



Factors Underpinning the Sales Effectiveness by Grounded Theory: The Case of Food Industry

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Abstract

Today, companies are well aware of the significance of sales and attempt to stabilize and/or improve their status in the competitive climate of the markets by increasing their sales. Since there are different strategies and methods in this regard and many components are involved in the sales of companies, we tried to identify the factors affecting sales effectiveness by presenting a model. The present qualitative research aims to enumerate the factors influencing sales effectiveness using grounded theory to identify the categories underpinning the sales effectiveness of companies. The data were collected from 10 experts in the food industry in Guilan province, Iran. The collected data were analyzed by coding in the MAXQDA software. Results show that 287 concepts (in terms of repetition) were extracted from the interviews at the first step (open coding). By considering the relationship of the concepts at the axial coding level (the second step), they were narrowed to 26 categories, and finally, six themes were identified at the third step (selective coding). These themes, i.e., the factors underpinning organizational sales effectiveness, include the firms' strategic orientations, marketing capabilities, sales control management, salesforce performance, and environmental factors. As well, sales effectiveness was decomposed into the categories of investment, profitability, market share, and customer satisfaction.

Keywords:

Environmental factors, marketing skills, sales effectiveness, sales control management, sales force performance, strategic decision-making

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INTRODUCTION

Companies are faced with significant challenges in their business environment, two of the primary ones being the constantly changing demand of customers and intensifying competition. Now, they need to find ways to improve their performance. In the contemporary world where the feasibility of mass production of commodities and services has allowed increasing supply versus demand, there is no way for producers but to satisfy customers. Indeed, the domain of the market and supply cannot be defined by limited tools. Experience shows that organizations that take a traditional perspective on the concepts of customer, commodity, market, sales, purchase, competition, advertisement, quality, and so on are not only destined to fail but also lose their capital and be eliminated from the market place (Abedi, 2017). In the meantime, the importance of sales and the use of different methods and tools to succeed in sales to companies cannot be exaggerated. Companies should adopt a proper way to sell their products. The enhancement of sales effectiveness is a key task of sales managers. Today, companies are well aware of the significance of sales and attempt to maintain, stabilize, and/or improve their status in the competitive climate of the markets by increasing their sales. Many factors are involved in achieving the goal of effective sales. For instance, the accomplishment of sales effectiveness requires skillful salespeople who can help companies realize their sales goals by recognizing the needs and problems of customers and establishing effective relations with them (Panagopoulos et al., 2015). In this respect, it is also important to consider the quality of intra-organizational communications, especially the relationships between management and sales human resource (Inyang et al., 2018). Since sales strategies that companies develop for themselves can influence the effectiveness or inefficiency of sales Dehdashti-Shahrokh (2013), the present research aims to propose a model for better recognition of the factors influencing the ef-

fectiveness of sales of companies and the determination of their interrelations.

On the other hand, the issue of sales effectiveness is of higher importance in food industries because food producers are struggling with various challenges for the sale of their products including economic turmoil, fierce competition, lack of liquidity, the bargaining power of retailers, and perishability. So, effective sales are a prime priority of all companies, which requires exploring the underlying factors and soundly planning for resolving the barriers to food production and sales. The first step to accomplish this goal is to identify the factors influencing the sales effectiveness of companies. A review of the literature reveals a range of factors within the categories of strategic orientation of the company, sales management and control, marketing capabilities, and salesforce performance. Accordingly, the research mainly aims to answer the question as to what factors affect the sales effectiveness of the companies.

Studies show that organizational sales effectiveness can be influenced by environmental, organizational, and salesforce factors, some of which are enumerated here. The first factor that companies should be considered to ensure the effective sales of their products is to develop long-term key strategies. A strategic view of sales enables companies to better monitor the long-term barriers and drivers of sales, thereby enhancing their sales effectiveness Panagopoulos and Avlonitis (2010). Researchers suggest that for successful admission into the market, a company needs to establish its strategic orientation toward customers and competitors and employ the innovations required for their production (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016; Na et al., 2019; Tutar et al., 2015)

They should also have strategies to control production costs (Altuntaş et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2015; Theodosiou et al., 2012). Researchers also argue that a strategy to gain a competitive advantage and improve performance is the use of the differentiation strategy (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016; Kaleka & Morgan,

2019; Lee et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2011). In other words, the company should have products that are unique as perceived by customers versus the similar products of the competitors. Brand orientation is also a concept that has been mentioned in the literature as a strategy for companies to accomplish optimal performance in their business (C Baumgarth, 2009; Gromark & Melin, 2011). This means that the more the companies move towards establishing, developing, and protecting their brands, the better their business performance will be and this is a key aspect of food product sales.

In addition to brand orientation, the success of a company in selling its products requires a set Ahmed et al. (2014) define marketing capabilities as the ability to exploit resources and inputs, e.g. financial resources and customer database, for optimal sales. Various research works have mentioned different capabilities as the marketing capabilities, including customer relationship management (Massiera et al., 2018), product management capability (Morgan et al., 2009; Navarro-García et al., 2016), pricing capability (Murray et al., 2011), distribution capability (Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Massiera et al., 2018), and product promotion capability (Navarro-García et al., 2016). In marketing, companies should have the capabilities of customer segmentation and customer prioritization and targeting, too (Inyang et al., 2018). Other marketing capabilities that have less been noted in the research are sales domain design (Piercy, 2011) and retail network management (Massiera et al., 2018). Sales domain design refers to decisions on allocating customers to a specific salesforce, determining the geographical configuration of the sales units, and adjusting other parameters to provide an opportunity for the good performance of the individual salesforce. Poor designs adversely affect the performance of the salesforce by limiting their opportunities, thereby affecting the sales effectiveness of the organization (Piercy, 2011).

One another factor mentioned in the literature as one of the most effective factors in sales effectiveness is the salesforce performance. The performance of a salesforce includes different behavioral and outcome dimensions so that behavioral performance is the precursor of outcome performance (Fatima & Azam, 2016). The behavioral performance of a salesforce refers to non-selling activities that the salespeople employ to improve their sales (e.g., customer-oriented selling skills, adaptive selling, teamwork, and technical knowledge), whereas outcome performance refers to the quantitative results of the selling activity (e.g., sales volume and market share) (Agnihotri et al., 2017). Research shows that the development of these two factors plays an essential role in the sales effectiveness of organizations (Gustafson et al., 2018).

A factor at the organizational level that may improve the behavioral and outcome performance of salespeople is a sales management and control system, which is by definition designed to condition the selling behavior of salespeople (Guenzi et al., 2014) and even all activities of the company and its people. Sales controls are important for several reasons. They strongly influence the economic performance of a company (Echchakoui, 2017) and its customer relationship because salespeople operate at the first line of a company (Albers et al., 2010). Besides, based on the cost structure of many companies, it is vital to control the salesforce because they constitute the greatest part of the marketing people and a great budget is spent on them. Consequently, designing mechanisms to control the salespeople's activities is a paramount field of sales research and activity (Malek et al., 2018). (Panagopoulos et al., 2015) note that the effective management of sales control should encompass both formal and informal controls.

The research is scientifically composed of two sections including scientific (qualitative) objectives and applied objectives. The qualitative section includes describing research

variables and recognizing components and variables, and the applied section includes identifying useful platforms for making sales effective, identifying sales effectiveness components, and presenting the priority of the sales effectiveness components by proposing a paradigmatic and conceptual model.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was a qualitative study based on grounded theory. Grounded theory is used to achieve natural findings from interviews to use them in a real environment. This method uses an inductive approach to identify the underlying categories of the phenomenon in question. In the qualitative phase, the library and field methods were employed for data collection. The field part was composed of two instruments, i.e., in-depth (semi-structured) interviews and the coding of the collected data.

The statistical population was composed of all experts in sales effectiveness in food industries in Guilan province, Iran. The sample size was determined based on the principle of saturation. That is, the researcher kept collecting data as long as new categories or themes emerged, but when the data is saturated, the sampling stops. As such, the present research was saturated with 10 interviews.

It should be noted that the interviews were conducted individually and the sessions were recorded. After the daily interviews were collected, they were subjected to open coding in the MAXQDA software package for which the repeated concepts were categorized, and then, they were classified based on an axial category. Finally, selective coding was used to adjust the final themes.

Qualitative method

1) *Collection of qualitative data:* Data were collected by conducting specialized interviews with experts and using in-depth and semi-structured interviews and reviewing the literature on the subject.

2) *Analysis of qualitative data:* By recording

and storing interviews in the form of text and analyzing by coding and extracting themes, categories, and concepts, the collected data were analyzed.

3) *Qualitative findings:* Using the Delphi technique, the indicators and relationships extracted in the interviews and the theoretical foundations were reviewed and rewritten, and a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire was tested for content validity by the Kendall rank test.

In-depth interviews were used to collect data. An in-depth interview is, in fact, a two-way conversation and a kind of almost unstructured conversation with people who have been selected from the target audience. In-depth interviewing - like a focus group - is an unstructured and direct method of obtaining information. However, in-depth interviews, in contrast to focus groups, are conducted one-on-one. These interviews usually lasted from half an hour to more than an hour. The interviews sought to uncover underlying motives, prejudices, or attitudes about sensitive topics. The in-depth interview, which was conducted in person, had the following steps:

- Preparing the interview: By identifying the participants, time and place were coordinated to interview them. Also, the necessary tools for recording audio and taking notes were provided.

- Simultaneous analysis: In the qualitative method, data collection and analysis were performed simultaneously to provide theoretical saturation conditions.

Therefore, with each interview, analysis was performed to determine the continuation of the interviews.

Data coding and analysis

The method of analyzing the data collected from in-depth interviews in the phenomenological method was similar to the grounded theory. Therefore, three coding steps were used in data analysis, each pursuing a specific goal. These three steps included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. To qualita-

tively analyze the interviews conducted and convert them into written text, all the recorded conversations of the interviewees were converted by the researcher into written text and converted into input text, and then the following steps were taken.

Open coding

Open coding is an analytical process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data. Open coding, or line-to-line coding, aims to turn textual data into concepts (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage, the primary categories of information about the phenomenon under study are formed by the segmentation of information. The researcher leaves the categories with all the collected data, such as interviews, observations, and events or self-based notes (Hernandez, 2009).

Axial coding

Axial coding is the process of linking categories to subcategories, and linking categories at the feature and dimension level. This coding is called "axial" because the coding takes place around the "axis" of a category (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage, the categories, features, and dimensions of open coding are formulated and put in place to build on the growing knowledge of the relationship valley (Charmaz, 2006). Strauss (2010) discusses some of the key steps in the coding phase, which are shown in the list below. This is a list of the main axial coding actions.

State the characteristics of a category and its dimensions, an action that was initiated during open coding.

Identify different conditions, different actions or interactions, and different consequences related to a phenomenon.

Relate a category to its subcategories, through propositions that explain how they relate to each other.

Search for clues in the data that indicate how the main categories may be related to each other

Selective coding

The whole analysis process involves the sequential integration of data into a small set of more abstract concepts and categories (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage, the categories are extracted in the form of themes. From the relationship between them, we will seek answers to research questions. Selective coding is the integration and refinement of theory. The first step in integration is to determine the central or core category, which represents the main theme of the research, although the central issue emerges from the research.

Applying the Delphi technique

At this stage, the results obtained from the theoretical foundations and analysis of interview data for two purposes are once again provided to expert members to (1) investigate the relationships between variables or categories and (2) ensure the accuracy of indicators (signs, concepts) used to extract the final indicators

Data analysis

In the qualitative part of this research, all stages of interviewing, implementation, and analysis were conducted by MAXQDA software. Also, to calculate the content validity index using the Kendall correlation coefficient, SPSS20 software was used. Also, in this section, the interpretive structural modeling method was used to discover the relationships between the identified themes. The purpose of this method is to classify the factors and identify the relationships between the criteria. This is a qualitative-quantitative method that has many applications in various sciences. This method consists of five steps as follows:

1- Formation of structural self-interaction matrix (SSIM)

In this step, the experts consider the criteria in pairs with each other and respond to the pair comparisons based on the following. That is, in each comparison, the two criteria use the letters V, A, X, O based on the follow-

ing definitions.

- V: The factor of row *i* causes the factor of column *j* to be realized.

- A: The factor of column *j* causes the factor of row *i* to be realized.

X: Both the row and column factors cause each other to be realized (factors *i* and *j* have a two-way relationship).

- O: There is no relationship between the row and column factor.

2- *Obtaining the initial achievement matrix*

By converting the symbols of the SSIM matrix to numbers 0 and 1 based on the sub-matrix, the initial achievement is obtained.

- If the symbol of house *ij* is the letter V, the number 1 is placed in that house and the number zero is placed in the symmetrical house.

- If the symbol of house *ij* is the letter A, the number 0 is placed in that house and the number 1 is placed in the symmetrical house.

- If the symbol of house *ij* is the letter X, the number 1 is placed in that house and the number 1 is placed in the symmetrical house.

- If the symbol of house *ij* is the letter O, the number 0 is placed in that house and the number 0 is placed in the symmetrical house.

3- *Matching the achievement matrix*

The initial achievement matrix must be checked if $i, j = 1, j, k = 1 \rightarrow i, k = 1$. That is, if criterion A is related to criterion B and criterion B is related to criterion C, then criterion A must also be related to C.

4- *Determining the level of variables*

In this step, we calculate the set of input

(prerequisite) and output (achievement) criteria for each criterion, and then we also specify the common factors. The subscriber is equal. After identifying these variables or variables, we remove their rows and columns from the table and repeat the operation on the other criteria.

5- *Drawing the network of interactions*

In this step, according to the levels of criteria in ISM and the relationships between them, a network of interactions is created. Level one is selected as the most influential level, and the last level is selected as the most influential level.

Interpretive structural modeling

After discovering the main themes of the interviews, in order to determine the relationship between them in this stage, the method of interpretive structural modeling consisting of five steps was used, the results of which are presented below. It should be noted that this method was analyzed based on the fashion of research experts' answers.

Step 1: Structural self-interaction matrix

In the first step, the structural self-interaction matrix of the research was developed using the opinion of the respondents and is shown in Table 1.

Step 2: Initial access matrix

In the second step, the initial achievement matrix must be formed by converting the structural self-interaction matrix to numbers 0 and 1 (Table 2).

Table 1
Structural Self-interaction Matrix

	Strategic orientation	Marketing capabilities	Sales control management	Salesforce performance	Environmental factors	Sales effectiveness
Strategic orientation		V	O	O	O	V
Marketing capabilities			A	V	O	V
Sales control management				V	O	V
Salesforce performance					O	V
Environmental factors						V
Sales effectiveness						

Table 2
Initial Access Matrix

	Strategic orientation	Marketing capabilities	Sales control management	Salesforce performance	Environmental factors	Sales effectiveness
Strategic orientation	0	1	0	0	0	1
Marketing capabilities	0	0	0	1	0	1
Sales control management	0	1	0	1	0	1
Sales force performance	0	0	0	0	0	1
Environmental factors	0	0	0	0	0	1
Sales effectiveness	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3
Compatibility of the Achievement Matrix

	Strategic orientation	Marketing capabilities	Sales control management	Salesforce performance	Environmental factors	Sales effectiveness	Influence
Strategic orientation	0	1	0	1*	0	1	3
Marketing capabilities	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Sales control management	0	1	0	1	0	1	3
Sales force performance	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Environmental factors	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Sales effectiveness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Degree of dependence	0	2	0	3	0	5	

Table 4
Summary of Themes Leveling Results

Theme	Level
Strategic orientation	3
Marketing capabilities	2
Sales control management	3
Salesforce performance	2
Sales effectiveness	3
Degree of dependence	1

Step 3: Match the achievement matrix

In the third step, the primary access matrix must be adapted. This compatibility is added to the primary access matrix using secondary relationships that may not exist. In Table 3, the cells denoted by * are the relationships created in the compatible matrix.

Step 4: Determine the level of variables

In the fourth step, the levels of each variable should be obtained based on the compatible achievement matrix. We calculated the sum of input and output variables and subscription, and in each iteration if the output variable is equal to the subscription variable, it is

the *i*th level iteration. Then, in the next row and column dimension, the variable is removed from the matrix and the calculations are performed again. The results are summarized in Table 4.

Step 5: Draw the network of interactions

In the fifth step, the ISM interaction network is drawn using the levels obtained from the criteria. The segmentation of the obtained levels is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The Segmentation of the Levels

RESULTS

In the qualitative phase, the data collected from the interviews were analyzed by the coding method in the MAXQDA software package. They were then integrated with the theoretical framework and the conceptual model.

Interview data analysis

In this phase, the concepts, categories, and themes were discovered in the interviews by the coding technique at three steps of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Table 5 presents the results of this analysis.

Based on the results, 287 concepts (considering the repetitions) were derived out of the interviews at the open-coding step. After the connections of the concepts were considered, they were reduced to 26 categories at the axial coding step. Finally, six themes were identified at the selecting coding step. After these steps were concluded, the paradigm and conceptual models of the research were obtained based on the selective coding, which

were drawn as shown in Figures 2 and 3 following consulting with the experts.

The categories of the model

A key aspect of grounded theory is the theoretical sensitivity or, in other words, the control of findings derived from the interviews through comparison with the previous theoretical framework. Accordingly, 66 papers in domestic journals and 120 papers in the journals of other countries were assessed whose results are presented in Table 6.

Topic No. 1: Company’s Strategic Orientations:

In almost all interviews, the issue of developing the right strategy was emphasized as the first success factor in creating sales effectiveness. The dimensions of this theme in the form of categories were extracted from the concepts as follows:

1- Customer orientation: According to one of the interviewees,
 “The most important and main step in the

Table 5
The results of the coding of the interviews

Theme	Category	Concepts (frequency)
Company's strategic orientations	Customer-orientation	Considering customers' needs and tastes (2); predicting customers' future needs (3); continuously measuring customer satisfaction (2); creating needs in customers (1)
	Competitor-orientation	Studying and identifying competitors (weaknesses, strengths, strategies, and goals) (3); improving competitiveness versus the competitors (1); helping customers collect data on competitors (2)
	Cost-orientation	Planning to cut unnecessary costs of production and distribution (5); supplying liquidity by reducing current costs (3); making economies of scale or mass production (1)
	Brand-orientation	Trying to be present in regional markets for the sake of brand development (2); managing and investing in brand making (2); stabilizing the presence in the market for brand establishment (1)
	Differentiation	Adding secondary advantage to the product (2); differentiating the appearance of the product (1), different taste (1); making differentiation in ready-to-eat food production (1)
Marketing capabilities	Customer relationship management capability	Fostering trust in customers for establishing a long-term relationship (2); responding and taking responsibility about customers (1); establishing and keeping a close relationship with suppliers and distributors (3)
	Product management capability	Using high-quality raw material (7); using attractive packaging (7); using up-to-date technology in production (5); diversifying products (4); organic production (4); recruiting skillful production people (4); using up-to-date knowledge in production (3); storing strong raw material (2); providing appropriate production infrastructure (1); hiring skillful personnel for production and marketing (1)
	Pricing capability	Correct (knowledge-based) pricing versus the competitors (6); using pricing skills and systems to rapidly respond to the market changes (2); monitoring competitors' prices and price variations (3)
	Distribution capability	Timely distribution of products (7); using various distributors (1); recruiting and retaining the best distributors (4); capability of establishing a relationship with distributors (3)
	Promotion capability	Generating attractive advertising content (8); using virtual and social networks for advertising (3); considering rewards and discounts for customers (1); considering special occasions in the year for advertising (1); attending domestic and foreign exhibitions (1); directing government subsidies to promote healthy food (1)
	Sales domain designing capability	Customer segmentation (based on their value or profitability, their demographic characteristics such as place of residence, or their buying behavior) (4); properly designing the geographical area of sales (2); prioritizing customers (based on their importance to the company) (2); determining the size of the salesforce for each domain (4); determining the deployment of a seller's sales time within customers in his or her area (2)
	Retailing network management	Establishing an appropriate mechanism for non-cash sales (6); suitable bids on goods for retailers (3); considering the appropriate profit margin for the retailer (1); selecting quality retailers (5)
Sales control management	Formal control	Continuously training the people (4); evaluating, improving, and providing ongoing feedback on staff performance (3); Performance-based promotions and downgrading (1); holding challenging meetings with staff to remove obstacles (1); setting specific goals for personnel (3)
	Information control	Motivating staff with material and spiritual gifts (4); encouraging staff to cooperate with one another (2); creating an environment for mutual respect (2); creating an environment in which staff feel proud of the company (1)
Salesforce performance	Behavioral performance	Salesforce's experience (6); ability to establish a long-term relationship between salesforce and retailers (4); salesforce's commitment (3); salesforce's creativity (2); salesforce's character (2); salesforce's knowledge (knowledge of product features, company production processes and market) (2); flexibility in sales methods (3); using a wide range of sales approaches (3); efforts to provide the best product to the customer according to his or her needs (2); establishing strong working relationships with other people in the company (1); very close coordination with other employees of the company to address the problems of past sales and after-sales service (1)
	Outcome performance	The salesperson's ability to sell new products of the company (3); the salesperson's ability to create more market share for the company's products (2); the salesperson's ability to go beyond the predetermined goals of the company in selling products (2); the salesperson's ability to identify and sell products to the main and effective buyers in the market (2)

Table 5
Continued

Theme	Category	Concepts (Frequency)
Environmental factors	Economic	Economic fluctuations (10); instability in raw material prices (1) Weak government policy-making (6); lack of governmental support (4); changes in governmental policies and laws (3); lack of governmental monitoring of the market (2); improper governmental quotas on raw materials (1); administrative bureaucracy (1); unsupported licensing (1)
	Socioeconomic	Different market cultures (5); reduced purchasing power of the people (2)
	Technology	Technological changes in the market (3); dependence on foreign countries for raw materials and technology (1); weak domestic technology (1)
	Competitive	Competition pressure in the market (7); extensive incentive and promotion competitions in the industry (2)
Organizational sales effectiveness	Investment	Increased investment in business development (1); increased investment in research and development (1)
	Profitability	Achieving profit margins versus the company's goals (3); achieving profit margins versus competitors (1)
	Market share	Gaining market share versus the company's goals (4); gaining market share versus competitors (2); gaining sales volume versus the predetermined goals (2); gaining sales volume more than competitors (2)
	Customer satisfaction	Satisfying customer expectations versus the predetermined goals (3); satisfying customer expectations versus competitors (2)

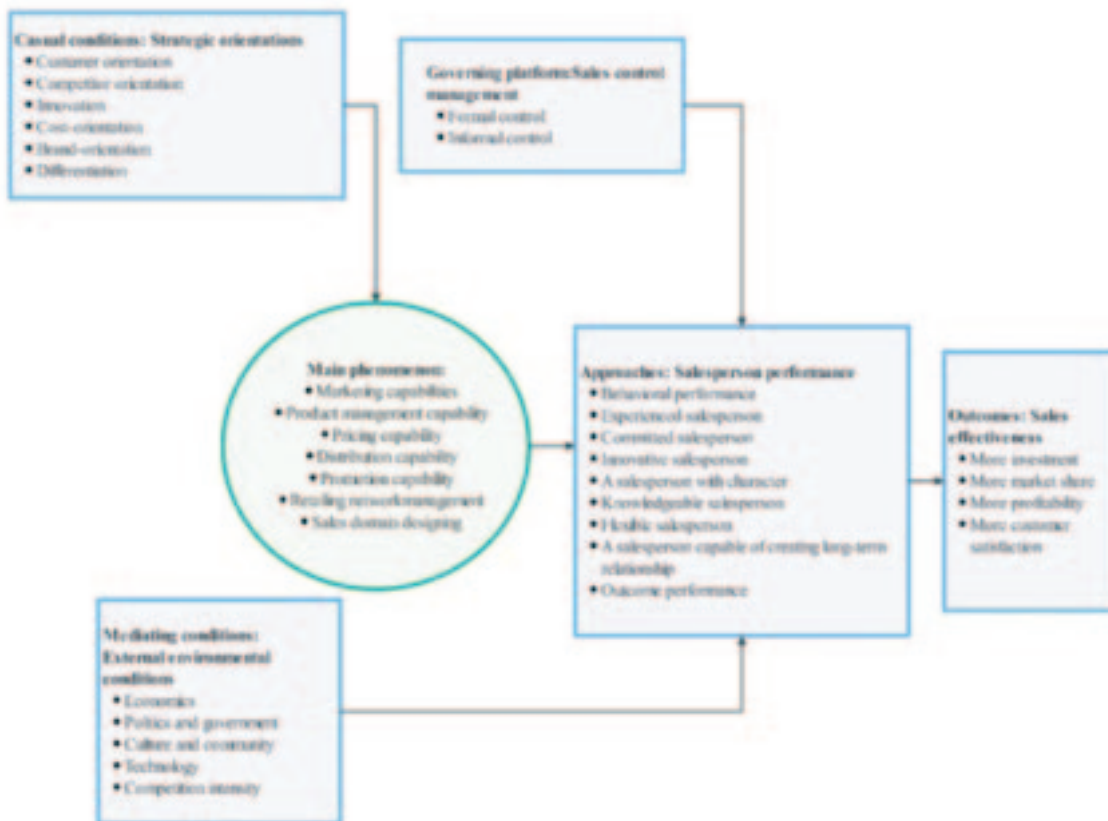


Figure 2. The Paradigm Derived from the Selective Coding of the Interviews

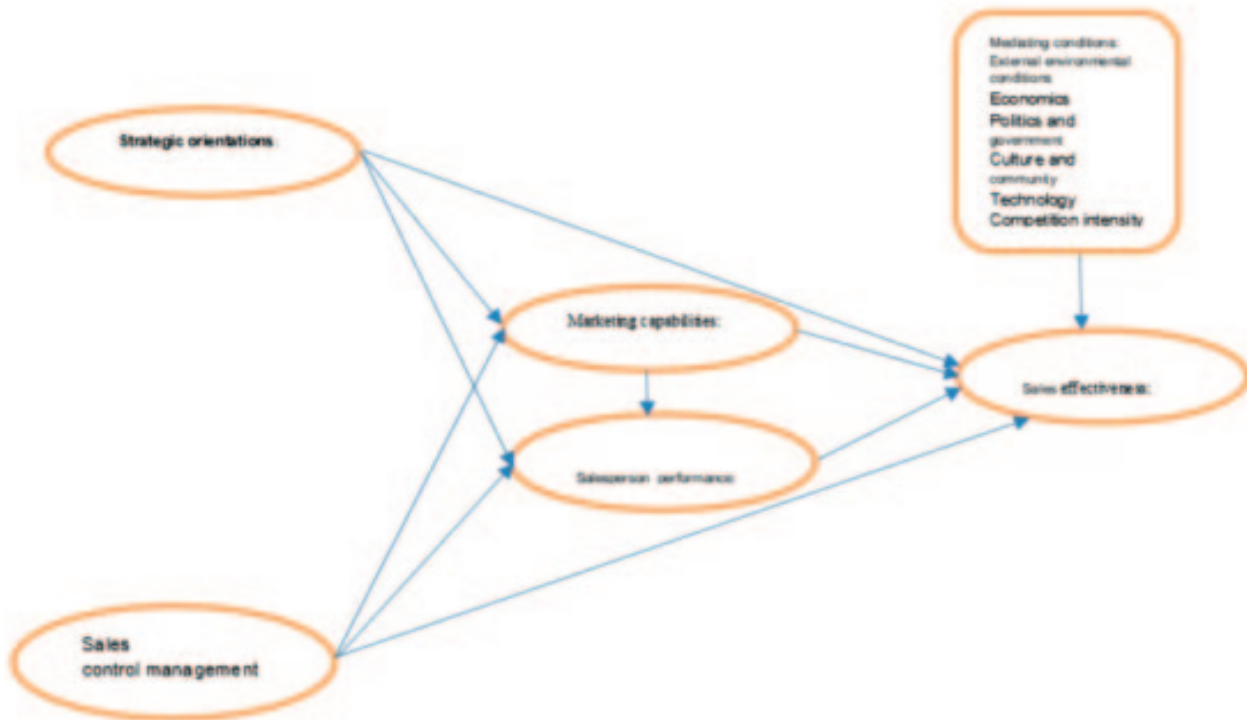


Figure 3. The Conceptual Model Derived from the Selective Coding of The Interviews in the MAXQDA Software Package

Table 6
The Dimensions of the Research Model and the Supporting Literature

Theme	Definition	Category	Supporting literature (domestic)	Supporting literature (foreign)
Company's strategic orientation	Strategic orientation refers to how a company adapt to the external environment. It is also used for specific managerial perception, readiness, willingnesses, motivations, and demands that guid strategic planning and strategic development process (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016).	Customer-orientation	Dehdashti-Shahrokh (2015); (Habibi & Mira, 2018; Hakimi, 2018; Naieji, 2018; Rahimi, 2018; Rahimnia, 2016)	(Adams et al., 2019; Altuntaş et al., 2013; Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016; Na et al., 2019; Panda, 2014; Theodosiou et al., 2012; Tutar et al., 2015)
		Competitor-orientation		
		Innovation-orientation		(Altuntaş et al., 2013; Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016; Theodosiou et al., 2012; Tutar et al., 2015)
		Brand-orientation	(Dehdashti-Shahrokh, 2015, 2017; Naieji, 2018; Ork, 2015)	(Carsten Baumgarth, 2009; Gromark & Melin, 2011; Napoli, 2006; Wong & Merrilees, 2005)
		Cost-orientation	(Bagheri, 2018; Behzadnia & Sanoubar, 2019; Mortazavi, 2015; Rastegar, 2015; Vazifeh Doost, 2013)	(Altuntaş et al., 2013; Kaleka & Morgan, 2019; Lee et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2009; Murray et al., 2011; Theodosiou et al., 2012)
Differentiation	(Bagheri, 2018; Behzadnia & Sanoubar, 2019; Rastegar, 2015; Vazifeh Doost, 2013)	(Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016; Kaleka & Morgan, 2019; Lee et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2011)		

Table 6
Continued

Theme	Definition	Category	Supporting literature (domestic)	Supporting literature (foreign)	
Sales control management	It refers to the efforts of the management and other stakeholders to influence the behavior and activities of the marketing staff to achieve optimal goals (Guenzi et al., 2014).	Formal control	(Qaracheh, 2010)	(Altıntaş et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2007; Panagopoulos et al., 2015; Samaraweera & Gelb, 2015; Skiba et al., 2016)	
		Informal control		(Altıntaş et al., 2017; Guenzi et al., 2014; Panagopoulos et al., 2015)	
Marketing capabilities	It refers to a complicated set of knowledge, skills, and capabilities that are present at all levels of an enterprise's business processes (Massiera et al., 2018).	Customer relationship management	(Dehdashti-Shahrokh, 2017; Golshahi, 2015; Mangali, 2015; Ork, 2015)	(Johnson et al., 2012; Kaleka & Morgan, 2019; Massiera et al., 2018)	
		Product management	(Hajipour, 2015; Hosseinzadeh Shahri, 2016; Mangali, 2015; Moazez, 2018; Rezaei Dolatabadi, 2006)	(Kaleka & Morgan, 2019; Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Massiera et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2009; Murray et al., 2011; Navarro-García et al., 2016)	
		Pricing	(Aghjani & Farzadfar, 2013; Dehdashti-Shahrokh, 2015; Hosseinzadeh Shahri, 2016; Mangali, 2015)	(Lee & Griffith, 2004; Leonidou et al., 2002; Massiera et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2009; Murray et al., 2011; Navarro-García et al., 2016; Vorhies & Morgan, 2005)	
		Distribution	(Aghjani & Farzadfar, 2013; Dehdashti-Shahrokh, 2015, 2017; Hosseinzadeh Shahri, 2016; Mangali, 2015; Moazez, 2018)	(Lee & Griffith, 2004; Leonidou et al., 2002; Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Massiera et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2009; Murray et al., 2011; Navarro-García et al., 2016; Vorhies & Morgan, 2005)	
		Promotion			
		Sales domain design	(Dehdashti-Shahrokh, 2015, 2017; Hosseinzadeh Shahri, 2016)	(Baldauf et al., 2001; Leonidou et al., 2002; Massiera et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2009; Pappas et al., 2009; Piercy, 2011)	
Salesforce performance	It refers to the extent to which a salesforce accomplish predetermined sales goals (Groza et al., 2016)	Behavioral performance	(Azizi, 2014; Rahimi, 2018)	(Babakus et al., 1996; Baldauf et al., 2001; Panagopoulos & Avlonitis, 2010; Piercy, 2011)	
		Outcome performance	(Hajipour, 2015; Rezaei Dolatabadi, 2006)	(Piercy, 1999 #55; Vorhies, 2005 #65)	
Organizational sales effectiveness	It refers to the extent to which companies accomplish their predetermined sales goals or their sales goals versus their competitors (Vorhies & Morgan, 2005).	Market share	(Dehdashti-Shahrokh, 2015, 2017; Shamabadi, 2005)		
		Profitability			
		Customer satisfaction			
Environmental factors	It refers to the factors that are out of the control of a company but affect its production and sales (Panagopoulos & Avlonitis, 2010).	Economic, political, cultural, technological, and competitive	(Dehdashti-Shahrokh, 2015, 2017; Shamabadi, 2005)	(Altıntaş et al., 2013; Boso et al., 2019; Guenzi et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2012; Kaleka & Morgan, 2019; Murray et al., 2011; Panagopoulos & Avlonitis, 2010; Panda, 2014; Pappas et al., 2009)	

process of customer satisfaction is identifying expectations, expectations and possible requirements of the consumer, which is not met by speculation and is achieved only by referring to the customer and receiving his views.”

In this regard, the company uses statistical techniques and techniques to survey customers. In fact, the customer expectations identification program is prepared and adjusted and implemented by using the information obtained from the mentioned cases.

2- Competitiveness: For decisions related to the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategies, information belonging to competing companies is so important that according to one of the interviewees,

“One of the problems is ignoring the tastes and performance of competing companies. Foreign companies in the Persian Gulf area pay attention to the packaging and taste of all kinds of food and beverages and have even succeeded in selling bottles and cans of all kinds of food and beverages in the Iranian market with prices much higher than their Iranian equivalent. Sometimes companies focus all their marketing efforts on what their customers want, without paying attention to the competitor, and even they define the only way for their brand to win the battle at a lower price.”

3- Tendency to innovation: According to one of the interviewees,

“In order not to fall behind, we must always be innovative in the production of various and new products, and having new products, in addition to having modern machinery, requires innovative and capable people.”

4- Costing: Costing “shows a company’s emphasis on the efficiency of all parts of the value chain” as one of the interviewees said,

“Given the opportunities and threats ahead, it seems that the right strategy for food companies could be to focus on cost-reduction models to help increase productivity and effectiveness. Manufacturing firms must be able to reduce their current costs by at least 30 to 50 percent. What makes many indus-

tries grow is the savings on a larger scale. At the same time, when one or more companies in an industry have a scale advantage, if another company wants to compete with them, it must start mass production or incur the high cost of small-scale production.”

5- Brand orientation: According to one of the interviewees, “The role of the brand is very important in selling a food product. If the product is well-known in the market or in the brand market, it is easier to find a product than when a product has a name unknown to the customer. Proper brand management can not only affect the high sales of a product but also other products related to the brand. For example, if a consumer likes a particular biscuit and trusts the brand, he or she is more likely to try other products offered by the company, such as chocolate or cookies.”

6- Distinction: According to one of the interviewees,

“If food companies can implement the differentiation strategy correctly, that is, if they have a clear advantage over competitors, then they can easily increase their customer loyalty, resulting in customers paying less for the product or service provided. They become sensitive.”

Topic 2: Marketing Capabilities: Another factor that was mentioned in almost all interviews or aspects of it was the marketing capabilities of a company to sell more products.

In general, marketing capabilities are defined as “the use of an organization’s knowledge, skills, and resources to create added value for goods and services, meet competitive demands, and respond to market-related needs” (8). The dimensions of this theme in the form of categories were extracted from the concepts as follows:

1- Ability to manage customer relations so that according to one of the respondents,

“When you prioritize the customer and look at each interaction from their point of view, the result of your work will be to provide them with better experiences, which will in turn increase their trust in the company.

Therefore, the secret of companies' survival is in creating a mechanism to establish long-term and better communication with the customer. Customer friendly behavior is the most important thing in marketing. In general, the phrase "the customer is always right" is made for this reason."

2- Ability to manage product production: According to the victims, one of the most important sales indicators is related to the product itself and how it is produced. According to one of the interviewees,

"One of the most important reasons for not selling products is the quality of the product, which can make it difficult to sell that product, even if we use the best sales force. Weaknesses in new technology for product production or product packaging have led to losses in the sale of food products. This overseas dependence hurts all the companies that produce food, both in terms of raw materials and packaging. Therefore, the lack of proper infrastructure for production is one of the problems of Iranian companies in the field of production. Lack of proper knowledge in producing products or packaging is one of the weaknesses of other Iranian companies."

- Pricing capability: According to one of the interviewees,

"Establishing a fair price for a product is also an important factor in effective product sales. Product pricing is an important and complex issue that requires an interaction between supply and demand. Also in this section, it should be noted that the real value of the product as well as the value that the buyer attaches to it is well considered. For example, pricing too high or too low for a good product can lead to market failure. Most companies focus on promotional activities and calculate pricing only at the cost of the product and simply skip it. However, the right approach in this area can have a tremendous impact on product sales, product development, and the overall future of the company."

4- Distribution capability: According to one

of the interviewees,

"Without a proper distribution system, even the best products are doomed to failure. For this reason, companies are always looking for competitive advantages with high profit margins in order to increase responsiveness to meet the changing needs of the market and customers. In this way, designing a proper distribution channel can pave the way for us to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Having an integrated distribution system and skilled intermediaries prevents the company from wasting financial resources and saves on distribution costs and reduces the cost of products."

5- Ability to promote: According to one of the interviewees,

"Using advertising campaigns, participating in exhibitions, establishing specialty stores such as health, sweet honey is some of the new ways of marketing food products. Recently, with the introduction of new printing and packaging technology, the use of smart labels is used to better introduce the product to the audience. The overall product production gained useful information. But, because of the high cost of this technology, this marketing method is currently used sparingly in luxury products."

6- Sales domain design: According to one of the interviewees,

"99 years will be a challenging year for start-ups in the food market. There must be careful planning. Due to the new economic conditions, the balance between the different deciles of the society has changed drastically and the society is basically being divided into one or a large part with a long distance. Choosing an audience is very important for food companies in this situation, and this can help to choose the right marketing strategy. The middle and lower classes of society are currently very price sensitive. Using the element of creativity to choose the right path and range can help the audience better understand and use the product."

7- Retail network management capability: According to one of the interviewees,

“In my opinion, for customers, especially retailers, in the long run, providing services has a higher priority than price. In Iranian companies that produce food products, unfortunately, services for selling their products are less considered and most of them use price leverage. Shopkeepers are reluctant to buy from brand companies because brand companies do not expand their services. For example, they limit the time allowed for checks.”

Topic 3: Sales Control Management: Without control management, it is not possible to evaluate the results and improve the course, and this issue was mentioned by the interviewees as a key component of food companies' sales effectiveness. Sales control management is basically designed to shape the sales behaviors of salespeople and the organization's personnel to achieve the expected results and is usually done in two ways: formal and informal control (62). The dimensions of this theme in the form of categories were extracted from the concepts as follows:

1- Formal control: According to one of the interviewees,

“Proper management of human resources, especially sales force, is a factor of success for companies. For employees, both incentives and punishments must be considered because capable employees will lose their motivation to work if they do not see the management dealing with lazy employees. Also, training human resources and holding numerous meetings and challenges with them, e.g. reviewing sales problems, can be very helpful. In this regard, planning to solve problems must be on the agenda. Checking for drops in sales or price increases or pressure from competitors should be constantly monitored in meetings and decisions made about them. We also have to decide on discounts and offers for our customers.”

2- Informal control:

“One of the main internal factors of a company for the successful sale are the human factors of that company, which should be constantly motivated. These incentives must be made both materially, such as the payment of amounts other than those stated in the pay slip, and materially, such as thanks and appreciation.”

Topic 4: Salesforce performance: Almost all interviewees believed that the sales force of companies that are in direct contact with customers or retailers as the tip of the arrow of the company's marketing activities will play a key role in the success or failure of the company.

Regarding the content of sales force performance, considering the scattering of concepts extracted from the opinions of the interviewees, the researcher concluded that sales force performance is generally divided into two categories: behavioral performance and consequential performance as follows::

1- Behavioral performance of the sales force: According to one of the interviewees,

“One of the key factors in effective sales is the experienced sales force, and the discussion of the leadership team and goals and training and motivation is important in the next stage. Experience, creativity, and knowledge of the sales force can be the main factors of effective sales. Also, establishing the right sales force relationship with customers can be one of the main factors in an effective sale.”

2- Consequential performance of the sales force: According to one of the interviewees,

“A good salesperson should be able to sell the company's new products. He must also continuously expand his market share in the geographical area. Losing a normal market share is one of the signs of a poor salesperson failing.”

Topic 5: Environmental factors: Environmental factors are defined as factors that are

beyond the control of the company but affect its production and sales activities.

Interviewees believed that economic, political, and governmental forces, technological change, socio-cultural forces, and competitors' forces would influence and adjust the effectiveness of corporate sales, and the above theme was extracted accordingly.

According to one of the interviewees,

"One of the important problems of the food market inside Iran is the unfortunate interference of government decision-makers in various sectors. Strong insistence on intervening in pricing without careful and rapid attention to the effective factors, very rapid changes in policies, and various waves of economic rumors are among the biggest obstacles for manufacturing companies. These issues ultimately lead to opaque markets and the production of lower quality goods, which will erode the confidence of buyers and consumers in the long run, and this is not in the best interests of the food industry."

Topic 6: Organizational Sales Effectiveness: Sales effectiveness refers to the extent to which companies achieve their set sales goals or their set goals relative to competitors.

According to the interviewees, to be able to determine whether a company has achieved sales effectiveness in a certain period of time during its activity, the following four categories should be considered:

1- Market share effectiveness: Market share effectiveness refers to the amount of sales, or the number or volume of sales of the product and also market share, or in other words, the percentage of customer coverage or the percentage of coverage of a larger geographical area (1).

2- Profitability: Profitability refers to the balance resulting from the subtraction of revenues from sales of the product and all costs of the supply, production, and distribution chain. The higher it is from the projected amounts or from the other competitors, the

more effective the company will be in its sales.

3- Customer Satisfaction: Customer satisfaction refers to the fulfillment of customer expectations from the consumption of the product. The higher the level of fulfillment of expectations, the more he refers to the product and thus the higher the effectiveness of a company's sales.

4- Investment: Among the other categories that were extracted from the interviewees' conversations about the company's sales effectiveness indicators, the issue of investment was more, which is not mentioned in any of the theoretical foundations. According to one of the interviewees,

"If a company is effective in selling its products, then the company will be more interested in making more investments to grow its business. Even in large companies, a large portion of its revenue is spent on research and development. They do so to be in line with current knowledge and to produce quality and varied food."

CONCLUSION

Companies should take appropriate methods to sell their products - methods that finally result in their sales effectiveness. The results of the data analysis revealed that a company will achieve sales effectiveness that it can accomplish greater market share, higher profitability, and greater customer satisfaction when compared to its own predetermined goals and its competitors and it makes more investment in its business development. But, none of these is possible without sound strategic orientations. A company should first specify its orientation towards customers and competitors and use all strategic tools, e.g., innovation, cost-orientation, brand-orientation, and product differentiation, to create a competitive advantage in the market. In this respect, the interviewees asserted that the priorities in a company's strategic orientations should be given to predicting the future needs of customers and considering their tastes, studying and identifying competitors (their weaknesses,

strengths, strategies, and goals), recruiting a strong and innovative management team, planning to eliminate unnecessary costs of production and distribution, attempting to be present in regional markets for the sake of brand development, and developing differentiation in products.

Another factor that companies need to make their sales effective and was mentioned by the participants frequently is the development of marketing capabilities and their application to sales. The capabilities of customer relationship management, product management, correct pricing, proper and professional distribution, product promotion, sales domain designing, and retailing network management are some factors enumerated by the participants correctly because weakness in any of them can lead to the failure of all attempts of a company for more sales. In this respect, the human factor – or, the so-called salesforce performance – is another major factor for the success of companies in sales. This factor has been mentioned in most previous studies. Based on the results of the interviews, to ensure effective sales, companies have no way but to recruit a salesforce that is leading both in behavior and outcome. The most frequently mentioned features of behavior performance included rich experience with the ability to establish long-term relationships with retailers, commitment, creativity, knowledgeability, and flexibility. The ability of a salesforce in selling the new products of a company, gaining a greater market share, and achieving sales greater than the predetermined goals are among the most frequently noted indicators of the outcome performance of the salesforce. In this sense, sales control management, or in other words, the deployment of a mechanism for formal and informal controls in a company for ensuring the effectiveness of salesforce and the control and modification of a company's marketing capability are other primary factors that are necessary for the sales effectiveness of companies. As mentioned in the interviews, continuously train-

ing people, including salespeople, continuously evaluating people's performance and providing feedback, motivating people, and creating a cooperation climate are factors that companies have to resort to in order to increase their sales.

In the end, it should be noted that all internal activities and efforts of a company for its sales effectiveness are influenced by environmental or external factors. In this respect, economic fluctuations, price volatility of raw materials, weak policymaking by the government, changes in regulations and governmental policies, the lack of governmental support, market culture, technological changes in the market, and competition pressure in the market are some external factors frequently mentioned by the interviewees as the factors that can affect all internal efforts of a company to achieve sales effectiveness and may even deviate all these efforts. So, predicting these factors and planning as to how to deal with them can greatly ensure the success of companies in selling more products.

Finally, it is asserted that 287 concepts (considering repetitions) were derived from the interviews in the first phase (open coding). When the relationships of the concepts were applied at the axial coding (second phase), they were reduced to 26 categories. Finally, six themes were identified in the third phase (selective coding). The difference between this research and similar studies is that the themes were derived from live interviews and that in the previous studies, all these variables were not investigated together. Also, previous studies have mostly been conducted in non-food industry domains in which perishability is not an important factor. In addition, most previous research has used a quantitative method, not a qualitative method. Finally, the present research reveals that considering the themes studied here can improve sales effectiveness and attention to priorities will contribute to the growth and development of the companies. The priority in considering the final themes is based on the frequency of concepts

derived for the respective theme.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The research was limited by the non-cooperation of some companies in providing their sales data and the lack of the chance to study the whole country due to time and cost limitations and the Covid-19 epidemic.

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