

Japanese Sports Fan in British Media Discourse

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Abstract

There has been a recent trend of Japanese fans and players cleaning up sports venues after events such as the World Cup. This has attracted a great deal of attention in Western media. This article examines several representative articles in the British media from a discourse analysis perspective. It finds that these articles share a number of commonalities. The behaviour of the Japanese fans is depicted as unusual while similar behaviour by fans from other countries is not mentioned or is minimized. The behaviour of the Japanese fans is linked to Japanese culture, which is then explained to the reader by a Western expert, not by a Japanese person. This ensures that the Japanese in the media reports remain an “Other.” Both the producers and consumers of this media then use this constructed representation of Japanese behavior as a way to either implicitly or explicitly criticize trends in Western society.

1. Introduction

This paper will examine how the Japanese are frequently represented in Western media, using stories about the behavior of Japanese fans and players following major sports events as a case study. In media coverage of events such as the 2018 Soccer World Cup and the 2018 Asian Cup, there has been a trend of stories reporting on the tendency of Japanese fans to clean up after sports events. The purpose of this paper is not to deny that this actually happens. It indeed may be possible that many Japanese sports fans are tidier than their Western counterparts. Instead this paper will look at why this is thought to be so newsworthy in Western media. It will show how the media creates an idealized representation of the Japanese based on stereotypes. It will examine the purposes that this discourse is used for, in particular how it is employed to criticize the behaviour of groups within Western societies.

The discourse used in these instances should be seen within the context of how Japan is generally represented in the West. Western media frequently bases its representation of Japan and the Japanese on stereotypes. These stereotypes and how they are used in media production will be examined more closely in the next section.

2. Background and the media

This section will provide a brief overview of how the Japanese tend to be presented in Western media and discourse in general. It will then outline the analytical framework to be used for the present study.

2.1. Japanese stereotypes and the media

Although Edward Said was discussing the Middle East in his influential *Orientalism* (1978), the idea of contrasting the “Other” with the West can also be applied to Japan. Orientalist discourse starts from the assumption that there is a fundamental distinction between East and West. This both shapes and imposes limitations on thinking and discourse about the “Orient.” Although Japan has had a very different relationship with the West than the Middle East has, the concepts introduced by Said can also be useful in analysing Western representations of Japan. Even though there was no direct Western colonisation of Japan as there was in Said’s *Orient*, the discourse about Japan has often been similar to Orientalist discourse (Minear, 1980). There is the same assumed fundamental distinction between Japan and Western countries.

It has been argued that two sets of stereotypes have been developed which can be applied to either Japan or China (Johnson, 1991). Whenever China has been viewed favorably, Japan has been seen negatively and vice versa (Kowner, 2000). Depending on the West’s relationship with Japan at a particular point in history, the Japanese are either stereotyped as patient, clean, courteous, and hard-working or as clannish, sneaky, and cruel. An example of this can be found in a survey made of American school children before and during World War II (Zeligs, 1955). In 1931, the children used words like clean, interesting, and kind to describe the Japanese. However, in 1944, children’s images of the Japanese included such terms as ugly, treacherous, blood-thirsty, hateful, dirty, and terrible. Today, when the West has a generally good relationship with Japan but often sees China as a rival, a positive set of stereotypes tends to be applied to Japan.

However, despite the existence of positive stereotypes, there are also stereotypes based on the idea of the Japanese as being different from and inferior to people in the West. Looking at British newspapers, Hinton argues that new stereotypes of the Japanese have emerged, also dependent on their supposed difference from Western norms (2014, 2015). He argues that stereotypes which emphasize cultural “otherness” influence British interpretation of the Japanese and result in any apparent difference being stressed in media reports. For example, the British media often focuses on subcultures such as otaku, hikikomori, and extreme anime and manga. This emphasis on the unusual and “perverse” positions the Japanese as a rationally and morally inferior Other (Hinton, 2015).

This use of stereotypes to represent the Japanese as inferior has also been noted in the American media. Four general trends have been identified in American reporting on Japan (Levick, 2005). First, the Japanese are presented as caricatures, including such stereotypes as samurai. Second, the Japanese are represented as a homogenous group, with individual voices

suppressed. Third, there is also a trend to explain all news about Japan in terms of Japanese culture. Certain cultural traits are seen as intrinsic to the Japanese and used as an explanation for Japanese events and actions. Finally, Japan is shown as irrational and inferior to the West (Levick, 2005).

It must be noted that not all of these tendencies are only apparent outside Japan. There has been a long tradition of *Nihonjinron* within Japan – a discourse focused on ideas of Japanese homogeneity and uniqueness. This supposed uniqueness of Japan has been linked to any number of factors including being an island nation, having four distinct seasons, the special characteristics of the Japanese language, a hierarchical society, and differences in brain development among others (Ando, 2009; Befu, 2001; Dale, 1986; Yoshino, 1992). Both *Nihonjinron* and Orientalist discourse tend to present the Japanese as homogenous and explain their behavior in terms of a unique culture.

However, although representations of Japan and the Japanese in Western media are often stereotypical and show them as a monolithic group, there has been a trend of reporting on Japanese behaviour positively. For example, reports of the Japanese reactions to the 2011 earthquake and tsunami focused on the lack of panic and crime in Japan and presented this as unusual. In these reports, Japanese were represented as stoic and orderly. The behavior of the Japanese was presented as a positive contrast to the chaos and disorder commonly (and incorrectly) thought to follow a disaster (Burgess, 2011; Clarke, 2017, 2018). In these instances, the Japanese were presented as a model to be emulated. This corresponds with the idea that when relations with Japan are good, a positive set of stereotypes is applied (Johnson, 1991; Kowner, 2000). It contradicts the expectation (Hinton, 2014, 2015; Levick, 2005) that stereotyped representations of others are primarily negative.

This tendency to positively evaluate Japanese behavior as compared to the behavior of others will be examined in this paper. In contrast to Hinton and Levick, I argue that in the cases under discussion here, unexpected Japanese behavior is not a sign that the Japanese people are inferior. Instead, they are positioned in the discourse as morally superior and used a way for both producers and consumers of texts to criticize elements of their own society that they object to.

2.2. Framework for Analysis

As a starting point, this paper will examine to what extent the four commonalities discussed above (Levick, 2005) are reflected in these media reports. Are the Japanese represented as a monolithic group with little or no individuality? Are the Japanese presented as stereotypical caricatures? Are Japanese actions attributed to something intrinsic and unique to Japanese culture? Is Japan shown in a negative light as compared to the West?

A Critical Discourse Analysis perspective provides a useful lens through which to examine these questions. Analysis of media texts allows us to examine how the world is represented, what identities are set up for those involved in the story, and what relationships are set up between those involved (Fairclough, 2003). The study of the texts in this paper will include

looking at how social actors are represented, how events are represented, the use of quotations, and what assumptions are present in the discourse. I will also look at how these news reports were received and responded to by news consumers.

3. Analysis

The analysis in this paper will primarily focus on two articles: “World Cup: Japan fans impress by cleaning up stadium” (2018) and “Japan leave dressing room spotless in dignified response to Asian Cup final disappointment” (2019) with further examples from a selection of other articles. It will examine how the Japanese and their actions are represented, how quotations are used to evaluate Japanese behavior and link it to Japanese culture, and how these media reports may have been received by news consumers.

3.1. Representation of Japanese and their behaviour

In this section, I will mainly be discussing the BBC.com article, “World Cup: Japan fans impress by cleaning up stadium” (2018). The representation of the Japanese found in this article is fairly typical of this trend of reporting as a whole. However, selections from other media reports will be used to provide further examples. This discussion will look at three main areas: the perception that Japanese behavior is surprising, the representation of social actors, and the evaluation of these actors and their behavior.

3.1.1. Surprising nature of Japanese behavior

The article discusses Japanese fans cleaning up the stadium after a game against Colombia in the 2018 soccer World Cup in Russia. Throughout the article, Japanese behavior is presented as surprising and unusual. This can be clearly seen in the first three paragraphs:

After a heated World Cup match, the stands are usually left with food waste, cups and wrappers scattered in the heat of the moment.

Japanese fans certainly had reason to go wild on Tuesday night. Their side won their opening game, beating Colombia 2-1, and securing the team's first victory against a South American side.

But after the team swept Colombia off the pitch, Japanese fans also did their share of sweeping: meticulously cleaning up their rows and seats in the stadium.

The story begins by presenting the scene which “usually” follows a sporting event – “food waste, cups and wrappers scattered.” The second paragraph implies that Japanese fans “certainly had reason” to “go wild” and leave a similar mess because their team had won the game against Colombia. Many readers of the article will also be familiar with this kind of behavior from their own experiences at sporting events.

The third paragraph marks a shift in the focus of the article. The use of the conjunction “but” creates a contrastive semantic relationship with the first two paragraphs (Fairclough, 2003; Halliday, 1994). It lets the reader know that article will be describing a contrast to this common situation. Rather than leaving the stadium dirty, “Japanese fans did their share of sweeping: meticulously cleaning up their rows and seats in the stadium.”

The unusual nature of the Japanese behaviour is emphasized throughout the article. For example, it is stated that “it is something that comes as a surprise to many foreigners attending matches in Japan.” In addition, the fact that this behavior is seen as newsworthy and was widely reported also indicates how unusual it is. One of the values which determines the newsworthiness of a story is unexpectedness. Things which are unexpected receive more media attention than those which are common and routine (Bell, 1991).

As a further example, an article in *The Times* (Kay, 2018) discusses the fact that the Japanese team cleaned up their locker room following a 2018 World Cup match against Belgium and also highlights how surprising this is:

Priscilla Janssens could not believe her eyes. As one of FIFA’s general coordinators, she is used to overseeing match-day operations at the World Cup venues, ensuring everything runs smoothly behind the scenes. It is one of those jobs where you have to expect the unexpected, but few things have surprised her like the sight that greeted her when Japan’s players left their dressing-room after a dramatic defeat by Belgium in Rostov last night.

The typical dressing-room scene is an ugly one - pieces of kit and apparatus discarded, the bin either ignored or piled high with rubbish. Japan’s players had left theirs spotless, immaculate. They had even left a note saying спасибо, thanking their Russian hosts. “What an example to all teams,” Janssens wrote on Twitter. “A privilege to work with.”

The use of phrases such as “could not believe her eyes”, “unexpected”, and “few things have surprised her like” also foregrounds the unusual nature of Japanese behavior. As in the BBC article, there is also a comparison to what is “typical”: “pieces of kits and apparatus discarded, the bin either ignored or piled high with rubbish.” Janssens also points to the Japanese team as an “example” to be emulated by other teams.

3.1.2. Representation of social actors

Returning to the BBC article, it is important to look at how the Japanese are represented. This article includes references to “Japanese fans”, “the Japanese”, and “Japanese people.” It also includes a reference to “fans”, which context makes clear is referring to Japanese fans. There are no individual Japanese people mentioned in the article, either anonymously or by name.

There are many ways of representing social actors. One distinction that can be made is whether they are “individualized” (referred to as individuals) or “assimilated” (grouped together) (Van Leeuwen, 1996). Two forms of assimilation can be distinguished: aggregation, which refers to a quantifiable number of people, and collectivization, as when social actors are referred to by an unquantified plural or by a mass or collective noun. Assimilation of social actors in a discourse suppresses individual differences. This can clearly be seen in this article. There are uses of both plural forms such as “fans” and collective nouns such as “the Japanese.” As discussed above, media reports about the Japanese often group them together in a monolithic whole without individuality. It is probably that there were Japanese fans, possibly even the majority, who did not take part in the clean-up after the game. However, the article uses the example of the fans seen cleaning and generalizes it to represent all Japanese people.

As well as presenting the Japanese as a monolithic group, the discourse also creates an image of the Japanese based on stereotypes. In several places in the BBC article, militaristic imagery is used. This can be seen in the phrase “Equipped with large rubbish bags they brought along, the fans marched through the rows picking up rubbish...” . Use of terms such as “equipped”, “marched” and in a later paragraph “drilled into them”, carries connotations of regimented, almost military-like behaviour. This can also be seen in an article about the 2014 World Cup in the Independent (“World Cup,” 2014), “...Japanese spectators armed with bin liners patrolled their side of the stadium”. This ties into common stereotypes of the communal and hierarchical nature of Japanese society, where individuality is suppressed. It may also be linked to the prevalence of the samurai stereotype noted by Levick (2005).

Other people involved in the story are either backgrounded or suppressed. This means they are either not included in the text at all or they are mentioned elsewhere in the text but not directly in connection with the given action (Van Leeuwen, 2008). For example, there is no mention of who left the garbage. Was it only fans from other countries or did this group include Japanese fans as well?

Although fans of other teams are also cleaning up after games, this is either not mentioned or is minimized by including it as a single sentence or clause in the midst of descriptions of Japanese behavior. It is also minimized through use of lexical items such as “although” and “however.” There is a single mention that “Senegal fans have in fact been seen doing the same at this year's World Cup - but it's the Japanese who pioneered it and are now famous for it.” This sentence is buried in the middle of descriptions and explanations of Japanese behavior. Following the clause about Senegalese behavior with a “but” clause also serves to minimize that significance of these actions. Unlike the Japanese fans, the newspaper makes no attempt to link the actions of these fans to some aspect of Senegal culture. It is possible that the reporters and readers have no common image and set of stereotypes linked to Senegal that can be drawn on for this article.

This minimization of the actions of fans from other countries can also be seen in other articles. The Telegraph (“Japan leave,” 2019) also follows this pattern of briefly mentioning the actions of other fans: “Japan’s fans in Russia took care to pick up litter around them at stadiums

and tidy up public spaces, inspiring Peru, Columbia, and Senegal fans to do the same.” The main clause of the sentence and the subordinate clause have a causal relationship: Japan’s actions are represented as “inspiring” the actions of other fans. This formulation gives Japan’s fans the credit for the actions of supporters of other countries.

By keeping the focus of the articles on Japan, the behavior of Japan’s fans is made to appear more unusual than it perhaps is. One possible reason for this is that this behaviour does not fit with common stereotypes of African or South American behavior. In contrast, as mentioned above, there are long-held ideas about the cleanliness of Japan and the Japanese. This connection between Japanese behavior and Japanese culture in the discourse will be examined more closely later in this paper.

3.1.3. Evaluation

Evaluation includes the ways by which the author of a text commits to values (Fairclough, 2003; Martin 2000). This can be done in a number of ways, including both explicitly and implicitly. For example, evaluative statements and the use of lexical items with positive or negative connotations can indicate explicit evaluation. Evaluation can also be implied through an appeal to a set of values assumed to be shared between reader and writer (Fairclough, 2003).

For example, the headline of the BBC article, “World Cup: Japan fans impress by cleaning up stadium” carries a positive evaluation through the use of the word “impress.” It is also interesting to look at how the Japanese fans depicted in this article and their behaviour is presented. For example, instead of describing their actions simply as “cleaning up”, the article uses phrases like “meticulously”, “absolutely clean”, and “to leave the place just as neat as they had found it.” Evaluative terms have a range of intensity (Martin & White, 2005; Fairclough, 2003). By using a high intensity phrase like “meticulously” or “absolutely clean” rather than a lower intensity term such as “clean” heightens the positive evaluation the article attaches to Japanese behavior.

Aside from explicit markers of evaluation, there can also be evaluation implied in the article because the writer and reader can be assumed to share a value system. Even if the article were written as neutrally as possible without explicit indications of evaluation, a reader could be expected to interpret the actions of cleaning up after oneself positively. This is because of the values of the society the reader is part of.

3.2. Intertextuality and the use of quotations

Quotations have also been found to be used in a highly evaluative manner. They are often used to praise or criticize events or the people involved. They can be used as a way for a reporter to appear objective but still provide evaluation of events or participants (Julian, 2011). The selection of which quotations to use and how they are framed in the story enable the reporter to introduce his or her own viewpoint while maintaining the appearance of objectivity. A journalist is able to select quotations which support the story he or she is trying to tell. The use of quotations also provides authority and legitimation to the reporter’s viewpoints (Caldas-

Coulthard, 1994). It has also been found that minority voices are often omitted from news reports in favor of the opinions of an “elite” (van Dijk, 1988, 1991).

This section will examine two areas in which other texts are incorporated into this discourse: the use of quotations from Twitter and the use of Western experts to explain Japanese behavior.

3.2.1 Twitter and fans

For example, an article in *The Sun* quoted two Twitter comments, both from non-Japanese fans. Both of these tweets have been selected by the author to support the message they are trying to convey.

Rival fans hailed the clean-up effort.

Christopher McKaig said: "This is my favourite moment of the World Cup so far. Lessons in life we can take from the game. Why I support."

Mark Blackmore added: "Imagine if all fans did this and then brought that habit home?"

As discussed above, the use of quotations allows the writer to introduce their viewpoint and still seem to remain objective. In addition, the first sentence “Rival fans hailed the clean-up effort” introduces the tweets and frames them as a positive evaluation of Japanese behavior. The two tweets selected are both positive evaluative statements and endorse using this behavior as a model to copy, referring to it as a lesson we can take and as something that should be brought home.

The BBC.com article also includes the first of these two tweets. However, when it comes to discussing how Japanese people on social media are responding to the news, the article says only “What do fans make of the fact their post-match cleaning spree becomes a regular hit on social media? If anything, they’re proud.” without referencing any individual examples. The focus of these articles remains how Japanese behavior appears in a Western context.

3.2.2. The use of Western experts

A common trend in media reports related to Japan is the use of non-Japanese experts to explain Japanese behaviour. Japanese experts are rarely quoted or asked for their opinions. Even though the experts referenced often live in Japan and are knowledgeable about Japanese issues, this cannot help but to contribute to the depiction of the Japanese from a Western perspective.

The only people mentioned by name in the BBC article are “Japan-based football journalist Scott McIntyre” and “Scott North, professor of sociology at Osaka University.” Although both are based in Japan and arguably experts on Japanese sports and society, neither is able to provide an authentic Japanese perspective on the story. However, they are used to connect Japanese behavior to Japanese culture.

For example, the BBC.com article quotes McIntyre as saying, "It's not just part of the football culture but part of Japanese culture." He then goes on to say "You often hear people say that football is a reflection of culture. An important aspect of Japanese society is making sure that everything is absolutely clean and that's the case in all sporting events and certainly also in football."

Another example from the same article reads,

It's a habit drilled into Japanese people from early childhood.

"Cleaning up after football matches is an extension of basic behaviours that are taught in school, where the children clean their school classrooms and hallways," explains Scott North, professor of sociology at Osaka University.

Both of these experts are used as authorities to explain the news report's representation of Japanese behaviour. Again, as commonly seen in reports on Japan, culture is used as an explanation for Japanese behavior. An NBC story on the 2014 World Cup ("Japan fans," 2014) claims this behaviour "has its roots in Japan's values of being respectful of hosts and protecting the environment." The Telegraph article ("Japan leave," 2019) also links Japanese behavior to their culture: "Picking up rubbish and taking pride in your possessions is instilled in Japanese children from an early age." It gives Naomi Osaka as a further example of this, stating that she "is known to clear up her own plastic bottles and bags from court." However, unlike the BBC article, these statements are presented as the reporter's own and not attributed to any authority.

As discussed above, this tendency to depict Japanese people as a monolithic whole and connect their behaviour to something intrinsic in their culture is common in media depictions of Japan. As can be seen in these articles, selected examples are used to make generalisations about "the Japanese." Quotations which support these generalizations are chosen. In addition, this representation of Japanese people occurs entirely from an outside perspective. No individual Japanese people are quoted or referenced as authorities.

3.3. Consumption of news reports

Many people are influenced in their opinions about race and ethnic groups by media reports. However, these media reports are processed through already existing schemata and models (van Dijk, 1987). People have their own ideas about race and tend to interpret media reports to fit with these ideas.

In the past, it was difficult to know how news reports were received by those consuming them. However, social media and internet comment sections allow us to see how news consumers react to a story. A recontextualization occurs when the news report is reproduced as an online article with a comment section. In this recontextualization, the text shifts from being a report of events to being a prompt for readers to respond with their own opinions, often with a different purpose from the original article. Because the BBC article discussed above does not

include a comment section, this section of the paper will mainly focus on an article in the Telegraph (“Japan Leaves,” 2019).

Consumers of the media take this story as an opportunity to complain about and criticize what they see as problems in their own society. For example, readers of the Telegraph article link the fact that British fans don’t clean up after games to a wide variety of causes. Some of the comments found after the article include:

- Dropping rubbish and destroying your and others' possessions is instilled in British children from an early age.
- Children are taught more about saving elephants in Africa than THEIR own environment and that it starts immediately around them and they should keep it clean.
- the indigenous Brits (and the innumerable Third Worlders sponging off the ridiculously loose & freely obtained welfare benefits) are content to live in filth.
- I fear that the concept of ‘pride’ in your own nation is slowly dying in the UK. It’s the complete opposite in Japan.
- Years of demoralisation tactics and cultural marxism aimed at making people feel guilt for their own existence will do that.
- I would say more to do with the sense of entitlement and "me-ism" fostered by hand-wringing, bleeding-heart lefties and spineless wimpy politicians. The concept of civic pride, care for ones environment and personal responsibility is foreign to most under fifties in the UK. Governments are too pre-occupied with the pursuit of Political Correctness in all its pervasive forms to address bread & butter issues and the ills of society.
- It starts with our Parliament which doesn't believe that the UK can and should rule ourselves.
- Here kids are taught someone will clean up after you.
- The UK has a mind set of having people in service doing things for them.
- Well Brits used to take pride in their country but then Thatcher came a long and said there's no such thing as society and it's everyone for themselves.
- That’s socialism for you.
- Don't you just love these people. If only our rabble could behave likewise.

Looking at these comments, it is obvious that the behaviour of the Japanese is almost irrelevant to the purposes behind the commenters. This constructed image of Japanese fans is used as an implicit criticism of fans from other countries, including the UK itself. In fact, it may be argued that these articles function in the discourse more about fans from other countries than about Japan and the Japanese.

This generally positive story about Japanese fans is used as an opportunity for media consumers to introduce their own opinions about a wide array of other people, including “British

children”, “indigenous Brits”, “innumerable Third Worlders sponging off the ridiculously loose & freely obtained welfare benefits”, “hand-wringing, bleeding-heart lefties”, “spineless wimpy politicians”, “Parliament”, and “our rabble”, among others.

This can be seen as a natural result of connecting Japanese actions to their culture. If Japanese behavior is linked to their culture, the lack of such behavior in the West can be seen as being connected to some negative aspects of Western culture. However, it is left to the individual consumer of the news to decide that these negative aspects are. Because the Daily Telegraph is a right-wing newspaper, it is not surprising that such things as political correctness, welfare benefits, environmentalism, cultural Marxism and socialism are given as possible causes for the failure of British fans to clean up after themselves. The one exception accepts that assumption that British people “used to take pride in their country”, but blames the loss of that feeling to Thatcher saying “there’s no such thing as society and it’s everyone for themselves.” However, this comment is followed by strong disagreement from the other commenters.

4. Conclusions and further research

Returning to the four broad generalizations discussed above, several of them can be found in these articles. In general, the Japanese are presented as a monolithic whole. It is very rare for any individual Japanese person to be referenced or quoted. The representation of Japanese tends to be stereotypical – meticulously clean, regimented, and without individuality. In addition, the behavior of the Japanese is explained as an intrinsic part of their culture. However, this linking of Japanese behavior and Japanese culture is always made through the use of non-Japanese experts on Japan and not by asking Japanese people themselves.

The one generalization which does not apply is the idea that Japan’s unusual behavior is used to present Japan as inferior to the West. In contrast to this expectation, these articles present Japanese behavior as a model to be followed by Western fans. This can also be seen in how the articles are received by readers. The Daily Telegraph comment section, for example, shows that consumers of these stories accept the link between this behavior and Japanese culture. Therefore, the apparent lack of similar behavior in the UK must be a reflection of weaknesses in modern British society. In this way, an apparently unrelated sports story about Japanese fans at the World Cup becomes subsumed into conservative British political discourse and used as support for anti-progressive and anti-immigrant views.

This paper looks at only a small number of examples in detail. It is necessary to examine if these conclusions can be generalized to media representations of the Japanese as a whole. This could possibly be done through a combination of CDA with corpus linguistics. This would allow a larger selection of media texts to be examined. The use of corpus linguistic techniques would also allow greater insight into how evaluative lexical items are used by identifying key words and collocations.

Both this paper and earlier research on media reports of the 2011 tsunami (Burgess, 2011; Clarke, 2017, 2018) have found that the Japanese are often used in the media as a way of providing an idealized example that Western society can be compared to. It allows news

producers to highlight a supposed shortcoming in the behavior of people in their own countries by contrasting it with a stereotypical generalized representation of Japanese people. Further research could expand this to a wider and more general corpus of texts to see if representations of the Japanese are used in a similar manner in other types of stories.

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