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Building mutual rewarding sponsor relationships between museums and corporations

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a theoretical model for the holistic description of the conditions to be met for a mutually beneficial relationship between museums and sponsoring corporations, from the perspectives of both parties. Based on interviews of sponsorship managers in top Dutch museums and their sponsoring corporations, and the application of Grounded Theory, the categories and relationships that describe the model are identified. We conclude that for a successful sponsorship, both the commercial and cultural drivers behind this relationship must be considered, and the organisational performance, management and joint cooperation should be deemed satisfactory. Moreover, such sponsorships should be aligned with the demands and requirements of society.

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Museum sponsorship; inter-organisational relationships; successful sponsorship; cultural sponsorship; reputation risks; alliances

Introduction

Given their stellar reputation across the globe, art museums are of especial interest in the business world, as by joining hands with them, corporations may benefit from image spill-over effects (Van Riel & Heijndijk, 2017). In turn, this monetary support is highly appreciated by museums, among other reasons, due to public funding cuts and the need to diversify their sources of income for guaranteed financial sustainability (Stanziola, 2011; Wu, 2003). Within this context, museums are also adjusting to societal demands and changing environments and no longer perceive corporations as institutions that simply transfer money to them. There is nowadays a need to justify this combined public and private funding for the maximum possible benefit of society (Woodward, 2012). At the same time, numerous corporations believe that sponsoring the arts is a part of their obligation to society (Gianecchini, 2020; Lee & Han, 2018). They understand it as “corporate cultural engagement”, i.e. a long-term cooperation that leans more towards social sustainability than brand building (Labaronne, 2023).

This reality at the turn of this century, has forced companies and museums to rethink the concept of sponsorship, transforming them from mere points of communication into “strategic marketing alliances” (Farrelly & Quester, 2005). Consequently, the outlook regarding sponsorships has shifted from a purely monetary transaction, towards inter-action-based partnerships. This new approach focuses above all on the relationship

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that is built (McNicholas, 2004). Given the time it takes to build a relationship, the concept of sponsorship is therefore of strategic importance. Within this approach, Seitanidi and Ryan (2007) frame sponsorships as a strategic, long-term, interactive and process-oriented relationship based on trust, commitment and recognition of each partner's role. Understanding sponsorship in this way means sharing responsibilities and risks in order to jointly achieve outcomes in a collaborative context with a mutual interest and commitment (Abdou, 2023). However, the world of business is not an automatic fit with the world of arts and therefore, arriving at a mutually rewarding relationship requires considerable effort by both parties.

This reality notwithstanding, academic research on sponsorships in the world of arts (including museums) has been unequal at best. Within cultural research, there has been an extensive debate that approaches sponsorship as a two-way street, highlighting the individual interests of the parties involved. Moreover, sponsorship has been essentially regarded within broader debates such as the privatisation of culture (Wu, 2003), corporate art intervention (Schuster, 2003), business funding of culture (Stanziola, 2007) or as alternatives within public-private partnerships (Stanziola, 2011). On the other hand, the business literature has been scarcer and has focused mainly on the motivations and achievements of corporations (Cornwell et al., 2006; Quester & Thompson, 2001) and to a lesser extent, on the relationship (Daellenbach et al., 2006; Olkkonen & Tuominen, 2008).

Both business studies and cultural research lack conceptual models that rigorously describe the system underpinning museum sponsorships by means of key elements and their intrinsic relationships within a specific context. If we are to provide a comprehensive description of this system, it is necessary to move beyond individual perspectives towards a common ground, that is, to move from "you and me" to "we". In this regard, the existing literature on this subject has only ever approached one of the two parties, without applying a dyadic approach to the methodology. This makes it impossible to describe a model based on the common elements of this relationship. Faced with these gaps, the goal of this work is to build a theoretical model that reflects a mutually rewarding sponsorship relationship between a corporation and a museum through a dyadic methodology.

Literature review

The relationship between museums and corporations

Within the literature on museums, sponsorship has been considered as an alternative in the broader debate on culture funding. In the late 1990s, at a time of funding cuts, it became necessary to address the financial sustainability of the arts and culture sector across Europe (Dubini & Monti, 2018; Greenhill, 1992). This situation was exacerbated by the 2008 financial crisis, especially in Europe, which led governments to encourage museums to diversify their sources of income by seeking private donors, or by promoting favourable tax schemes to incentivise sponsorship and philanthropy (Dubini & Monti, 2018). This has led to the emergence of an increased corporate presence within major museums (Rubio-Arostegui & Villarroja, 2022), as for instance, partnerships between museums and public, private or non-profit bodies in the United Kingdom (Greer, 2021). In Dutch museums, even private fundraising is mandatory in order to maintain state

funding (Plets & Kuijt, 2022). However, this has led to a new debate in British and other museums, as regards their demand for greater autonomy over the spending of these self-generated funds (Abdullah & Khadaroo, 2022; Wu, 2003). In this demand, museums have significantly boosted their strategic approach to marketing and active corporate participation (Stanziola, 2011). Therefore, they seek suitable corporations who are aligned with their interests (Kushner, 1996) and evoke the right fit (Mazodier & Quester, 2014). Today, new ways by which private participation may be publicly acknowledged are being considered, such setting up business committees to support the arts, or inviting private corporate leaders to join the governing councils of museums (Schuster, 2003). Abdou (2023) affirms that the partnerships between museums and corporations extend beyond financial sustainability to contemplate other mutual interests (economic, technological, social and environmental resources and capacities) and a unified commitment. According to Basílio (2017), these agreements are only entered into when they benefit both parties.

With regard to the above, research on the corporate sponsorship of museums, compared it to studies on sponsorship in general (Kourovskaja & Meenaghan, 2013), has mainly focused on the impact of these partnership and have delved into the effects on the corporations. In the case of corporations, they seek both tactical and strategic effects. The first includes achieving profitable and successful marketing strategies, having ideal platforms for testing new products, motivating staff, promoting local sales, creating brand awareness (Colbert et al., 2005; Cornwell et al., 2006; Moir & Taffler, 2004; Quester & Thompson, 2001; Stanziola, 2011). Strategic effects include the impact of sponsorship investments on shareholders' assessment of the corporation, creating an altruistic image of its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and/or senior management, enhancing its brand image and corporate reputation or boosting its corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy (Campa & Zijlmans, 2019; Cornwell et al., 2006; Quester & Thompson, 2001). Regarding museums, these effects include securing needed resources, the preservation of cultural heritage and artistic quality, increasing their resources in the face of cuts to public funding (Abdullah & Khadaroo, 2022).

However, these works have rarely focused on the pillars for building and maintaining this relationship between museums and corporations (Daellenbach et al., 2006). Furthermore, most studies deal with museum sponsorship partnerships by surveying one of the two parties involved, without a dyadic methodology, although there are a few exceptions such as Olkkonen and Tuominen (2008). This has made it impossible to describe a relationship model based on common elements, as well as the factors that influence it, in other words, a model that integrates the perception of both parties regarding their relationship within a common context, the sponsorship.

Key theories for understanding sponsorship relationship

In order to understand the system of the sponsoring relationship between museums and corporations, we draw on two major inter-organisational theories that offer relevant insights into this type of partnership, the Resource Based View (RBV) theory (Barney, 1991) and institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These theories have been previously addressed in the literature on sponsorships (Jensen et al., 2016), and more specifically, in cultural and artistic sponsorships (Daellenbach et al., 2006; Rubio-Arostegui &

Villarroya, 2022). Jensen et al. (2016) use RBV theory to develop a conceptual model able to identify the key characteristics that can aid the sponsoring corporation to achieve a sustained competitive advantage. Daellenbach et al. (2006) study the life cycle of arts sponsorship relationships using these theories. Finally, Rubio-Arostegui and Villarroya (2022) draw on institutional theory, to explore the role of corporations in the financial structure and internal organisation of large Spanish museums. Therefore, these theories constitute valid sources of inspiration when searching for relevant insights into this relationship.

A central notion in the RBV theory is that corporations and institutions can increase their competitive advantage if they succeed in getting permanent access to a set of financial and tangible resources (buildings, materials, money), intangible resources (corporate social responsibility (CSR), networking opportunities) and capabilities (corporate culture, methodologies, management processes) (Barney, 1991). The drivers for each party in a sponsorship shall be to obtain, enhance or complement the resource or capacity it lacks (Jensen et al., 2016). In our case, the literature on the subject notes that museums have a portfolio of unconventional resources and capabilities that appeal to sponsors (Hillman et al., 2000) while sponsors, on the other hand, offer museums an alternative source of funding and new formulas, in addition to the public funding of culture and technological innovation (Rubio-Arostegui & Villarroya, 2022; Tobelem, 2013). According to RBV theory, both the resources and the capabilities exchanged in this sponsorship are intended to enhance each party's competitive advantages, consisting of the benefits provided. Considering the above, the first and second research question (RQ) are as follows:

RQ1: What are the essential drivers of a successful sponsorship for both museums and sponsoring corporations?

RQ2: What are the benefits deemed satisfactory by both museums and sponsoring corporations within a successful sponsorship?

The success of a sponsoring alliance does not only depend on the alliance itself, but it is also conditioned by the internal aspects and structures of its actors and the macro-environment in which relationship develops (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In this sense, the institutional theory is revealing. Firstly, it contributes to the comprehension of both museums and corporations as “cognitive, normative and regulatory structures and activities that give meaning to social behaviour” and “how cultures and routines operating at multiple levels become the carriers through which institutions influence organisations” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In this sense, it is of the utmost importance to understand how they manage their resources and capabilities internally and how they cooperate with each other (Farrelly et al., 2006; Michael & Combs, 2008). The literature points to four crucial elements of this cooperative management: the perceived degree of professionalism of its actors (Yarbrough & Powers, 2006), professional risk management (Westberg et al., 2011), effective and emphatic communication (Farrelly et al., 2003; Farrelly et al., 2006) and clear legal agreement (Meenaghan, 1998).

On the other hand, this theory includes the importance of normative frameworks and rules that influence organisational behaviour and sponsorship relationships (Daellenbach et al., 2006). Organisations conduct their activity within a changing environment that influences them (Agostini & Nosella, 2017). The literature of cultural sponsorship discusses some external influencing aspects, such as policies to cut public funding for museums

(Stanziola, 2011; Woodward, 2012), tax benefits and exclusionary contracts (Cornwell & Maignan, 2013; Fahy et al., 2004).

In addition, these internal and external aspects of the relationship must be aligned with the expectations of institutions or with the norms legitimised by their social environments, and by their respective business, artistic, economic, political and legal environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Otherwise, it may jeopardise the success of these sponsorships and their continuation (Daellenbach et al., 2006), or lead to operational and reputational risks (Olkkonen & Tuominen, 2008). Based on the framework of institutional theory on inter-organisational relations, two new research questions are formulated:

RQ3: What aspects of the internal context enable the sponsorship to be perceived as successful by both museums and sponsoring corporations?

RQ4: What aspects of the external context enable the sponsorship to be perceived as successful by both museums and sponsoring corporations?

Figure 1, inspired by both theories, shows the basic structure of the sponsoring relationship.

Methodology

Although both RBV and institutional theory point to a basic structure of elements to be considered in an inter-organisational partnership (drivers, benefits, internal and external aspects), this paper develops a qualitative research methodology based on Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 2002). This theory has been deemed suitable for the creation of a theoretical model based on data provided by the actors involved, thus avoiding biases arising from a priori constraints of existing research or theoretical frameworks (Goulden, 2002).

The phases of this research are shown in Figure 2.

Data collection

Given the highly heterogeneous nature of museum structures, as mentioned by Stanziola (2011), we opted to select these organisations based on common traditions, legislation and main sources of funding. In line with these recommendations, therefore, our research is framed within a specific country, The Netherlands, which constitutes a good case study due to its unique system of museum funding. Visitor numbers, business approach and,

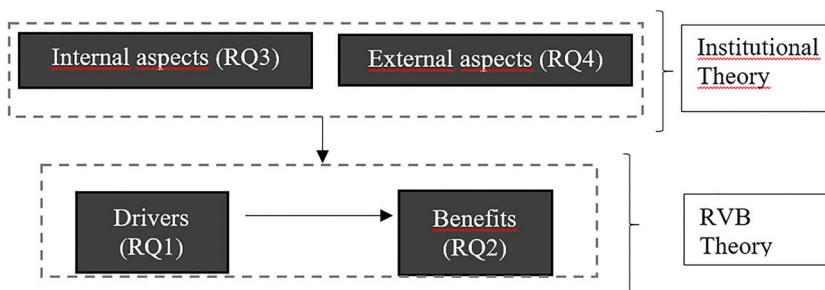
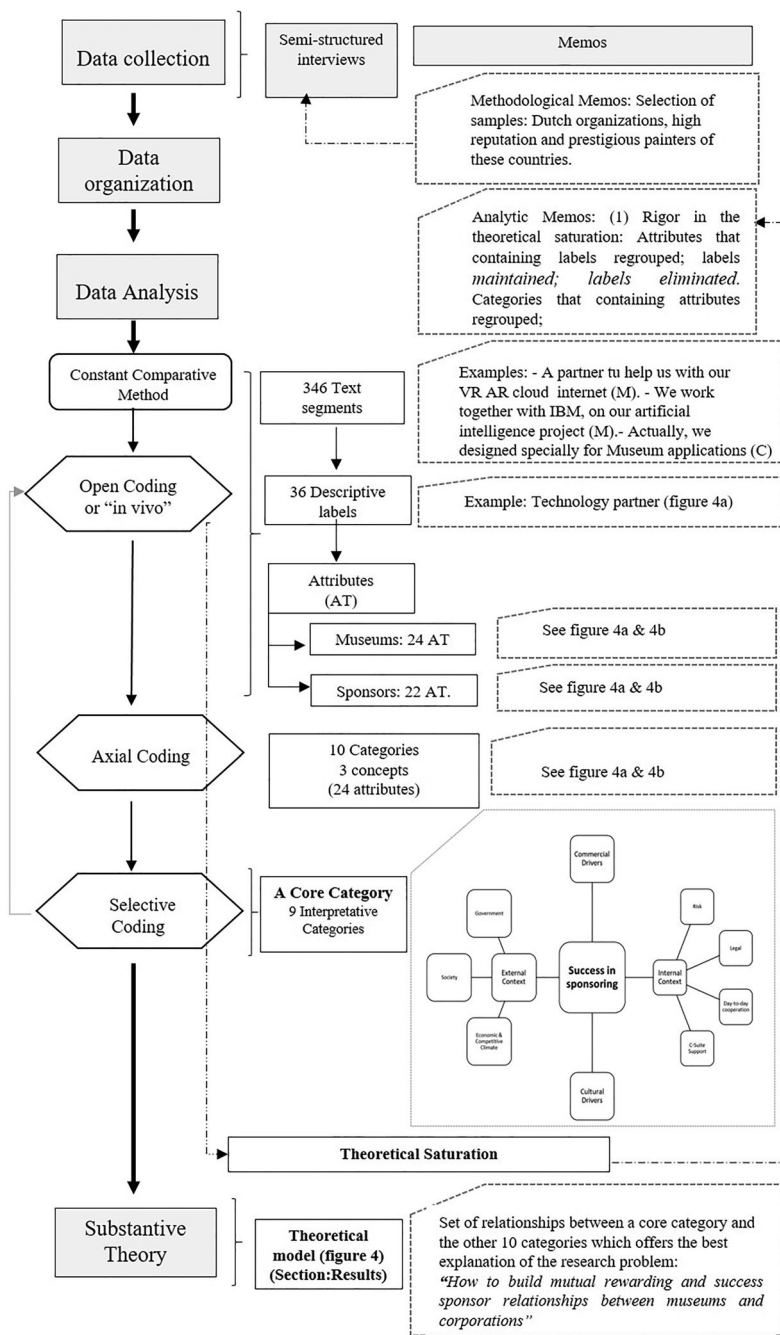


Figure 1. Structure of the sponsoring relationship.



Note: Memos are Impressions, reflections, theoretical issues, questions, and summaries of codes and categories. The use of memos is central to theory development and helps to raise the conceptual level of the research. They allow you to think beyond the simple incidents that lead you to identify themes and patterns in the data, and help you to hypothesise about the properties of categories, the relationships between categories and aid theory development. Memos are produced constantly and continuously throughout the research process.

Figure 2. Phases of the research.

especially the magical figure of 17.5% of independent income have since 2013, become key factors for the public funding of dutch museums. Within this context, corporate partnerships have become strategic goals museums, so much so that many of them have developed organisational structures (“corporate relationship managers”) to ensure their relationships with corporate sponsors (Plets & Kuijt, 2022).

Given that the aim is to obtain a theoretical-explanatory model of strategic and cooperative relationships in sponsorships, it is essential that the selected corporations and museums were as homogeneous as possible and of similar relevance in their sector (Figure 3), thus avoiding power imbalances in the relationship. The selected museums were Rijksmuseum, Van Gogh Museum, Mauritshuis and Kunstmuseum. The corporate sponsors of these museums were KPN, Shell, Philips and Rabobank. Data have been collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews enabling the interviewees to freely express their experiences on each of the research questions (Goulden, 2002). The interview script, scheduled for an hour and a half, was the same for both museums and their corporate sponsors, and was divided into four sections that matched the research questions. The profile of our interviewees were the Chief Communication Officers or Sponsorship directors. The interviews were conducted within the same period, when these sponsorships were in force. Each interview was recorded for subsequent transcription.

Common criteria	Museums	Sponsors
<i>Duration of the relationship</i>	Sponsorships at least 2 years old	
<i>Country of Origin</i>	The Netherlands Rijksmuseum y Van Gogh Museum (Amsterdam) Mauritshuis and Kunstmuseum (The Hague)	The Netherlands KPN, Shell, Philips and Rabobank
<i>Best ranked</i>	Highest economic prosperity and best-quality facilities and attractive from a cultural perspective (Cultural and Creative Cities Monitor-European Comission, https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/cultural-creative-cities-monitor/countries-and-cities/nl)	Highest turnover (https://www.dutchnews.nl/2017/09/banks-bulbs-beer-and-oil-the-10-largest-dutch-companies/)
<i>Most reputable</i>	Museums housing renowned words by the most famous Dutch painters (Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Jan Van Goyen, Vermeer, Mondrian). Most reputable museums in the Netherlands (van Riel & Heijndijk, 2017)	Top ranking companies in the Netherlands. (https://www.reprtrak.com/rankings/); https://www.rsm.nl/fileadmin/Corporate/About_RSM/Companies/RSM_Reputation_Institute_brochure_2017.pdf)

Figure 3. Selection criteria.

Data organisation

In this phase, the interviews are transcribed and the databases compiled. For this purpose, the interviews are divided into text segments that identify an idea, eliminating sentences not relevant to the topic under study and, finally, an identification code is assigned to said segments. The following code was used: comment number and the participant’s initials (for example, 2M2: Comment No. 2 of Museum 2; 4S1: Comment No. 4 of Sponsor 1). A total of 364 text segments (Figure 4a,b) were collected.

Data analysis

For the data analysis (Figure 2), we have followed four steps suggested by Glaser and Strauss (2017) in Grounded Theory: open coding; axial coding; selective coding and

First Phase: Open Coding or "in vivo"				Second Phase: Axial Coding	Third Phase: Selective Coding
Text Segments (examples)	Descriptive labels (36)	Museums 24 Attributes	Sponsors 22 Attributes	Categories (10) *3 concepts	Core Category (1) Interpretative Categories (9)
<i>You really need money to take care of your collection (M)</i>	Money	Financial Resources	Financial Resources	Commercial Drivers	Commercial Drivers (I.C.)
<i>People who use our services would like it if we sponsor a museum. (C)</i>	Commercial Partner	Commercial Opportunities	Commercial Opportunities		
<i>We can really do nice networking events and they have their own networks which they invite us. (C)</i>	Meeting partners	Networking Opportunities	Networking Opportunities		
<i>A partner to help us with our VR AR cloud internet (M).</i>	Technology Partner	Research & Development	Research & Development	Cultural Drivers	Cultural Drivers (I.C.)
<i>We, the museums, are always looking for people to support culture. (M)</i>	Heritage & Education	Supporting Culture	Supporting Culture		
<i>Because I am from a local bank, we also do things for the city, The Hague to make it better. So for the people who live in it. (C)</i>	Community Programmes	CSR	CSR	Success in Sponsoring	Success in Sponsoring (C.C.)
<i>What you are looking for is a brand with a solid reputation and a big reach and international focused and something we need. (M)</i>	Prestigious Brand	ROI Externally: Reputation	ROI Externally: Reputation		
<i>With truly global exposure in terms of public relations, we build media and customer loyalty to our brand. (C)</i>	Commercial Brands	ROI Externally: Brand Loyalty	ROI Externally: Brand Loyalty		
<i>We can reach a new audience and they need to sell us to that audience. (M)</i>	New markets	ROI Externally: Access to new markets	ROI Externally: Access to new markets		
<i>You know, use the museum's creative power and expectations of art to actually help innovate to the companies. (M)</i>	New Developments	ROI Internally: Increased sensitivity for innovation	ROI Internally: Increased sensitivity for innovation		
<i>Acquiring new works for their collections. (M)</i>	Services & Products	ROI Internally: Improved Infrastructures & Products	ROI Internally: Improved Infrastructures & Products		
<i>Developing a feeling of employer pride. (C)</i>	Motivations of employees	ROI Internally: Increased employer branding	ROI Internally: Increased employer branding		
<i>Help us change the culture of our museum to improve our organisational processes. (M)</i>	Knowledge	ROI Internally: Learning	ROI Internally: Learning		
<i>It takes a lot of time. I never knew that being a sponsor could take up so much time. (C)</i>	Balanced resources	Effort: Time of Dedication & Money Invested	Effort: Time of Dedication & Money Invested		
<i>Sometimes they ask so much that I have to hire extra people to ensure that we can do it - then it is not interesting anymore for me. (M)</i>	Staff of sponsorship	Effort: Human Resources	Effort: Human Resources		

Legend: (M)-Museum; (C)-Corporation. (I.C.)-Interpretative Category. Black color: attributes containing regrouped tags; Dark grey color: attributes maintained; Light grey color: attributes eliminated. (Continued)

(a)

First Phase: Open Coding or "in vivo"				Second Phase: Axial Coding	Third Phase: Selective Coding
Text Segments (examples)	Descriptive labels (36)	Museums 24 Attributes	Sponsors 22 Attributes	Categories (10) *3 concepts	Core Category (1) Interpretative Categories (9)
<i>Our CEO was very culturally enthusiastic and he sponsored a lot. (C)</i>	CEO's Opinion	CEO & Internal Support	CEO & Internal Support	C-Suite Support	C-Suite Support (I.C.)
<i>We are both very interested in art since coming from 2 completely different worlds. (M)</i>	Common Strategies	Brand Fit	Brand Fit		
<i>The employees who say yes, this sponsorship is a good business. (C)</i>	Employee Attitude	Employee Attitude	Employee Attitude		
<i>Very important for all the sponsoring we do is the relation as a client. (M)</i>	Previous Experiences	Previous Experiences	Previous Experiences	Legal	Legal (I.C.)
<i>It includes the activities to be developed and the KPI to be achieved. (C)</i>	Clear Contract	Clear Contract	Clear Contract		
<i>It is allowed to work with a sponsor in the same line of an industry. (C)</i>	Exclusivity	Exclusivity	Exclusivity	Risk	Risk (I.C.)
<i>They cannot have another similar sponsor in the same project. (C)</i>	Type of Partners	Clear definition of participants	Clear definition of participants		
<i>I haven't encountered any tax problems in this field no. (C)</i>	Tax Advantages	Tax Advantages	Tax Advantages		
<i>For a bank it is important that all risks are excluded and it also that our own employees are engaged and they understand it. (C)</i>	Management Risks	Operational risk	Operational risk	Internal Conditioning Aspects *	Internal Conditioning Aspects *
<i>If there is a huge sponsor and you have a major reputation crisis, you probably have to deal with it. (M)</i>	Gossips & Scandals	Reputational risk	Reputational risk		
<i>I think it is a more equal sponsorship relationship. (M)</i>	Communication	Personal Relationships	Personal Relationships	Day-to-day cooperation	Day-to-day cooperation (I.C.)
<i>Relationship with the team of the museum? I regard them as highly professional, very entrepreneurial. (C)</i>	Professional Competences	Professional Relationships	Professional Relationships		
<i>I have a spreadsheet, I have care of it, I keep track of all benefits, so I don't really make it our responsibility. (M)</i>	Good Performance	Not wasting our money or resources	Not wasting our money or resources		
<i>You feel that one of the two parties, there is this trust thing going on. (C)</i>	Responsible Management	Compliance with our obligations	Compliance with our obligations	Economic & Competitive Climate	Economic & Competitive Climate (I.C.)
<i>There is mutual respect for the things you are working with. (M)</i>	Cooperation	Respect our deadlines	Respect our deadlines		
<i>She always think in Sponsor 1. (C)</i>	Adhoc relationship	Adhoc focused relationship	Adhoc focused relationship	Society	Society (I.C.)
<i>We had the banking crisis and especially financial institutions had to cut back their budgets. (M)</i>	Financial Crisis	Economic Cycle	Economic Cycle		
<i>We are all competing for the same pool, it's a small group of companies who afford to enter into a partnership at a monetary level. (C)</i>	Competition	Efforts by Competitors	Efforts by Competitors		
<i>Society is changing so quickly, lot of museums are now really thinking should we really be sponsored by a company like Xx, yes or no. (C)</i>	Social Beliefs	Values in Society	Values in Society	External Conditioning Aspects *	External Conditioning Aspects *
<i>Famous people who visited the exhibition recommended it to their followers... (M)</i>	Social Influencers	Impact of External Criticasters	Impact of External Criticasters		
<i>We only receive 15% of our budget - so 15% is government money and 85% we earn ourselves (M)</i>	Government Policies	Government Policy in supporting arts	Government Policy in supporting arts	Government	Government (I.C.)

Legend: (M)-Museum; (C)-Corporation. (I.C.)-Interpretative Category. Black color: attributes containing regrouped tags; Dark grey color: attributes maintained; Light grey color: attributes eliminated. (Continued)

(b)

Figure 4. (a) Phases of the data analysis. (b) Phases of the data analysis.

formulation of the theoretical-explanatory model. In order to reduce subjectivity in analysis, we have worked independently in each stage. Subsequently, we compared common results and the discrepancies were solved by mutual agreement between the researchers.

In the first phase, open coding, a descriptive label or code “in vivo” (one or two words identifying the idea) was identified for each of the 346 text segments, which allowed us to initially group text segments by similar topics discussed, amounting to a total of 36 descriptive labels. Subsequently, they were further refined by means of theoretical saturation (data that are widely supported and agreed upon by the respondents are selected), resulting in 24 attributes for museums and 22 for sponsors. These attributes were further refined to achieve a higher theoretical saturation that was common between museums and sponsors. In this process, some attributes were discarded, others were regrouped or refined and others were maintained. The final set of attributes (24) is displayed in the final model (Figure 5).

In the second phase, axial coding was performed by aggregating the obtained attributes into 10 categories (Figure 4a,b) that are more embedded in the context of the four research questions of this study. In the third phase, the core category is formulated as the conceptual idea under which all categories generated in the second phase are grouped (Strauss & Corbin, 2002). The core category of our model is “Success in Sponsoring”. Finally, the process ends by organising and establishing the hierarchies of the categories and outlining their relationships in relation to the core category, generating a theoretical-explanatory model (Figure 5).

Results

The key findings of our study, that collect the answers to our research, are compiled within a theoretical-explanatory model (Figure 5). This model consists of a core category

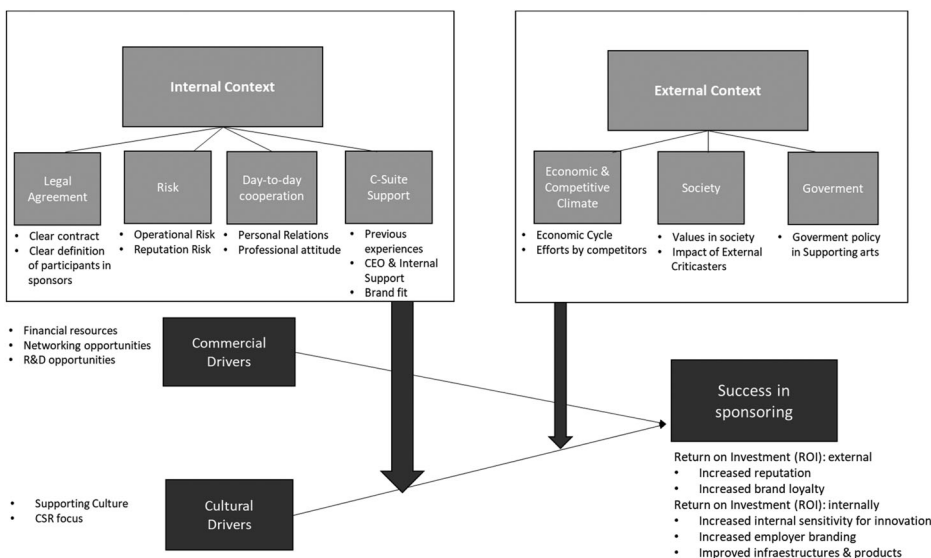


Figure 5. A theoretical model for building mutually rewarding relationships between museums and sponsoring corporations.

(Success in sponsoring) and nine interpretative categories grouped according to their relationship with the core category: commercial or cultural drivers, and (internal or external) conditioning aspects of the relationship. Each category is subsequently described through attributes. A total of 24 attributes have been identified (Figure 4).

Core category: success in sponsoring

Success in sponsoring is defined in terms of Return on Investment (ROI), understood by museums and sponsors as the benefits obtained compared to the investment made. Success in sponsoring is defined by five attributes: three attributes of internal ROI (Increased internal sensitivity for innovation; Increased employer branding; Improved infrastructures & products) and two attributes of external ROI (Increased reputation; Increased brand loyalty). For both parties, this investment (ROI) is expressed in terms of time spent on sponsorship and money invested in the relationship. Moreover, in the case of museums, the human resources employed in the course of the relationship are also included. However, the perception of the ROI achieved by each party is different:

- Sponsor: “... I feel that my museum thinks that is important that we get something back from it, and that is different from a lot of other museums ...”.
- Museums: “... have to hire people to manage this relationship because sponsors are calling every day, they want to come in every day to entertain their stakeholders ...”

For this reason, museums have a lower perception of the ROI obtained than the sponsors.

Interviewees perceive two types of ROI, external and internal. The external ROI is evaluated by means of two attributes: increase in reputation and increased brand loyalty. Both parties consider the increase in reputation as increased relations with and recognition by upper spheres of power (the monarchy, institutions). Additionally, museums consider increase in reputation due to: their partnerships with renowned sponsors (“Triple A” mention); and the positive e-WOM generated by the relationship:

- So they think of us. You cannot Twitter every day about us. But when they can, they think about us. And so ... if the director of our sponsor actually puts something on LinkedIn there is a pretty big network that actually reads that.

At the opposite end, sponsors note that increase in reputation enhances their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and even boosts their purpose, identity and social mission. By supporting cultural benchmark institutions of their country, they can project patriotic sentiment. Consequently, they perceive that partnering with top museums endows them with a spill-over reputation which may even help to counteract any possible reputational risks.

With regard to the second external ROI, increased brand loyalty, both parties perceive it in terms of reinforcing their positioning in common objective markets. Moreover, museums perceive that high exposure in the sponsor’s markets helps them to attract new segments of the population, “young people and international audiences”, and to develop new business opportunities along expanded product lines such as “reproductions of paintings”. Similarly, the sponsorship grants the sponsor access to new strategic stakeholders via experiences and activities in museums. Museums can even become “new B-to-B showcases” to expand the positioning of the sponsor’s commercial brand.

Internal ROI is perceived by our interviewees on the basis of three attributes: Increased internal sensitivity for innovation (museums and sponsors), increased employer branding (sponsors) and improved infrastructures & products (museums). With regard to the first attribute, both parties achieve it by means of new knowledge from their counterparts which they may then implement in their respective organisations. Museums acquire knowledge of their sponsors' management processes while the latter is better able to "think outside the box" when creating concepts and developing products and services. However, our results reveal that as of today, this knowledge acquisition is more productive for museums than for sponsors. Thus, according to museums:

... and I really believe that we could have a more balanced relationship if companies would see a bit more the potential of what you can do with sponsoring.

Moreover, it allows museums to: develop technical artistic research, for example, "chemical research and research into the substance of the paint", and innovation in terms of new technologies and acquainting employees with said innovations, as well as new services that provide access to artworks:

... we entered into a partnership with Google Art Institutes and we are now preparing a web environment where you can find everything about Vermeer

The second attribute of internal ROI is increased employer branding. For sponsors, it increases their positioning as an employer brand, "strengthening their internal reputation", improves their relations with shareholders, and fosters "employer pride". The third attribute of internal ROI (infrastructures) allows museums to "improve their infrastructures and products", by "restoring paintings", "financing new exhibitions", acquiring new works for their collections, and improving their basic facilities, for example "to rebuild the toilets and to change the windows".

Interpretative categories

The results display nine interpretative categories grouped into three concepts that explain the different relationships in terms of the core category: drivers, internal aspects and external aspects conditioning the successful sponsorship.

Drivers that explain a sponsor relationship

When discussing the different reasons why museums and sponsors enter into sponsorships, the interviewees highlight two types of drivers (interpretative categories): Commercial Drivers and Cultural Drivers. Three attributes (financial resources, networking opportunities, research & development) are mentioned by both actors in relation to commercial drivers. For museums, the first attribute (financial resources) is key: "we are always short of money". Museums require money to fund their exhibitions, to carry out new activities, or to improve their infrastructure. In relation to the attribute "Networking opportunities", museums perceive it as "growing in visitors", "open up to new international markets" or "attract new and interesting financing opportunities among other top sponsors". Corporate sponsors however focus more on non-conventional resources, for example: an exclusive use of spaces, improved commercial image of their products, or to even "get the license" to operate as an institution providing financial support to

cultural beneficiaries. Moreover, sponsors consider these as networking opportunities to not only get in touch with new markets, as is the case for museums, but also to develop high-level networks and improved social status, and to even strengthen internal relationships between fellow CEOs:

... we have CEO visits from China or wherever, we bring them to the museum and out of opening hours and they really love it so it really strengthens our reputation.

Financial support and increased network opportunities are essential attributes in the core category of this research (successful in sponsoring).

The third attribute included in commercial drivers is Research & Development. Both museums and sponsors seek to improve their processes and they perceive these partnerships as a means to exchange knowledge or develop joint research programmes. For museums, this attribute entails learning from sponsoring corporations how to apply innovations in either their primary processes or in support functions such as marketing or IT, or to develop technology:

I was trying to find a partnership in technology, a partner to help us with our VR AR cloud internet ... , they haven't got the traditional sponsoring treatment, so they do it differently, they want to help you, so they put resources on your joint projects but the level of Euros they will give you is much lower, then it is even more important that you know why you are entering into this relationship.

Whereas sponsors seek support from museums in order to encounter new ways of "creative thinking" for their innovation processes, and even for R & D testing on new platforms:

... when we did have a really good showcase with the LED lighting, The Night Watch was the first global painting that was lit up by LED lighting, where we really had a good showcase ...

In addition to the above, both parties deem it necessary to focus on cultural drivers (second interpretative category) as catalysts for the development of a successful sponsorship. This category is broken down into two attributes (Supporting culture and CSR). Supporting culture is more relevant for museums, given that the sponsorship enables them to move ahead with their mission "to care heritage and educate society culturally so that artistic heritage continues to be valued". The CSR attribute is more valued by sponsors because these partnerships reinforce their brand image of commitment to the community and, therefore, to local inhabitants:

In our case we are a little bit different than other banks in Holland because we are a cooperative bank and we do not only have KPI's on commercial aspects but also on environmental aspects so we also do things to make things, because I am from a local bank, we also do things for the city, The Hague to make it better. So for the people who live in it.

Moreover, sponsors also feel that they are "corporate citizens" and it is their duty to participate in maintaining the cultural heritage of their country.

Internal aspects that condition the success of the relationship

When discussing different internal aspects that condition the relationship between museums and sponsors in the sponsorship, interviewees highlight four interpretative categories: Day-to-day cooperation, C-Suite Support, Legal and Risk. These categories are framed within the management of the sponsorship itself.

Day-to-day cooperation is further subdivided into two attributes: personal relations and professional relationship. With regard to Personal Relations, both parties agree on the importance of cultivating close relationships, “to keep that alive somehow”. To this end, the aforesaid relationships must be: “fluid”, which means that “on a daily basis we have this regular contact about marketing actions or events”. This generates empathy, motivation and symmetry in the relationship:

... it is always at least trying to look at it from our side and how to bring the best benefits to us as a partner and I think that really sets them apart from others that I have worked with

Although, both agree that it does not always happen, all interviewees stress the importance of “mutual trust”, which has to be reflected in the honesty and ethics of the people in charge of the sponsorship, as well as “loyalty and respect of the sponsor towards them”. Moreover, communication is understood as a key element for daily cooperation between both parties and not as a mere tool in the service of publicising sponsorship.

Professional attitude, which is the second attribute under day-to-day cooperation, is defined as flexibility in management, qualifications and cross-departmental skills of the persons working on sponsorships (“professional, very entrepreneurial, very flexible people”), and continually striving to improve the relationship. Museums are even more demanding with regard to this professional attitude, especially on the responsible management of money and resources obtained from the sponsorship, the sponsor’s completion of their obligations in time and form, the ability to “measure” the results, “the ad-hoc focus” in the relationship, and the sponsor’s interest in learning about art:

Yes, I don’t think you have to have it up front, you need to be willing to learn and to tell the stories. ... people regard you as a specialist from the moment they come in and they want you to tell interesting stories about the art ... and I like to tell stories about what it cost or the historical content. So you find your own way ...

The second internal category includes the risks that may arise in this relationship, and is defined by two attributes: operational risks and reputational risk. Operational Risks are linked to various issues: power imbalances in the sponsor relationship where either the museum or the sponsor is dominant, not using the funds wisely, and above all, irregular changes to the museum and sponsor contact persons:

In commercial firms people change jobs all the time ... So, I think it is important for both sides that there is stability in who to work with.

Risk may also be derived from “employees who appear not to be engaged”, resulting in potential accidents, recklessness or negligence by both parties in the scheduled sponsorship activities.

In relation to the second attribute, reputational risks, museums are faced with a range of potential risks arising from corporate sponsorship. They may being criticised if they join forces with a corporation that is deemed to be engaged in activities deemed unacceptable by certain stakeholder groups. Opposition to a corporate sponsor may lead to vandalism or retaliation by activist groups against the sponsored museums. This is exacerbated when the museum is “one hundred per cent dependent on the sponsor ... financially”.

On the other hand, a corporate sponsor runs minimal reputational risks when sponsoring a museum. Their only significant risk may be in relation to art displayed in the museum

that is of a sensitive nature for important company stakeholders. While sponsoring corporations have less to fear, they nevertheless run a risk analysis prior to formalising the sponsorship contract:

We check that someone on the board has not done anything illegal prior to establishing a sponsor relationship.

A third noteworthy category is C-Suite support. It is explained by three attributes: CEO internal support, previous experience and brand fit. With regard to the first attribute (CEO internal support), CEOs who display a positive attitude towards CSR in general and more specifically, towards arts sponsorship, are more likely to start and maintain a sponsorship. This is also true for museums. Receiving monetary support does not automatically generate a positive attitude among all museum stakeholders. The more positive the museum managers' approach to the corporate sponsorship, the more effective the relationship. This appears to be true according to our interviewees, when museum managers and corporations have had prior positive experiences in sponsorships in general and especially art sponsorships. Second attribute of C-suite support: previous experiences.

In relation to the third attribute, sponsorship directors believe it is necessary to create a logical fit between the museums and the sponsoring corporations. For this, both institutions must align "marketing budgets", "strategic goals" and "corporate values", thus enabling a successful implementation of the corporation's and museum's objectives.

Finally, the interviewees take into consideration the legal aspect, which is the fourth category within the internal aspects that condition the relationship. This category is explained by interviewees according to two attributes: Clear contract, Clear Definition of participants. With regard to clear contracts, museums prefer flexibility within a well-defined bandwidth:

you can spend it the way you want to spend it.

However, companies prefer a clearly worded contract. They prefer clarity regarding "the activities to be developed" and prefer defining the "key performance indicators (KPI)" to be achieved. Both parties deem the quality of the personal relationship to be more important than the formal contract itself, because "that's where it all starts", and as stated by one of the interviewees, "if you are aligned, the train will start to ride automatically".

External aspects that condition the success in the relationship

Based on interviews with museums and companies, three interpretative categories of external aspects that condition this relationship are extracted: economic and competitive climate, government and society. Within the first category, two attributes are mentioned: Efforts by competitors and Economic cycles. With regard to the first attribute, an economic aspect that impacts decision making in sponsorships is competition between sponsoring corporations to create a unique sponsoring relationship with the two to three most important art museums in the Netherlands:

... all our competitors are competing in getting a sponsor relationship with the two to three top museums in this country.

On the other hand, both parties are aware of the economic cycles (second attribute) that affect sponsor relationships. During and shortly after the financial crisis at the start of the

twenty-first century, “financial institutions had to cut back on their budgets”, which obviously had a negative impact on financial support received by museums from banks. In parallel to this crisis, interviewees stated that there have been significant cuts to government spending on museums. This has increased the need for museums to be more business-minded and to consider “sponsoring as our most important source of income”. These statements are revealing for the second category that conditions this sponsoring relationship, Government, and its only attribute Government policies in supporting arts. Sponsors interviewed state that legislation passed by governments has occasionally influenced their decision regarding sponsorship type, for example, “regulations in the health care industry” or partnering institution type, whether cultural or non-cultural. As one of the museums stated:

The relationship with that sponsor started because this sponsor needed beneficiaries like us to donate the money to because otherwise they would not get the licence for their activity
...

While government regulations in general cannot be ignored, public opinion trends regarding the perceived (mis) behaviour of corporations involved in sponsoring the arts can pose a considerable challenge for both companies and museums. In this sense, the third category of external aspects, society and its two attributes (Values in society; and Impact of external critics) are reflected in the interviewees’ perceptions:

The societal context is becoming more and more important to a lot of museums. They are now thinking, should we really be sponsored by a company like this, as it evokes so much protest ...

Regarding the first attribute of society, Values in Society, appreciation for sponsoring increases if key opinion leaders express positive opinions regarding the quality or uniqueness of the exhibition, or if famous people endorse the sponsored event:

Queen Maxima opened the exhibition ... and it was perfect.

Sponsoring is deemed successful when the cooperation between a museum and a sponsoring corporation is in line with dominant social norms and values. Finally, concerning the second attribute of society, and within the context of increasing criticism faced by numerous corporations for their (perceived) lack of responsibility in relation to sustainability, to quote one example, sponsorships are “used” by critics to attack said corporations during exhibitions they have sponsored. This may result in awkward situations.

We don’t get complaints but if people would start complaining about our cooperation with this sponsor, then maybe we would consider stopping this sponsorship.

Finally, [Figure 5](#) displays the theoretical model that illustrates the results of this section by applying Grounded Theory.

Discussion and conclusions

The objective of this work has been to develop a theoretical model that reflects a mutually rewarding sponsorship between a corporation and a museum built under a dyadic methodology and using Grounded Theory ([Figure 5](#)). This model shows that for a relationship to be perceived as successful, both parties must have obtained benefits in terms of

internal and external ROI (explained under five attributes), which are driven by commercial and cultural drivers. Furthermore, the successful relationship is conditioned both by internal aspects of the organisations, legal agreement, risk, day-to-day cooperation and C-suite support (explained under nine attributes) and by the external aspects defined by Economic & Competitive climate, Society and Government (explained by five attributes).

Our results are in line with the theory of resources and capacities (Barney, 1991). The actors in this relationship, museums and corporations, highlight the benefits or ROI obtained for each party. Likewise, they commence and maintain the relationship if they obtain, improve or supplement resources or capacities that they lack. However, the interviews allow us to analyse the benefits sought in greater detail. For example, in the case of museums, resource improvements are not only identified in terms of cultural preservation and artistic quality (Abdullah & Khadaroo, 2022; Stanziola, 2011) but they also express the importance of using them to enhance their own infrastructures. In case of sponsors, not only do they achieve a high reputation but also customer loyalty, by virtue of their responsible image and good corporate citizenship (Labaronne, 2023). On the other hand, and in line with Colbert et al. (2005), Moir and Taffler (2004) and Kourovskia and Meenaghan (2013) the positive sentiment of a good employer brand is deemed an internal benefit, as it leads to greater staff motivation and retention. Finally, our results identify a new internal benefit, “increased internal sensitivity to innovation”, understood beyond advances in technological solutions, i.e. in terms of new “product” development methods in corporations or developing “management processes” in museums.

With respect to drivers, our results are in line with existing research. However, our work able to group these motives into two distinct categories: commercial drivers and cultural drivers. Regarding commercial drivers, these are not only reflected in monetary terms (Stanziola, 2011; Trupiano, 2005) but also in non-conventional resources (Hillman et al., 2000) such as using networking opportunities and new markets (Quester & Thompson, 2001), research and development (Greer, 2021; Lewandowska, 2015). On the other hand, cultural drivers, are an indisputable motive behind the search for partners in this relationship for both parties. As pointed out by Harrison (2005) the new social role of museums increasingly involves attending to the needs and aspirations of local communities, with people and social concerns being more important than objects. In this sense, the need for museums to embrace this new role and the interest of sponsors in developing cultural engagement as a corporate citizen (Labaronne, 2023), means that both parties look to each other for shared interests in supporting cultural heritage and a focus on social responsibility.

But achieving a successful relationship that provides a competitive advantage does not mean, as Fahy et al. (2004) argue, limiting a relationship to the exchange of resources and capabilities. According to institutional theory, and in line with our results, the internal and external aspects that condition this relationship must also be considered. Among the internal organisational aspects that condition this relationship, Moir and Taffler (2004) state that, although CEOs convey an initial altruistic interest in art museums, this is not the main reason behind corporate support for culture. In this sense, our results show that, for both, the C-Suite wields the most power in go-no go decisions at the start or restart of a sponsorship project, while managers in charge of day-to-day activities are especially vital in suggesting to top management when to end a project, should they perceive the relationship as unprofessional and above all demonstrating a lack of respect. Moreover, as Daellenbach

et al. (2006) state, what is important for the continuity of the sponsorship is precisely the relationship between the two at different stages of said sponsorship. In this sense, our interviewees also emphasise the importance of day-to-day cooperation, in terms of a good personal relationship and professional attitude, and highlight how previous experience and risk management in this type of relationship is key for both parties.

Our results also demonstrate what institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and cultural literature (Greer, 2021; Rubio-Arostegui & Villarroya, 2022; Stanziola, 2011; Wu, 2003) highlight, namely, how the economic cycle, government policies regarding museum funding and societal values and norms (external aspects) directly condition the willingness or lack thereof to increase and maintain museum sponsorships in the USA, Europe and the UK. In our case, the proliferation and maintenance of these sponsorship relationships is also conditioned by social legitimisation. The Dutch museums appear to be highly sensitive to the risk of ignoring societal demands when joining forces with a company. Externally, Dutch corporations are highly sensitive about how to justify the sponsorship investment to all stakeholders and society at large.

To summarise, this work concludes that sponsorship between museums and corporations will be perceived as successful for both if certain conditions are met, in addition to commercial and cultural drivers: the enhancement of organisational performance and a rewarding cooperation for both parties. This implies that both organisations should work on managerial skills to ensure effective interactions and reduced reputation risks (operational and reputational), and in order to communicate in an empathic and symmetric manner with each other. Moreover, sponsorship should also be in line with social demands.

Our study contributes to academic theory in two ways. Firstly, by applying a dyadic methodology, our work provides a global model based on common elements of this relationship. Secondly, we have designed the first theoretical model that accounts for the critical factors of a successful sponsoring relationship between museums and corporations, including not only commercial drivers, but also ad-hoc cultural drivers for this type of museum sponsorship relationship, and the internal and external conditioning factors that condition this relationship.

However, even though the model has been tested with renowned museums and sponsors, these results are limited to the Dutch market and are likely to vary in other countries. It would be interesting to test this model in other markets for future research.

Managerial implications

The proposed model permits Chief Marketing Officers of museums and sponsoring corporations to design long-term common strategies based on mutual rewards that go beyond financial and commercial opportunities. In addition, this model may be a useful tool as: (1) It allows the parties to assess the health of their sponsorship relationship (threats and opportunities); and (2) it enables the creation of a common framework and language that facilitates the relationship and management between two actors that belong to very different worlds.

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