

Discourse of Environmentalism in Visual Media: A Multimodal Analysis of Earth Day Posters from Representational and Compositional Perspective

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Abstract— This research examines the ways that environmental discourse is visually produced through examining Earth Day posters from NASA website and applying Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotic framework. The problem of this research is the environmental challenges which are continuously changing, the historical and symbolic underpinnings of its visual language that must be understood to sustain public interest. In following the growth of Earth Day's visual image, this research analyzes four earth day poster to identify how visual and verbal elements are combined to make meaning. It has studies two important questions in the context of this research: (1) what are the major environmental topics and graphic symbols represented in Earth Day posters? (2) what are the ways that environmental messages are built when combining visual components, such as color, imagery, and layout design, with textual elements like slogans and language? The study make use of the two metafunctions (representational, compositional), the study reveals how ecological narratives are built using symbols such as bees (collective action), sunflowers (sustainability), marine life, and satellites (technological stewardship) as well as textual elements such as slogans and timelines. From the evidence, it appears that the posters often highlight biodiversity, unity of ecosystems, and cooperation between humans and environment in complimentary colors and active structure of the posters, describing environmental emergencies with the promise of positive changes. Vivid, text-elements, together with graphic design that emphasizes meaning, encourage viewers to take an active part in saving the planet. Scholars state that Earth Day posters are designed to blend different design elements such as color, visual motifs, composition, and textual style to make environmentalism appear as a long-term responsibility that requires international collaboration with a unified multimodal approach to trigger interest and contemplation.



Keywords— Environmental Discourse, Multimodal Analysis, Social Semiotic, Symbolism, Ecosystem.

I. INTRODUCTION

A grassroots campaign developed in 1970 as "Earth Day" to combat rapidly intensifying environmental issues, has evolved into a worldwide supporter of ecological activity uniting millions (Rome, 2003). Comprehensive practical progress of visual media, mostly posters, that place complex environmental topics in terms relatable and emotionally objectionable ways underlie the long-term relevance of Earth Day. These materials reflect the contemporary social and political situation, but tending

to shape public perception of environmentalism. Visual communication in accordance with Lester (2006) greatly helps activist campaigns because it goes beyond language boundaries and engages spectators with symbolic and aesthetic aspects. Although it is now widespread, the activism of Earth Day has been isolated in the recent years, research has mainly concentrated on the written and visual elements, neglecting its combining expression in shaping of public environmental discourse (Hansen & Machin, 2013). This hole further asserts the need for a broad

multimodal analysis of Earth Day posters that mix of visuals and text, which aids though an analysis of environmental conversations.

Two major questions open up this research:

- (1) what are the major environmental topics and graphic symbols represented in Earth Day posters?
- (2) what are the ways that environmental messages are built when combining visual components, such as color, imagery, and layout design, with textual elements like slogans and language?

To answer the research questions, the research contains two sections: First, the representational analysis is how images depict the relationships among the depicted participants in a visual composition. Second, the compositional analysis serves as a powerful lens through which one can discern and decode the intricate meanings woven into a visual composition. The present study helps to create effective advocacy strategies for the further environmental activism.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Environmental Communication

Environmental communication is what studies the ways that societies construct, spread, and debate environmental issues with advocacy, education, and community engagement features to raise united action (Cox & Pezzullo, 2021). Based on the assumption that environmental issues are discursive and material realities, environmental communication is concerned with the effects of communication on formulating perceptions, shaping policies and influencing behaviors. Central to this area of study are theories such as framing, which claims that the way a problem is described, i.e., some priorities are emphasized over others, significantly influences public understanding and action (Entman, 1993). For example, drawing awareness to climate change as a “crisis” rather than as an “opportunity” triggers various emotional and political responses that campaigns of environmental use to mobilize support (Nisbet, 2009). In the same direction, Cox (2013) points out that advocacy communication connects persuasion and ethics, and the final goal is to support not only knowledge but also societal impact. Typically, the Earth Day posters combine the scientific urgency and moral appeals to impel the public with slogans “Act Now”, “Save Our Planet”.

Social movements are irreplaceable in creating the stories that characterize environmental problems. The first Earth Day in 1970 that linked grassroots activity and official endorsement became the foundation of the reliance

of environmentalism on common stories to drive change, which was evident in such movements as Fridays for Future (Brulle, 2000). These collectives are public arenas in which such paradigms as extreme industrial growth are articulated and renegotiated via the use of iconic symbols, catchwords and visual narratives. It will read as an excellent example; “Think Globally, Act Locally” slogan which, as the popularized during the 1980s, demonstrates how movements reduce global dilemmas to simple ground level undertakings (Hawkins, 2018). Due to public engagement, these stories become more visible because participatory interaction makes institutions, activists, and communities come together for a collective conversation. According to Delicath and DeLuca (2003), image events such as well-publicized demonstrations like tree-sitting and oil spills are essential to environmental activities and the public discourse.

Environmental communication, in essence, is at its most powerful when there is a resolve of epistemic gaps. Environmental claims are rooted in scientific findings although social and the emotional importance tend to dominate the attention of public interest in the issues (Hansen & Machine 2013). Such a clash demonstrates that a multimodal approach would be effective, namely the combination of textual argumentation and visual symbols (images of polar bears on melting ice) or online initiatives. Furthermore, there is a need for social movements to be vigilant in obtaining the balance between hopeful and fearful messages. Messages that paint too dark a picture may make people apathetic while one-sided optimism may not communicate a sense of urgency required (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009). In line with this dynamic, the Earth Day network has redirected its recent activities to nail in climate justice and intersectionality to hook in to younger, socially conscious individuals (Dunaway 2015).

2.2 Visual Rhetoric and Multimodality

Viewing across fields, visual rhetoric investigates how images communicate meaning, convince the audience, and construct ideas, using semiotics—the study of signs and signs—to reveal what lies beneath visual texts (Barthes, 1977; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Through semiotics, lies the idea that visual content such as color, composition and iconography creates complex messages through images (beyond literal sense). In his influential book, Roland Barthes offers a distinction between denotative meanings, those that have been symbolic in the literal representation of images, and connotative ones—where the meaning is to be inferred deeper, culturally conditioned symbolism based on history and context (Barthes, 1977). The image of tree on an Earth

Day poster may mean growth, sustainability ecological interconnections in the same way the poster's graphic treatment affects it all. other option representational" (showing the subject matter), "interactive" (how the viewers will interact with the image) and "compositional" (the visual arrangement of components). This model of analysis aid analyst to be able to see that visuals cooperate with text, typography and layout do directly create discursive construction of meaning.

It is fundamental to posters of Earth Day, in 'semiotic modes' synergy. For instance, posters whose visual color scheme includes blues and bright greens suggest the meaning of involvement with love and nature to the planet (Forceville, 1996). How the naturalism of images is also shown to impact their perceived constancy is a problem emphasized by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). A real image of the "oil-soaked ocean" can extend a more immediate sense of mislead information, rather than a cartoon-inspired temper that can have more effect on dampen harsh financial admonitions or young people. Designing of posters with Earth as a vital point in the central image tap the cultural symbol of the "blue marble" to confirm comprehensive ecological interest (Hawkins, 2018). For instance, visual metaphors those symbolized by the slogan "Reduce, Recycle, Reuse" are corroborative by the additional text that inspires specific environmental activities and limits interpretation (Barthes, 1977). This is an example of the combination of visual and textual elements, and the overall meaning that emerges out of the principal of multimodality.

Using multimodal analysis and social semiotic, illustrate the persuasive style applied to how environmental messages are communicated in effective way. Therefore, the study takes into account the posters of Earth Day as place of debate that contesting ideologies and these become over the interplay of words and images, constructions of ecological citizenship crucial to mobilizing the general to action within the Anthropocene (Machin, 2007). These insights are engaging both creative work and analyses of discourse, and allow visual communicators to improve enlivening messages that are emotionally and responsive relevant in an image-saturated world.

2.3 Earth Day and Environmental Iconography

Originally formed in 1970, Earth Day has provided a collecting point for environmentalists' reason as well as a visual stage for the display of images versus environmental worries particularly the themes of stewardship, hope, and crisis (Rome, 2013). These materials have, by pervasion worldwide, come to denote cultural milestones, which grabs the progressive changes

in environmental center through repeated visual objects. What Earth Day did with twentieth century environmentalism, according to Rome's (2013) scholarship, it provides one thread by which to integrate various frets into a unified cause for the power of captivating and accessible imagery. A significant geminate of Earth Day posters in 1970 set beside grim actualities of smog-filled cities by optimistic visions of sustainable force charted environmentalism over a common ethical responsibility. The visual language of Earth Day posters has expanded over the decades to include a wide variety of topics evenly, starting with early pollution, environmental awareness to biodiversity and, more recently, climate justice.

Earth imagery is the centric motif in the Earth Day graphic, a public symbol indicative of the identity of the planet. Since 1972, the most obvious Earth Day symbol has been the "Blue Marble" photograph that embodies an unstable equilibrium between heavenly fragility and universal human responsibility (Hawkins, 2018). Once more, images of hands holding the Earth or planting out of palms reverse ideas of care and revitalization confirming human stewardship stories (Dunaway, 2015). In contrast, images like wildlife smothered in oil, deforestation, or vanishing polar ice, is literally a grotesque desk of environmental rot that levers shock into a cauldron of impending catastrophe (Lester, 2006). These images are cultural symbols that have formed their meanings in time, but again constantly reworked by the contemporary anxieties of the environment. Before, posters frequently featured industrial smokestacks and trash, but the current poster material focuses on climate refugees and wildfires which reflects the increasing narrative going on around the Anthropocene (Hansen & Machin, 2013).

Analysis of such motifs reveals their dual purpose in education and social views shaping. Earth imagery, in-consuming a feeling of global citizenship, can make complex socioecological challenges into a simplified narrative of a "planet in peril" (Hawkins, 2018). Similarly, portrayals of the issue of pollution are likely to take the form of individual acts, rather than taking on so-called corporate pollution, for instance recycling or planting trees (Dunaway, 2015). These criticisms show the difference between the grassroots nature of Earth Day itself, and at times its neoliberal tendencies, in which individuals' efforts are seen as sufficient for groundbreaking society change. However, the persistence of these symbols is in a large part due to their flexibility. Development of digital technology has enabled the production of interactive and intersectional visual content, such as poster that will interrelate environmental struggles with racial justice,

thereby diversifying environmental images to include complex awakenings (Cox & Pezzullo, 2021).

Analysis of visuals connected with Earth Day points to the movement's changes in time as well as to its communication with a broad spectrum of people. Noticing the tension between catastrophe and hope in these images or betting upon the boundaries of "mourning and mobilization", Rome (2013) observes that this chimes with the generic challenges in environmental messaging. While demonstrate these symbols, professionals and researchers can also discern the impacts of visual rhetoric on public involvement, which nothing, but can educational those capitalizing on campaigns that search for an eclectic audience.

III. METHODOLOGY

Using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) social semiotics within a qualitative research paradigm, this study explores Earth Day posters that represent environmental messages through their multimodal components. The four posters were selected over a purposive sample from the website of Earth Day campaign posters from NASA archives, digital collections, and advocacy sites, ensuring a temporal perspective and a wide variety of themes. These posters are publicly accessible and downloaded in high resolution from the website https://science.nasa.gov/multimedia/earth-day-posters/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

- (1) The first poster downloaded from the campaign (#Connected by Earth (From Big to Small we're all Connected)) <https://science.nasa.gov/multimedia/earth-day-2021-poster/>, which was released on April 22, 2021.
- (2) The second poster downloaded from the campaign (Season of Change (The Shore of the Cosmic Ocean)) <https://www.behance.net/gallery/64314985/2018-NASA-Earth-Day-Poster>, which was released on April 22, 2018.
- (3) The third poster downloaded from the campaign (Water Toughs Everything) <https://science.nasa.gov/earth/earth-day/earth-day-poster-2024/>, which was released on April 22, 2024.
- (4) The fourth poster downloaded from the campaign (Mobilize the Earth) https://science.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2012_EarthDayPoster.pdf, which was released on April 22, 2012.

Research design strategies of Earth Day posters by Kress and van Leeuwen's three metafunctions "representational, interactive, and compositional", permit us to explore how textual and visual combinations effected the ecological storytelling. Re-reading the material repeatedly, repeated visual sign such as globes and industrial decay sight emerged, along with their interpretations (as theorized by Barthes in 1977). The textual elements include fonts and slogan were evaluated in their power to shape the understanding of the viewer.

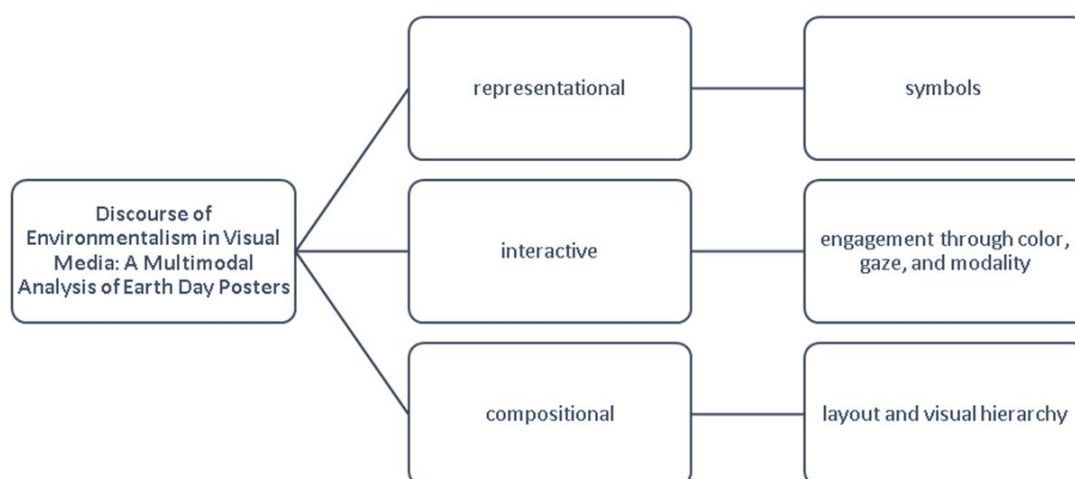


Fig. (1) Framework of Analysis

IV. DATA ANALYSIS



1. Representational Analysis *Poster (1)*

<https://science.nasa.gov/multimedia/earth-day-2021-poster/>

April 22, 2021

The poster dedicates a symbolic exposition to the problems of environmental protection and the continuous flow of time. Observed as images of vaccination and collective endeavor, the black and yellow bees with their hive represents a series of deeds, which figuratively depiction human efforts to protect the environment. As a conception, yellow sunflowers denote growth, sustainability, and the life power of the planet, but the use of red ladybug shoes and a snail an analytical mark, indicating biodiversity and species connectivity. A white moon and a blue sky represented continuity between night and day in the hope of reflecting a commitment to environmental stewardship. Through the use of “FROM 2010-2020” and “EARTH DAY”, the artwork portrays a realistic timeline of ecological activism in the last ten years. These components merge images from nature with markers of time to display how people get involved in protecting the earth.

2. Compositional Analysis

Nature and text are combined carefully to make both urgent requirements for action and sense of oneness. The “EARTH DAY” text and the bee hive are highlighted as the focal to the design take up an eye-catching center stage. A couple of sunflowers wing the ends of the composition create balance, and anchor the composition in the picture of nature's wealth. It is top-bottom design by the moon at the top and grass at bottom, demonstrate contrast between earthly life and cosmic symbolism. The timeline that spans under the bottom, titled “2010-2020”,

contextualizes the bit into a specific term of time. A vibrant palette of red, yellow, and black complements calmer shades of blue and green: urgency expressed by a relaxed atmospheres and text inspired by nature can coexist. The scrambled leaves and clear sky work with each other to create natural boundaries that give the image an attainable naturalist balance. This balance discover a symbiotic relationship between natural environments and human activity for whom the design implies the message of earth day for joint responsibility and constant.



1. Representational Analysis *Poster (2)*

<https://www.behance.net/gallery/64314985/2018-NASA-Earth-Day-Poster>

April 22, 2018

Visual details of the picture set the flow of the narrative. The image of man lying around the sea shore in the sea shore in the grass stations a calm and natural ambience. It is the lying down of the man that diverts viewer's attention from him to the environment as a pedestal to the rapport between people and nature. The presence of dragonfly adds another element, both of vulnerability and interdependence of all that lives. The total shades of blue of the sea and of the sky repeated in a single background makes its message stronger about the beauty of Earth. Both tranquility and ecological equilibrium come through as the nature of the scene communicates the images that are integrated within it, with a promise for the values of Earth Day in appreciating the environment.

2. Compositional Analysis

Balance is created in the artwork and this is a result of thoughtfully arranged visual symmetry. The horizon line is a border, not only contrasting the grounded foreground with the grass and man, against the expanse of the sky and sea but as an allusion to what humans' placing is in the grand cosmos affairs. Layout of the man and dragonfly in the rule of thirds could draw attention to the engagement of viewers. The reflections of the sky in the light like surface of the sea add to the image of visual symmetry and unity of composition. When the words “EARTH DAY”

are used, they will help with the theme's focus and the natural elements of grass, water, insect, and man will function as a united voice on environmental responsibility and the unity of things.



1. Representational Analysis *Poster (3)*

<https://science.nasa.gov/earth/earth-day/earth-day-poster-2024/> April 22, 2024

Using marine organisms' visual depiction and advanced technology, the image depicts a complex narrative. Mothership whales and school of fish swimming through the light blue sea sends a vibrant and networked message about ocean systems, echoing the plea of care for environment that Earth Day advances. These visuals are strong on the story, confirming the crucial value of the diverse life in the ocean themselves. Inserting a clashing blue satellite is a figure that symbolizes humanity's technological presence in earth attacked towards observing climate, water cycles, and the overall ecosystem. The poster elevates its contextual cross-connection of marine ecosystems, global environments by saying "WATER TOUCHES EVERYTHING" and human technology. These binary images build a story related equilibrium between development and nature, drawing attention toward our planet's development and vulnerability.

2. Compositional Analysis

By perfectly organizing space and employ symmetrical design, the work is fit to make an effective compare between technological and natural aspects. A vast sea fills the lower two-thirds of the picture, in motion with marine life, and the upper third shows the blue satellite, side-lighting the gap between the natural world and technological gaze in space. The composition helps further to visually establish humanity's positioning in nature and at the same time divide it from its surrounding. The rules of the thirds certainly give the viewers' eyes a direction to the whales and the fish revealing their size and movement while central or upper positioning of the satellite

highlights its purpose. This consistent presence of blue knits the scene together, making the ocean and heavens/space appear to be combined from a wholesome "cosmic ocean" as the word-ing suggested by Carl Sagan. The components of text such as the phrase "WATER TOUCHES EVERYTHING" can be laid out in natural bends mimicking the movement of water and in a fashion represented "MARVEL" could lightly seduce the pop culture world while leaving the message about the environment intact. The combination of the use of organic shapes in whales and waves, and the exact form of the satellite expresses a symbiosis of ecological protection and the use of technology.



1. Representational Analysis *Poster (4)*

https://science.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2012_EarthDayPoster.pdf April 22, 2012

A story of global stewardship and interrelatedness develops in the representation of different symbolic participants. Particularly on the middle of the picture, earth in blue is shown with green trees and a sunflower besides different animals from elephants, monkeys, giraffes and dolphins which communicates earth's provision of all forms of life. The introduction of buildings arranges a dramatic conflict between the development and nature and emphasizes the necessity of sustainable coexistence. Although in motion, the eagle presages watching, and freedom, but while the waterfall and clouds portray the essential ecological functions, such as hydrological and climatic maintenance, at the core of Earth's life. The fact that there is the yellow butterfly and sunflower makes the feeling of susceptibility and spread more apparent, in the way that the earth's ecosystems share mutual linkages. The phrase "EARTH Is every day at NASA" reconfigures these elements with the yardstick of scientific study so that NASA can operate as a steward with technology monitoring to protect planet Earth. In the middle of these symbols, we visualize Earth

to be a valuable and breakable world that requests natural balance, and our active tending.

2. Compositional Analysis

Spatial organization in the composition successfully combines natural and built elements. In the center of the design the earth is seen, and itself as the focal point, here its spherical shape plays an important role both visually and literally. The volcano and clouds clothe the center summoning up the unbroken loop that connects sky, land, and water. Animals and buildings are placed using the rule of thirds and elephants and giraffes in the foreground and eagles and clouds in the upper thirds create strong focal points for the eyes. Architecture located at the base of the Earth is juxtaposed with organic forms (trees and animals) which both reveals a role of integration as well as sometimes conflict with the environment. The fact that the artwork has placed both the sunflower and the butterfly in central areas gives emphasis on growth and graceful sensitivity. Earth's center position and the reflected flow of the waterfall create symmetry although animal uneven distribution creates sense of movement for the composition. The repeated use of colors integrates all in the composition: The clear blues and greens of the scene complement abstractions with real life and keep the overall image vibrant with yellow accents. With "NASA" stylized you could merge fully with the artwork, highlighting humanity's position as scientific protectors. The opposition of global and microscopic aspects characterizes the need for both a wide understanding and individual initiative in environmental stewardship.

4.1 Results and Discussions

The visual composition through usage of the metafunctions of Kress and van Leeuwen is however seen to be deliberately chosen with an intention of promoting environmental conservation. From the standpoint of the representational metafunction, participants such as bees, sunflowers, and whales are the tools through which narratives focused on collaboration and relations between various components of the ecosystem can be created. Through linking, mostly, bees with pollination and humans with those bees, they represent human activity and the union of marine animals and satellites indicates interplay between natural environment and technological intervention but in seeing Earth as fragile but strong. Geographical and historical justification of environmental movements is achieved through timelines like "2010-2020" and slogans like "WATER TOUCHES EVERYTHING" are employed to serve the purpose. Through construction of the composition, the compositional metafunction encourages urgency and a balanced visual harmony. Primary focal areas such as

Earth and beehives form the center of the story complete with a balance of patterns (sunflowers, waterfalls) and strategic compositions (whales, elephants) that control visual attention. The fine color, pointing to live yellows against blazing blues, accompanied by satellites scenery technology's performance between flourishing seas, expound the intricacy of ecological conservation and modern development. The addition of such texts as "NASA" and "EARTH DAY" correlates cultural sensibility with scientific knowing, and symbolic timelines as well as celestial image portray environmental stewardship as timeless and timely. An orchestra of these elements smoothens a universal palace of imagery that, invites the audience to grasp inclusion, involvement, and an eco-centric connection as a whole to nurturing the constancy of the planet.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The research attains the following conclusions:

1. Themes regarding to the environment (interdependence of ecosystems, diversity or partnership between people and nature) are constantly performed on Earth Day posters, particularly by using graphic images. Posters of bees and hives portray joint ecological management, whereas, flourishing life circle and the tender nation of the environment are identified by butterflies and sunflowers. Images of the sea creatures and satellite imagery taken together point to the role of technology in monitoring and protecting the planet's ecosystems. Visual clues in the form of timelines covering "2010-2020", slogans such as "WATER TOUCHES EVERYTHING" create a foundation for activism within given spatial-temporal boundaries with a continuous stewardship effect. Representations, from the blue planet to animals-elephants, dolphins, and to urban landscapes depict the collision of development and ecological balance, with motifs from the sky reflecting eternal cycles of nature. Using these images, Earth is depicted as a finely calibrated, fragile web desperately in need of deliberate, collaborative control.
2. Environmental messages in Earth Day posters are deliberately created based on the thoughtful combination of visuals and text. The colorful images of warm tones such as sunflowers, ladybugs bring positivity while the expansive blues and greens bring peacefulness – calling from our beautiful world. Humans lay down,

eagles fly, waterfalls spill – illustrations in these poses evoke emotion in viewers through placement and perspective so that they are active participants. Layouts balance urgency and harmony: Visual emphasizes on “EARTH DAY” and timelines are anchors, while rule- of-thirds placements (for instance, whales and elephants) and balanced reflections (such as sky reflection in water) “It WATER TOUCHES EVERYTHING” connects universal concepts to individual behavior enlivened with cosmic imagery (satellites, floating planets) that advance overall thinking. The using of bold, eye-grabbing typography incorporates the viewers into the visuals, and text outlining based on the natural shapes (such as water curved phrases) completes the immersion. With the help of thoughtful layout, bold imagery, and positive messaging, this campaign hits home both the power of collective responsibility and the power of collective responsibility.

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