 2002) was used for measuring emotional intelligence. This 16-item scale is scored on a 6-point Likert format (1 = "strongly disagree" and 6 = "strongly agree") with high scores corresponding to high levels of emotional intelligence. Wong and Law (2002) reported excellent levels of internal consistency for this scale (α = .94). Convergent validity of this scale has been established with other measures of emotional intelligence (Bar-On, 1997). Its discriminant validity has also been established with a measure of IQ by Eysenck (1990).

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule. Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS, Watson et al., 1988) was used for measuring positive affect (PA) and negative affect. This scale comprised of two

subscales each comprising of 10 items for measuring positive and negative affect on a 5-point Likert type response format (1 = "very slightly or not at all" and 5 = "extremely"). Higher score on NA or PA subscales indicates the greater tendency to experience a negative or positive mood respectively. This scale is quite reliable as Cronbach's alphas of .86 and .91 for PA and .85 and .83 for NA have been reported by Schaubroeck and Jones (2000) in their successive studies.

Job Satisfaction Subscale of Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire. Job satisfaction was operationalized through the three item job satisfaction subscale of Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Camman et al., 1979) on a 6-point Likert scale format (1 = "strongly disagree" and 6 = "strongly agree"). High score is suggestive of high levels of job satisfaction and vice versa. Cammann et al. (1979) reported an internal consistency reliability of .77. The first item of the scale is reversed scored.

Procedure

The managers of various banks and cellular services offices were personally contacted in their offices and after explaining the purpose of this study, their formal permission for data collection was sought. After their formal consent, employees were briefed about the purpose and nature of the study and were assured confidentiality and anonymity of their information. Questionnaire booklets along with printed instructions for responding were handed over to them. The filled questionnaires were inspected for any missing data and were collected back from the respondents with a note of gratitude for their cooperation and support.

Results

Descriptive statistics and alpha coefficient of reliability for various scales were computed through SPSS version 22. The hypotheses of the study were tested through path analysis using Amos version 20. The results are presented in Table 1 to Table 3.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics, alpha coefficients of reliability, and correlation coefficients among various variables of the present study. Values of kurtosis and skewness for all the variables are within the acceptable range, which suggested that these variables were normally distributed and parametric tests could be used. Reliability coefficients were also quite satisfactory as they were above .70 for all the scales. Emotional intelligence had significant positive relationships with

job satisfaction and positive affectivity. Positive affectivity had a significant positive relationship whereas negative affectivity had a significant negative relationship with job satisfaction. Negative affectivity had a non-significant negative relationship with emotional intelligence and positive affectivity.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliability Coefficients for Variables of Present Study

Variables	K	М	SD	α	Sk^a	Ku^b	EI	PA	NA	JS
EI	16	72.36	11.76	.89	78	.34		.45***	14*	.29***
PA	10	33.92	6.48	.76	23	.21			13*	.36***
NA	10	23.67	7.22	.81	.31	21				18**
JS	3	13.27	3.39	.76	58	37				

Note. EI = emotional intelligence. PA = positive affectivity. NA = negative affectivity. JS = job satisfaction. a Standard error of skewness = .16. b Standard error of kurtosis = .32 *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Findings of the path analysis for the proposed model of the present study are summarized in Table 2. The indices of fit for the proposed recursive model (see Figure 1) suggested that it fits well to the data. The non-significant χ^2 value along with excellent values of other fit indices demonstrated that data fits well to the proposed model (CFI, GFI, NFI were above .95 whereas RMSEA = .048, $p_{close} = .45$, Standardized RMR = .05).

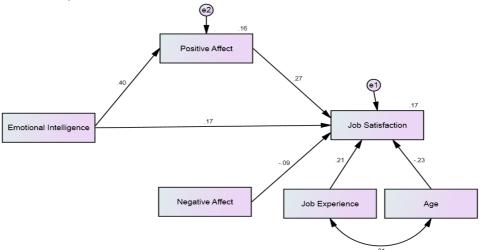


Figure 1. Structural Model of the Present Study

Table 2	
Standardized Coefficients of Direct and Indirect Paths to Job Satisfacti	on

Paths	β	95% <i>CI</i>
Age Job Satisfaction	23	5903
Experience Job Satisfaction	.21	0559
Negative Affect → Job Satisfaction	09	2706
Emotional Intelligence——Positive Affect	.40**	.2255
Emotional Intelligence → Job Satisfaction	.18	00238
Positive Affect → Job Satisfaction	.27*	.0545
Positive Affect→Emotional Intelligence→Job Satisfaction	.07*	.00320
.2 (9) 10 10 26		_

 χ^{2} (8) = 10.10, p = .26

GFI = .97

CFI = .98

RMSEA = .048, p_{close} = .45

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01

The proposed model of the present study treated age and job experience of the employees as control variables, which could not explain any significant amount of variance in job satisfaction. Positive affect had significant positive direct effect on job satisfaction whereas negative affect had a non significant direct effect on job satisfaction. The direct effect of emotional intelligence on positive affect was significant, however, its direct effect on job satisfaction was non significant. Nevertheless, when path from positive affect to job satisfaction was constrained to zero, the direct effect of emotional intelligence on job satisfaction became significant. This suggest that positive affect fully mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction because in the presence of mediator (i.e., positive affect), the otherwise significant effect of predictor (i.e., emotional intelligence) became non significant. Sobel's Z value for this indirect effect was 2.39 (p = .02) which also testifies to the full mediation by positive affect.

Gender and occupational differences in the proposed structural model were explored through comparing unconstrained (where path coefficients were freely estimated for each group) and fully constrained models (where all path coefficients were constrained to be equal across the groups) and computing chi square difference test. Results revealed that the proposed structural model was invariant across gender ($\Delta \chi^2 = 4.46$, $\Delta df = 6$, p = .62). However, the model was variant across the occupational groups of employees in banks and cellular services ($\Delta \chi^2 = 18.48$, $\Delta df = 6$, p = .05). Post hoc analyses revealed that the path from emotional intelligence to job satisfaction was significant only in relation to the customer services representatives of banking sector ($\Delta \chi^2 = 5.77$, $\Delta df = 1$, p = .02) and the control variable of age in relation to job

satisfaction was significant in customer services representatives of cellular services sector only ($\Delta \chi^2 = 5.58$, $\Delta df = 1$, p = .02). The path form negative affect to job satisfaction was significant in the banking sample only, however, constraining this path to be equal across two occupational groups did not result in significant chi square different test ($\Delta \chi^2 = 2.29$, $\Delta df = 1$, p = .13).

Table 3
Occupational and Gender Differences in Direct and Indirect Paths to Job
Satisfaction

	Occupation		Gender	
	Cellular Industry	Banks	Men	Women
Paths	β	β	β	β
	[95% CI]	[95% CI]	[95% CI]	[95% CI]
Age → Job Satisfaction	37***	.03	12	23
	[6616]	[3837]	[5223]	[5903]
Experience — Job Satisfaction	.19	03	.01	.21
	[0447]	[4438]	[4539]	[0559]
Negative Affect → Job Satisfaction	05	25***	17*	09
	[2012]	[4209]	[3101]	[2707]
Emotional Intelligence — Positive Affect	.52***	.39***	.53***	.40**
	[.3366]	[.2055]	[.3568]	[.2256]
Emotional Intelligence—Job Satisfaction	04	.31***	.06	.18
	[2316]	[.1249]	[1932]	[00238]
Positive Affect — Job Satisfaction	.34**	.23*	.29**	.27*
	[.1551]	[.00244]	[.0849]	[.0545]
Positive Affect—Emotional Intelligence —bb Satisfaction	.18**	.09*	.15**	.11**
	[.0831]	[.0218]	[.0432]	[.0419]

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p = .001

Discussion

The present study was undertaken in order to assess the relationship between workplace affects, emotional intelligence, and job satisfaction among customer services representatives. More specifically, it was hypothesized that positive affects would predict job satisfaction positively whereas negative affects would predict it negatively. Emotional intelligence was hypothesized to have positive influence on job satisfaction directly as well as indirectly via workplace positive affects.

Our first two hypotheses were supported because emotional intelligence had a significant positive relationship with positive affect and significant negative relationship with negative affect (see Table 1). Emotional intelligence facilitates the abilities of customer services representatives to regulate their emotions so they can be in a good mood and meet the needs of their customers. Furthermore, they are aware of the feelings of their clients and are sensitive to these feelings. This may lead

them to have a higher perception of positive workplace affect and lower levels of perceived negative affect.

Our third and fourth hypotheses were also supported as both positive affectivity and emotional intelligence were positively related to job satisfaction (see Tables 1 & 2). Employees who experience positive affect from their jobs seem to enjoy their jobs, believe their jobs are valuable, and feel satisfied with their work. Being satisfied with one's job might create pleasant and effective working conditions and enhance job satisfaction. This has been consistent with meta-analytic findings of Bowling et al (2008) who argued that positive affectivity is related to global job satisfaction as well as to facet satisfaction, namely, satisfaction with work itself, and satisfaction with supervision, co-workers, and promotion. Similarly, our results suggesting a positive link between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction is also consistent with Fasihizadeh et al. (2012) and Landa, López-Zafra, Antoñana, and Pulido's (2006) work who found emotional intelligence as important predictor of job satisfaction and Kafetsiosa and Zampetakis's (2008) research, which identified positive affect as mediator between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction.

Our fifth hypothesis suggesting a negative relationship between negative affectivity and job satisfaction was not supported in the total sample (see Table 2). Although it had significant negative association with job satisfaction in correlational analysis, it failed to predict job satisfaction in the proposed structural model of the present study. Although this finding is contrary to our expectations and pertinent literature, Hochwarter, Zellars, Perrewe, and Harrison (1999) cogently reasoned that employees with higher levels of negative affect are not destined to be unhappy or dissatisfied with their job, rather there could be certain situational or environmental factors that may attenuate the negative outcomes typically associated with negative Hochwarter's et al. (1999) findings demonstrated that employees high in negative affect could have been as much satisfied with their jobs as their counterparts low in negative affect if they perceive that their job scope was high. These findings suggest that individuals high in negative affect are not necessarily dissatisfied with their jobs because they could be responsive to the positive certain environmental or job characteristics.

Our final hypothesis was also supported because positive affect fully mediated between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction (see Table 2). Emotionally intelligent employees are more likely to create positive affective event by dint of their superior abilities of perceiving,

reappraising, and expressing accurate emotions as well as receiving emotional information from their clients which in turn may lead to enhanced levels of satisfaction with their work.

The variant paths of the model of the present study across the two occupational groups (i.e., cellular services sector and banking services sector) revealed moderating role of occupation in the relationship of emotional intelligence and negative affect with job satisfaction (see Table 3). Emotional intelligence had a significant direct positive effect and negative affect had a significant inverse direct effect on job satisfaction among customer services representatives of banking sector only. It may reflect the more strenuous nature of banking sector jobs where the employees are regulated by more stringent rules and regulations and more formal hierarchical organizational structure. Moreover, the nature of their jobs involving financial transactions implicates more risk and makes them more accountable as compared to their counterparts in cellular services. Their time schedule is also tougher than CSRs in cellular services, which may lead to issues of work-family conflict. Therefore, for CSRs in banking sector, emotional intelligence is more valuable resource in determining their levels of job satisfaction. Moreover, the significant direct effect of negative affect on job satisfaction of CSRs in banking sector only may signify the interaction between higher levels of perceived negative affect at workplace and the taxing nature of banking jobs, which may ultimately, culminates in reduced levels of job satisfaction.

Occupation also moderated the relationship between age and job satisfaction because age had a significant inverse relationship with job satisfaction in CSRs of cellular services but it was not related to job satisfaction of CSRs in banking sector. Most of the CSRs in cellular services do not occupy a regular or permanent post in their industry and they have higher levels of perceived job insecurity. Moreover, cellular services industry offers relatively limited fringe benefits, low pay structure, and few opportunities for career progression. In contrast, CSRs in banking sector have more promotional opportunities with well-established and secure service structure that clearly delineates the career development ladder with higher levels of compensation and other fringe benefits. Therefore, with increasing age, CSRs in cellular services are likely to be less satisfied with their jobs as compared to their counterparts in banking sector.

Limitations and Suggestions. Like any empirical investigation, the present study also involves certain limitations of its own. Firstly, owing to the cross-sectional design of the preset study, causality cannot be inferred regarding the variables in the proposed structural model since all data were collected at one point of time. Future research should employ longitudinal research design so that the causal nature of relationships among variables of the present study can be ascertained.

Secondly, all variables of the current study were operationalized through self-report measures which might have introduced common method variance resulting in inflated relationship estimates. However, it must be noted that the use of self-report measures may be appropriate in this instance because this study seeks to assess dispositional variable of emotional intelligence and perceived levels of workplace affect and job satisfaction. An emerging technique in affects at work research is the use of experience sampling methodology (ESM), whereby individuals respond to questions regarding their emotions, mood, emotional displays, and emotion regulation repeatedly in real time involving natural work contexts. This technique holds a great deal of promise for work affects research and the future studies based on this methodology may disentangle certain perplexing issues pertaining to work place affect.

Thirdly, the sample of the current study was only limited to service industry as it comprised of only the customer services representatives (CSRs) from cellular services and banks. This might have reduced the external validity of the study, so any generalization of findings should be made cautiously. Future studies must incorporate various occupational categories in their samples which may not only help in enhancing the external validity of the findings but also may yield an insight into the dynamics by which emotional intelligence and workplace affects and its correlates may vary across various occupational categories.

Finally, this study did not incorporate organizational or job variables into its framework, which could have explained why negative workplace affect did not predict employees' levels of perceived job satisfaction. It is quite plausible that job autonomy, supervisor support, authentic leadership and other important organizational variables may have an interaction with negative affect owing to which employees with high negative affect may enjoy optimal levels of job satisfaction. Therefore, future studies on role of emotional intelligence and workplace affect in relation to job satisfaction must assimilate theoretically pertinent organizational and job factors.

Conclusion and Implications. This study has postulated and tested a model of employee's' job satisfaction specifying mediating role of workplace affect between emotional intelligence and job satisfaction while controlling the influence of age and job experience. Our findings provided strong support to the proposed model and suggested that emotionally intelligent employees had greater chances of experiencing positive workplace affect, which in turn made them more satisfied with their jobs regardless of their age, occupation, gender, and job experience. These findings have not only broadened the relevant theory but also highlighted the pragmatic role of emotional intelligence and workplace affects in relation to job satisfaction. On practical side, emotional intelligence should have been assigned its due weightage in the recruitment and selection processes for employees in customer services sector because highly emotionally intelligent employees are not only more satisfied with their jobs but they also experience more positive workplace affects.

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