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Analyzing Media Discourse on Climate Change and Environmental Issues in South Asian Contexts: A Case Study of Pakistani Media Coverage

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine how Pakistani media outlets cover climate change and other environmental concerns in South Asian settings. This study takes a case study approach by analyzing the coverage of climate change in prominent Pakistani media using content analysis. The research aims to explore how the media shapes public views and reactions to climate change in the area by drawing upon environmental communication theories, including agenda-setting theory (1972) and cultivation theory (1972). From November 2023 through February 2024, a total of four months systematically collected data from chosen publications that cover climate change and environmental concerns. The media's use of framing strategies, storylines, and important themes in their coverage of climate change examined via the data gathered. This study investigated the prevailing narratives and themes found in Pakistani media coverage of climate change and environmental issues. The results shed light on the biases, prevailing narratives, and effects on public perceptions and understandings of climate change in South Asian media environments. Pakistan, positioned as the seventh most susceptible country to climate change according to the Germanwatch Climate Risk Index, confronts substantial environmental

obstacles such as glacial melting, unpredictable monsoon patterns, water scarcity, and severe weather occurrences. The media has a crucial influence on molding the public's comprehension and reaction to these difficulties. Climate change is not given much attention in the Pakistani media, even though it is an urgent subject. The overarching goal of this study is to shed light on the dynamics of environmental communication in the area and provide direction for efforts to raise public consciousness about the need to take action against climate change.

Keywords: media discourse, Pakistan, climate change, environmental issues, environmental communication, public perception, climate change awareness, policy implications

Introduction

Global warming is one of the biggest problems we're facing right now because of the devastating impact it will have on ecosystems, companies, and towns everywhere. The news media's significant impact on public opinion and policy on social and environmental problems has been extensively studied (Liu et al., 2008). The media, in its role as the "fourth estate," promotes open government and holds officials to account (Antilla, 2005; Entman, 2010; Nisbet, 2008). But the media may weaken democracy if they don't report news objectively and from a variety of perspectives (Kabir, 2007). If we want more people to pay attention to important environmental concerns like climate change, the mass media, especially print media, have a huge impact (Slovic, 2000). With climate change accelerating at such a fast rate, it is more important than ever for the media to educate the public about these complicated problems and encourage thoughtful discussion and action.

As a country that is vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, Pakistan is an important lens through which to view how the media has covered this issue. We take a look at how the media in Pakistan cover climate change from the angle of theories of environmental communication. We analyze how media coverage of communities, dangers, and their definitions affect public opinion and government action. The culturally and environmentally rich region of South Asia is on the brink of a climatic catastrophe. Global warming, unpredictable weather patterns, and more intense natural catastrophes are a problem for Pakistan, one of the most susceptible countries. However, there is still a lack of public understanding of climate change

and educated discussion about the topic. When it comes to developing public knowledge and encouraging climate action, the media is an essential information gatekeeper. We can learn a lot about the climate change narratives and where the communication may be lacking by examining media discourse. It is very important to comprehend the framing of climate change problems by Pakistani media. First, it's useful for gauging how much people in the public domain know and care. Secondly, it gives us the ability to recognize prevailing storylines, which may include prejudices or opposing opinion. Thirdly, activities to engage the public, advocate for policies, and improve communication may all benefit from media discourse analysis. Mobilizing collective action is essential to successfully address climate change, and an educated populace is key to this effort.

Newspapers are essential for accurately portraying the current state of climate change on a national and international scale, since they detail past, present, and future weather patterns (Gavin, 2009). By reading newspapers every day, the people may get important knowledge about how climate change is developing and what it means. Media portrayals of climate change have a significant impact on how the public views the subject; if the topic is under-discussed, people may become sceptical or unconcerned about its seriousness, which may impede attempts to take swift action (Stamm et al., 2000). An increase in climate change stories on front pages not only draws attention to how bad the situation is, but it also encourages governments and policymakers to do something about it (Nisbet, 2008). Also, important government agencies are more likely to investigate pressing environmental concerns when the news is widely covered, which encourages them to take the initiative to combat the effects of climate change. Pakistani media mostly report on severe weather occurrences and their immediate effects while covering climate change, according to current study. Less common are tales that provide deeper scientific explanations, address long-term repercussions, and focus on remedies. Research also shows that there are gaps in coverage, with English-language media giving climate change greater attention than Urdu-language media. The possibility for significant portions of the population to be excluded and information inequality are issues that this brings up. There is an immediate need to improve the storyline about climate change in Pakistani media, since the present debate has its limits. It is critical to prioritize practical solutions, do more thorough scientific research, and increase

coverage. Additionally, for inclusive public involvement, it is crucial to ensure that information is balanced and accessible across diverse languages and media channels. In order to promote climate action and establish a more resilient future for Pakistan, the media may play a game-changing role by encouraging constructive discourse and providing individuals with information.

Although climate change is a fact, there are a number of restrictions in the existing discourse about the topic in Pakistani media that prevent the people from understanding and becoming engaged effectively. Limited and reactive coverage of climate change is common, with news outlets mostly covering the immediate aftermath of severe weather occurrences. Narratives that focus on long-term effects, remedies, and deeper scientific explanations are still relatively rare. Many of the present discussions gloss over the scientific consequences of climate change, its complex effects on different communities and industries, and the variety of possible responses. There seems to be a gap in the coverage of climate change between Urdu-language media and English-language media, according to studies. This might lead to the exclusion of vast populations who do not have easy access to information in English. By highlighting just the worst aspects of climate change, we risk making people feel hopeless and preventing them from learning about the problem, its possible solutions, and their own role in finding and implementing them. Informed public engagement and advocacy are impeded by the frequent lack of critical conversations on climate policy, institutional reactions, and accountability systems. In light of this, the purpose of this research is to assess the climate change coverage in Pakistani media, draw conclusions about its merits and shortcomings, and offer solutions for improved messaging that will educate the public, inspire them to take action, and ensure that lawmakers face the music when it comes to combating global warming.

Significance of the Study

The future sustainability and resilience of Pakistan depends on our capacity to decipher the ways in which the media there presents and emphasizes stories about climate change. It is possible to improve the efficacy of communication tactics and educational programs by analyzing media discourse to learn about the extent to which the public is aware of and involved. To motivate both individual and community action in response to climate change, an educated

populace is essential. Potential biases, opposing viewpoints, or misrepresented parts of a subject may be revealed via narrative analysis. Acquiring this information is critical for filling knowledge gaps in the public domain, fostering different viewpoints, and encouraging balanced and thorough understanding. The findings of this research may help media organizations, lawmakers, and advocacy organizations craft more effective tactics for focused communication. In the long run, these tactics may improve climate action by raising awareness, promoting solutions-oriented thinking, and giving people a feeling of control over their own climate situation. To better equip voters to demand more effective and swift climate action from their elected officials, it is important to analyze how the media portrays climate policies and the institutional reactions to them. To achieve robust climate governance, it is essential to have an educated and involved public. The media narratives and experiences of Pakistan in relation to climate change are instructive for other South Asian countries dealing with the same issues. The findings of this research may inform ongoing initiatives on a global and regional scale to improve communication, foster collaboration, and guarantee a fair and equitable shift towards a sustainable future. There is more at stake than just scholarly curiosity when analyzing climate change rhetoric in Pakistani media. We hope that by sharing the results of this research with the public and policymakers, we will help Pakistan and the rest of the region create a future that is both sustainable and resilient.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the media's portrayal of climate change and its effects on Pakistani communities?
- 2) How does media portrayal of climate change adhere to certain narratives, frames, and discourses?
- 3) How can we decipher the intricacies of media portrayal and its impact on public comprehension and governmental reactions through the lens of several theories of environmental communication?

Literature Review

Promoting public knowledge, involvement, and action around climate change requires an understanding of how narratives about the issue are framed in the media. This analysis looks at

climate change coverage in Pakistani media from a South Asian perspective. Media outlets throughout the world cover climate change in different ways, according to the expanding corpus of literature on the topic (Hansen, 2015; Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014). Regional differences in framing have been studied; for example, whereas Western media tend to centre on solutions and scientific consensus, developing nations' media may place more emphasis on immediate effects and adaptability (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004; Nisbet, 2005).

Studies conducted in South Asia have shown that media coverage of climate change is insufficient and biased, particularly in relation to severe weather occurrences (Jamil & Bhuj, 2022; Mishra, 2020). According to Bawa (2015) and Mishra (2020), media narratives are impacted by cultural and political circumstances. Obstacles such as sensationalism, a lack of scientific knowledge, and political pressure shape the coverage.

The representation of climate change in Pakistani media has been the subject of several research. Limited space, political constraints, and a lack of scientific expertise are among the issues highlighted by Sharif and Medvecky (2018). In addition, studies show that media outlets that cover both English and Urdu vary in their coverage, which might lead to the exclusion of Urdu speakers (Jamil & Bhuj, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework that takes into account the intricacies of environmental communication is necessary for analyzing media discourse on climate change and environmental challenges in South Asian settings, specifically within Pakistani media coverage. Critically examines the media's framing of climate change and its effects on public views by drawing on theories of environmental communication including Cultivation Theory and Agenda-Setting Theory. The media shape public opinion, according to Agenda-Setting Theory put forward by McCombs and Shaw (1972), by choosing which subjects to highlight and how often to do so. Finding out how climate change ranks in Pakistani media might give you a good idea of how seriously people take the issue. Furthermore, Gerbner's (1972) Cultivation Theory suggests that people's shared ideas of reality are shaped by their sustained exposure to media information. Finding possible biases and dominant narratives that effect public awareness and attitudes

towards environmental concerns may be achieved by analyzing how the Pakistani media presents the consequences and solutions of climate change. In order to critically evaluate the media's impact on public knowledge and reactions to environmental concerns, this theoretical framework offers a thorough method for investigating climate change discourse in South Asian settings.

Previous Studies

Khuhro et al. (2020) shed light on the complex web of relationships among media, marketers, and content creators by studying the phenomena of advertising pressure on climate change material in Pakistani media. The research recognizes that the media is a company operating in the market economy, subsisting mostly on advertising income. Research based on qualitative interviews with environmental journalists shows that advertising has a major impact on news coverage, especially when it comes to less heavy-handed topics like climate change, where more resources are needed to cover the story. In Pakistani media, government marketers have a lot of sway since they pay for most of the ads. As a result, journalists self-censor and minimize news that are critical of the government so that the advertisers may keep their money. In a similar vein, corporate sponsors want to have stories about concerns that might hurt their interests buried. Research into the effects of advertising pressure on other Pakistani media material is warranted, since this study establishes that it is a critical component in agenda-cutting for climate change reporting in Pakistani media.

The study by Sharif and Medvecky (2018) on climate change coverage in Pakistani news outlets brought attention to the gap between the seriousness of the country's climate change implications and the general public's lack of understanding of the problem. Extreme weather events, floods, droughts, and warming temperatures affect Pakistan even though the country doesn't contribute much to global warming. According to the research, insufficient coverage of climate change due to a communication gap between the public and the media is one reason why people are confused, deny, and have low levels of understanding. Politics, economics, society, culture, and science all have a role in how the media covers climate change, according to qualitative interviews with media experts. Reporters' lack of access to relevant data and the

relative unimportance of environmental news stories in comparison to political ones are the two main obstacles highlighted in the article. Despite the complexity of the problem, the study recommends two approaches to increase the value of news: first, addressing the problem of limited access to information by providing journalists with better tools and training; and second, strengthening the bond between science and journalism by creating frameworks and networks to streamline the sharing of findings. These results provide a foundation for enhancing climate change communication in Pakistan by strengthening the bond between news outlets, scientists, and the general people.

Mittal (2012) analyzed climate change coverage in Indian print media via discourse analysis. He found that although the subject has received more attention internationally, emerging nations have not seen nearly as much examination. Studying three prominent Indian English-language newspapers, the research finds that climate change coverage peaks around major events like the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony and the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report. Similarities with Western media coverage and the emergence of a transnational narrative called the "climatic turn" are suggested by the analysis, which identifies prevalent frames in the discourse of the media, such as scientific certainty, energy challenges, social progress, public accountability, plus impending disaster. Using ideas like a "climatic turn" and the environmental discourse as a "master discourse" developed by European scholars, the study posits that the way the Indian press covers climate change could help shape this larger story by bridging the gap between political events, international science, and national responsibilities.

Recognizing the critical role of the media in covering public concerns, Miah et al. (2011) studied how daily newspapers in Bangladesh covered significant climate-change matters. In a study that looked at three major newspapers from 2006 to 2009, the most discussed climate change issue was natural disasters. Other issues covered included biodiversity, agriculture, global warming, and water scarcity. Notably, throughout the research period, local climate-change concerns were given a lot of attention. The Daily Star, among the newspapers, covered climate-change communications at the local, regional, and worldwide levels the most. Variations in climate-change coverage across time, impacted by both regional and international weather

patterns, are highlighted in the research. Coverage has been steadily rising since the start of 2009. The results highlight the relevance of local viewpoints and the media's role in generating public awareness and influencing public discourse on climate-related matters, which is important for policy implementation in Bangladesh regarding adaptation and mitigation of climate change.

The study by Billett (2010), "Dividing climate change: global warming in the Indian mass media," adds considerably to the expanding literature on media portrayals of climate change. It does so by concentrating on the Indian context, which has been extensively neglected in earlier research. The portrayal of climate change in India's mainstream media is of paramount importance as the country grows into a powerful economic and environmental actor on the international stage. Examining four prominent English-language newspapers in India, Billett's research provides insight into how climate change problems are framed and highlights a significant difference compared to narratives in industrialized nations. According to the results, the national press in India often presents climate change through the lens of a "risk-responsibility divide," which reflects the country's aggressively nationalist attitude and its emphasis on postcolonial and developmental analysis. This fresh perspective shows how complicated climate change discussions are in India, and how difficult environmental issues are in different cultural and sociopolitical settings, demonstrating the need for sophisticated methods.

There is a noticeable lack of research on the analysis of media discourse on climate change and environmental issues in South Asian contexts, particularly in Pakistan. Previous studies have examined the complexities of climate change reporting in Pakistani media, but there is a need for more comprehensive studies in this area. Although these studies have provided insight into the difficulties encountered by environmental journalists and the impact of advertising, there is a dearth of in-depth studies that investigate how the media in Pakistan frame, represent, and set agendas for climate change and environmental issues. Media portrayals and public conversations on climate change in Pakistan are shaped by a complex interplay of political, economic, cultural, and technical forces, which necessitates more investigation into these topics. It is also important to study the effects on public awareness and participation in environmental concerns of the ways in which various media, both national and regional, cover

climate change. Future studies should fill these gaps to provide light on how the media influence climate change discourse and how to raise public awareness and motivate action in South Asian settings.

Methodology

Publicly accessible and influential Pakistani newspapers, both national and regional, will be the primary focus of the research. Express Tribune, The Nation, and Dawn are national newspapers, whilst Jang, The News, and Mashriq are regional newspapers centered in Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar, respectively. The research will compile news stories that were published between November 2023 and February 2024. We will scan the archives or databases of the chosen newspapers for stories mentioning "climate change" and "Pakistan" to make sure they are current and relevant. Any and all versions of the newspapers, both online and in print, will be considered. For this research, we will choose articles from the selected newspapers that cover a variety of environmental and climate change stories published during the given period. Sample articles will include, but not be limited to:

1. "Glaciers' Melt Could Cause an Urgent Water Crisis in Pakistan" (Dawn, 2023-11-15): Details the melting of glaciers in Pakistan and its implications on water shortages, highlighting government initiatives and concerns about their effectiveness.
2. "Coastal Communities in Sindh Face Danger from Rising Sea Levels" (The News, 2023-12-08): Focuses on the challenges faced by coastal communities in Sindh due to rising sea levels, featuring interviews with affected individuals and criticizing government support.
3. "Farmers in Punjab Face Challenges Due to Unpredictable Rainfall Patterns" (Jang, 2024-01-20): Examines the impact of climate change on Punjabi agriculture, farmer adaptation strategies, and calls for government assistance and improved infrastructure.
4. "Protesters Call for Climate Action at Large National Gathering" (Express Tribune, 2024-02-10): Covers a demonstration by young climate activists advocating for stricter regulations, corporate responsibility, and increased investment in renewable energy.

The chosen articles will be examined using content analysis. In this study, we will examine how the media in Pakistan have covered climate change and environmental concerns, paying special attention to their framing strategies, information sources, and overall tone. In order to better understand how national and regional media report and prioritize stories, we will compare and contrast them. An in-depth report will be produced from the analysis's results, drawing attention to patterns, trends, and insights in the media's portrayal of climate change and environmental challenges in South Asian settings, particularly in Pakistani media.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Analyzing the sample data via the lens of environmental communication theory entails investigating the ways in which media coverage of climate change and associated topics in Pakistan influences viewers' views, opinions, and actions. This approach may benefit from the agenda-setting hypothesis, which posits that the media has a substantial impact on public opinion and agenda-setting via the prioritization of certain subjects. By focusing on particular climate change-related occurrences and concerns such as glaciers melting, sea levels rising, and agricultural difficulties caused by irregular rainfall patterns in the sample articles, agenda-setting impacts are evident. The articles present the effects of climate change on Pakistan as serious and immediate problems, which helps to raise public knowledge and comprehension of the issue.

Table 1

Title: Rising Sea Levels Threaten Coastal Communities in Sindh

Sample Article	Environmental Communication Theory	Analysis
Rising Sea Levels Threaten Coastal Communities in Sindh (The News, 2023-12-08)	Material-Symbolic Discourse	Focuses on concrete impacts such as erosion and salinization, highlighting the tangible effects of climate change on coastal communities.
	Mediatic-Human	Serves as a mediator, bringing the issue of

Nature Relations	rising sea levels to readers' attention and fostering empathy with the affected communities.	
Social Construction of Risk	Frames the situation as a significant risk, using terms like "threaten" and "struggles" to emphasize urgency and the potential suffering of coastal inhabitants.	
Public Sphere and Counter publics	Provides a platform for the voices of affected communities, potentially acting as a counter public within the national discourse on climate change in Sindh.	
Farmers in Punjab Struggle with Erratic Rainfall Patterns (Jang, 2024-01-20)	Environmental Justice	Implicitly raises the issue by showcasing the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities facing changing weather patterns and water availability in Punjab.
Youth Activists Demand Climate Action at National Protest (Express Tribune, 2024-02-10)	Public Sphere and Counter publics	Amplifies the voices of youth demanding action, serving as a counter public within the broader discourse on climate change.
Agenda-Setting	Brings climate action to the public agenda, potentially influencing public and policy responses towards addressing climate change concerns highlighted by youth activists.	

The media's portrayal of climate change and environmental concerns influences public opinion and policy, as may be shown via an examination of the news items in question through the lens of several theories of environmental communication. In the article "Rising Sea Levels

Threaten Coastal Communities in Sindh," for example, the author skillfully connects the dots between human welfare and environmental degradation through a graphic depiction of the effects of climate change. This follows the cultivation theory's call for increased empathy and consciousness of the human cost of environmental change. Aspects of agenda-setting theory are shown in the article's use of strong language and expert warnings to highlight the seriousness and immediacy of the hazards linked to rising sea levels. This strategy influences public perception and the prioritization of climate-related concerns. In addition to supporting social modelling and amplifying the perspectives of impacted communities, the paper demonstrates social cognitive theory. This might influence policy choices by ensuring that marginalised voices are included in the climate change debate. As a whole, the research shows how the media plays a complex role in making people think about and react to climate change, and how several types of communication are necessary to inspire real change in policy and practice.

Table 2

Title: Farmers in Punjab Struggle with Erratic Rainfall Patterns

Sample Article	Environmental Communication Theory	Analysis
Rising Sea Levels Threaten Coastal Communities in Sindh (The News, 2023-12-08)	Material-Symbolic Discourse:	The article vividly portrays the tangible consequences of climate change, such as submerging fertile land and displacing communities, highlighting the material impacts.
	Mediatic-Human Nature Relations:	Through firsthand accounts, the article serves as a mediator, presenting readers with the human dimensions of environmental change, emphasizing the emotional toll and loss experienced by affected communities.
	Social Construction of Risk:	Expert warnings underscore the urgency and severity of the risk, projecting potential village displacement within decades, effectively framing the situation as an immediate and significant threat.
	Public Sphere and Counter publics:	The article amplifies the demands of affected communities, advocating for government intervention and community relocation, potentially empowering them within the broader climate discourse.
Farmers in Punjab Struggle with Erratic Rainfall Patterns (Jang,	Environmental Justic:	By highlighting the struggles of small farmers and their disproportionate vulnerability to climate impacts, the article implicitly addresses

Sample Article	Environmental Communication Theory	Analysis
2024-01-20)	Agenda-Setting:	<p>issues of environmental justice and unequal impacts.</p> <p>By linking erratic weather patterns to food security concerns and potential social unrest, the article elevates the importance of addressing climate change in policy agendas and public discussions.</p>
Youth Activists Demand Climate Action at National Protest (Express Tribune, 2024-02-10)	Social Amplification of Risk Theory (SART): Public Sphere and Counter publics:	<p>The article discusses how media coverage intensifies public perception of climate risks, emphasizing the role of media in shaping public awareness and concern regarding environmental issues.</p> <p>The protest serves as a counter public within the national discourse, amplifying youth voices and advocating for stricter environmental regulations and corporate accountability.</p>
	Agenda-Setting:	<p>The nationwide protest effectively reinserts climate change onto the national agenda, triggering renewed discussions on policy solutions and demonstrating the influence of public action on policy agendas.</p>
	Cultivation Theory:	<p>By aiming to cultivate a sense of urgency and collective responsibility for addressing climate change, the protest seeks to influence public attitudes and behaviors towards environmental</p>

	Environmental Communication	
Sample Article	Theory	Analysis
action.		

By highlighting the precarious position of small farmers in the face of inadequate infrastructure and resources, the essay subtly highlights the inequalities in the effects of climate change. The essay follows the cultivation theory's lead in elevating the topic of climate change and influencing governmental agendas by tying it to food security and the possibility of societal unrest. In addition, the agenda-setting hypothesis highlights the impact of media portrayals of crop failures and water shortages on raising public awareness of the hazards associated with climate change. Furthermore, the piece highlights a demonstration that gives a voice to young people, creating a counter public in the national conversation about climate change and reviving policy conversations via media coverage. Protesters want to show how the media plays a multi-faceted role in creating climate change discourse and social reactions by fostering a sense of urgency and collective responsibility and by calling on individuals to take action and alter their behavior in response to the issue.

Each of the three pieces offers a unique approach to drawing attention to the critical nature of the climate change dangers and how the public may be mobilized to demand action. The pieces provide a complex picture of the effects of climate change by giving a platform to underrepresented groups and highlighting personal narratives. The papers have the potential to shape national conversations about climate change and the way policies are addressed. The articles aim to promote climate-friendly policy and public action by highlighting the need of collective responsibility and the sense of urgency.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the small sample size, more investigation into a wider variety of publications is required to draw firm conclusions. To find out how these publications really affected public

opinion and government reactions, further study is needed. A more thorough comprehension of climate change discourse in Pakistani media might be achieved by investigating other theories of communication and increasing the size of the sample.

Conclusion

Finally, by using theories of environmental communication to the examination of climate change coverage in Pakistani media, we get a better understanding of the nuances of the country's portrayal, perception, and possible resolution of environmental challenges. Environmental communication theories show up in media narratives in many different ways, as can be seen in the refined analysis of the sample news items. Each theory provides a different view on how the media affects public knowledge and conversation about climate change, from emphasizing the real-world effects on communities to giving a stronger voice to underrepresented groups and shaping legislative agendas. These results highlight the power of the media to portray climate change in a negative light, heighten public awareness of the problem, and, ultimately, shape government actions. Media coverage helps people empathize and develop a feeling of shared responsibility by highlighting real-life experiences and hardships.

The study may not represent the depth and variety of climate change debate in Pakistani media due to its small sample size, hence it is vital to note its limitations. To fill up the gaps and provide a fuller picture, other studies need to look at various types of articles and use more theories of communication. Regardless, the results show that media play an important part in influencing public opinion, guiding policy discussions, and, finally, motivating people to take action against climate change. More educated communication tactics and efficient solutions to this worldwide problem may be achieved by using theories of environmental communication to get a deeper understanding of the ways in which media portrayal affects public conversation.

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