

EFFICACY OF KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN FOSTERING ENTREPRENEURIAL CULTURE AMONG YOUTH IN KENYA

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Abstract This article explores how knowledge sharing cultivates an entrepreneurial culture among Kenya's youth, focusing on its impact on business sustainability, growth, and innovation within this demographic. With youth unemployment remaining a major challenge, fostering entrepreneurship is crucial for Kenya's economic development. Knowledge sharing among young entrepreneurs has emerged as a key element for improving business competencies, resilience, and adaptability, allowing entrepreneurs to benefit from collective insights, problem-solving strategies, and innovative ideas essential for navigating complex market environments. The study uses a qualitative approach, employing interviews and focus groups to gain in-depth insights into the experiences of youth entrepreneurs in Kenya. The findings reveal that effective knowledge sharing among young entrepreneurs bolsters their business agility, fuels innovation, and creates a supportive network for knowledge exchange, which enhances collaboration and mutual growth. Essential factors identified include trust, social networks, and supportive leadership, all of which create a foundation for productive knowledge-sharing practices. However, significant challenges hinder these practices, including limited access to digital platforms, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of training that leaves many entrepreneurs without the digital literacy needed to benefit fully from knowledge-sharing mechanisms. The study concludes that knowledge sharing is vital for fostering an entrepreneurial culture among Kenyan youth by promoting innovation, resilience, and a sustainable business environment. Enhancing trust, leadership support, and social networks while addressing barriers like limited digital access can help create a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem that drives economic growth and stability. The article underscores the importance of establishing structured knowledge-based initiatives, fostering an enabling environment, and providing access to digital resources. By addressing these gaps, stakeholders - including the government and private sector - can promote a resilient, knowledge-based entrepreneurial culture that supports sustainable economic opportunities for Kenya's youth.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing, Youth Entrepreneurs, SMEs, Entrepreneurial Culture

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Entrepreneurship is increasingly recognised as a major catalyst for job creation and economic growth, with transformative potential for societies worldwide (Isenberg, 2020). In economies with high youth unemployment, such as Kenya, entrepreneurial ventures present a promising path to tackling employment challenges and fostering innovation (Chen et al., 2021). Given Kenya's substantial youth demographic, entrepreneurship offers a viable solution to the twin issues of unemployment and poverty Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS in 2019). As Kenya moves toward a knowledge-based economy,

fostering entrepreneurial skills through knowledge sharing has become crucial.

Knowledge sharing, defined as the exchange of skills, insights, and experiences between individuals and organizations (Kucharcikova et al., 2021), bolsters entrepreneurial resilience and growth (Khapova et al., 2019). This process is especially valuable for young Kenyan entrepreneurs, many of whom operate small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Knowledge sharing facilitates access to diverse perspectives, problem-solving strategies, and industry expertise, which can enhance adaptability and sustain business viability in evolving markets (Nkhonjera, 2020). Platforms for informal mentorship, peer learning, and

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formal training further enrich the entrepreneurial ecosystem, while the exchange of tacit knowledge - experience-based, implicit know-how - fosters more effective decision-making and innovation (Ikwoba & Fajobi, 2022).

The value of knowledge sharing extends beyond individual success, contributing to a collective entrepreneurial culture that promotes continuous learning, adaptability, and resilience (Lundvall, 2016). Within this culture, young entrepreneurs can navigate challenges together, leveraging shared experiences to avoid common pitfalls and capitalise on opportunities. This collaborative culture is particularly vital in Kenya's dynamic economy, where innovation is essential for competitiveness (Bowen, Morara & Mureithi, 2009). Knowledge sharing fosters collaboration over competition, as young entrepreneurs recognise the benefits of pooling resources and expertise (Mugambi & Karugu, 2017). For instance, sectors such as technology, agriculture, and retail - where many Kenyan youth-led SMEs are concentrated - benefit from shared knowledge on market trends, technological advances, and customer behaviour, which can lead to better decision-making and competitive advantages (KNBS, 2016).

Despite its benefits, knowledge sharing among young entrepreneurs in Kenya faces significant obstacles. A primary challenge is the lack of infrastructure to support systematic knowledge-sharing processes (World Bank, 2018). Many young entrepreneurs lack access to digital platforms that are necessary for continuous interaction and engagement. In rural parts of Kenya, limited internet access constrains entrepreneurs' ability to participate in digital knowledge-sharing initiatives (Wachira, Ngugi & Otieno, 2017). Moreover, the high costs associated with internet access and digital tools can be prohibitive for small-scale entrepreneurs (Mungai, 2019). Although free platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn offer networking opportunities, the costs of internet access and advanced digital services can hinder active participation (Barasa et al., 2017).

Young entrepreneurs also face digital literacy challenges, which further restrict effective knowledge sharing (Kimathi & Zhang, 2019). Digital literacy encompasses skills beyond basic internet usage, including the ability to navigate platforms, access information, and communicate effectively within digital spaces (Zhao & Anand, 2013). This skills gap limits the reach and impact of knowledge-sharing practices, as entrepreneurs lacking digital proficiency may avoid online knowledge resources or digital networking forums (Njoroge et al., 2020). Thus, training programs and digital literacy initiatives are essential for enabling young entrepreneurs to maximise knowledge sharing and access critical resources (UNIDO, 2021).

Another significant barrier is the lack of awareness regarding the importance of knowledge sharing. Many

young entrepreneurs focus solely on the immediate demands of running a business, often unaware of the potential benefits of collaborative networks (Muteti, 2021). This isolation can lead to missed learning and collaboration opportunities, as entrepreneurs may overlook the value of shared experiences and insights in enhancing business strategies (Nabawi, Syahril & Salmat, 2020). Awareness campaigns and educational programs could help foster a collaborative mindset among young entrepreneurs, encouraging them to engage actively in knowledge-sharing networks (Kinyua, 2019). Initiatives such as local business forums, youth entrepreneur networks, and educational partnerships could serve to raise awareness and encourage participation in knowledge-sharing activities (Froese, Sutherland & Lee, 2019).

The absence of formalised knowledge-sharing frameworks further impedes systematic knowledge exchange. While informal networks facilitate knowledge sharing to some extent, structured platforms are necessary for organised and consistent knowledge exchange (Ansari & Tabrizi, 2012). Regional or national digital hubs for young entrepreneurs from various sectors could support sector-specific discussions, share best practices, and offer mentorship opportunities (Wachira et al., 2017). Government agencies, NGOs, and private sector stakeholders could play a critical role in establishing frameworks to empower young entrepreneurs in connecting, sharing, and developing their businesses (Ministry of Industrialization and Enterprise Development, 2020).

Furthermore, Kenya's regulatory environment can limit knowledge sharing. Although attempts to assist youth entrepreneurship have evolved, several legislative impediments still hamper information flow (KNBS, 2019). Bureaucratic processes including firm registration, tax compliance, and licensing may discourage entrepreneurs from participating in open information exchange (Ndungu, 2020). Addressing these regulatory issues through streamlined processes and clear compliance guidelines may allow young entrepreneurs to engage in knowledge-sharing activities without fear of legal ramifications (Kenya Youth Enterprise Development Fund, 2019). Finally, social and cultural characteristics might have an impact on how well knowledge is shared. Competition among young entrepreneurs, as well as a reluctance to share insights with future competitors, can stifle open information exchange. Fostering a collaborative mindset in which young entrepreneurs consider each other as growing partners is critical to breaking down this barrier (Chege & Wang, 2020). Building trust and stressing the long-term benefits of information sharing can help foster an open, collaborative culture (Wakaba et al., 2018). To address these challenges, various stakeholders - including government bodies, the private sector, and civil society - must collaborate to develop initiatives enhancing knowledge-sharing infrastructure,

promoting digital literacy, and encouraging openness and collaboration (World Bank, 2020). Investment in affordable internet access and digital literacy training could extend knowledge-sharing initiatives to underserved rural areas (Wachira et al., 2017). Additionally, government incentives for knowledge-sharing participation and funding for digital platforms dedicated to youth entrepreneurship could be transformative (Mungai, 2019).

Educational institutions can contribute by embedding knowledge-sharing practices in entrepreneurship curricula, teaching young entrepreneurs about collaborative networks, and offering skills in digital literacy and communication (Chege et al., 2020). Mentorship programmes that pair young entrepreneurs with experienced business owners can provide valuable guidance, fostering knowledge exchange that benefits both mentors and mentees (Ndungu, 2020).

From the foregoing, knowledge sharing is essential for developing a sustainable entrepreneurial culture among Kenya's youth. It allows young entrepreneurs to access critical insights, adapt to market changes, and foster a culture of continuous learning and innovation. With focused efforts to enhance infrastructure, digital literacy, and awareness, Kenya can create an environment where knowledge sharing thrives, empowering youth to drive economic growth, social development, and poverty reduction.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Youth-owned businesses in Kenya face substantial challenges, with failure rates as high as 70% within the first three years of operation (Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis [KIPPRA], 2020). This high attrition rate reflects significant barriers to knowledge sharing, as youth entrepreneurs often struggle to access essential insights and strategies needed for sustainability in a competitive market. Effective knowledge sharing among young entrepreneurs is crucial for fostering adaptability and resilience, allowing them to exchange vital business practices and market insights. However, barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of formalised knowledge-sharing frameworks, and limited access to relevant platforms restrict knowledge dissemination among youth-led enterprises. This limitation hinders young entrepreneurs from developing robust business strategies and adapting to changing market dynamics, which ultimately impacts their ventures' survival rates (Douglas et al., 2017).

A lack of awareness about the benefits of knowledge sharing further exacerbates this issue, as many young entrepreneurs prioritise daily operational challenges over long-term growth strategies facilitated by shared knowledge (Wanjohi & Mugure, 2008). Additionally, structural and technological challenges prevent efficient information flow,

as digital literacy remains a significant barrier for many youth entrepreneurs in Kenya, especially in rural regions where access to digital resources is limited (KNBS, 2016). The absence of a supportive regulatory environment also compounds these difficulties, with bureaucratic hurdles in business registration and compliance deterring open knowledge-sharing practices (Mwang'ombe, Mathuva & Njoroge, 2017).

Given the significance of youth SMEs to Kenya's economy and their high risk of failure, this study investigates knowledge-sharing methods among young entrepreneurs. It examines how structured knowledge-sharing programmes might help these young business owners create a sustainable entrepreneurial culture that promotes resilience and growth. By addressing these crucial impediments, the research hopes to inspire interventions that improve information exchange, ultimately lowering business failure rates and promoting a vibrant environment for young entrepreneurs in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on knowledge sharing emphasises its critical role in nurturing an entrepreneurial culture, enhancing business resilience, and driving innovation, particularly within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) run by youth in Kenya. Knowledge sharing, divided into explicit and tacit forms, involves both structured information such as business processes and experiential insights gained from personal experience (Badawy et al., 2015). Explicit knowledge, including facts, concepts, and procedural knowledge, is relatively easy to document and disseminate across digital platforms, which play an increasingly significant role in contemporary knowledge transfer (Cao & Xiang, 2012). Tacit knowledge, however, is deeply personal, experience based, and requires social interactions for effective transfer, making it more challenging to codify and share (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018).

Digital platforms facilitate knowledge sharing among youth entrepreneurs by enabling access to industry trends, peer networks, and mentorship opportunities. Platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and LinkedIn, commonly used among Kenyan youth entrepreneurs, provide accessible channels for information exchange and create communities that encourage collaborative problem-solving (Sonia, 2010). Despite the benefits, challenges such as limited digital literacy and internet access remain barriers, particularly in rural areas where technological infrastructure is less developed (Chege et al., 2020).

The Social Exchange Theory (SET) offers a theoretical basis for understanding the motivations behind knowledge-sharing behaviours among youth entrepreneurs. This theory posits that individuals are motivated to share knowledge

when they perceive the benefits, such as status or reciprocity, to outweigh the costs, such as time and effort (Wu & Lee, 2017). Within this framework, SET suggests that social rewards and the expectation of reciprocal benefits can drive individuals to share their expertise, fostering a collaborative culture in youth-led SMEs (Wang et al., 2015). In the context of Kenyan youth entrepreneurs, SET explains how personal relationships, trust, and the anticipation of support can motivate knowledge-sharing practices, enhancing collective business resilience (Malmström & Johansson, 2015).

Similarly, the Goal-Oriented Theory of Motivation (GOT) provides insights into how specific goals influence individuals' knowledge-sharing behaviours. According to GOT, individuals are more likely to engage in knowledge sharing when it aligns with their professional development and learning goals (Thomas & Gupta, 2021). This theory underscores the importance of performance and learning orientation as key motivators for knowledge sharing among youth entrepreneurs, suggesting that setting clear, challenging goals encourages participation in knowledge-sharing activities that can foster innovation and growth (Locke & Latham, 2006).

Youth entrepreneurs in Kenya face unique challenges in implementing effective knowledge-sharing practices. Inadequate infrastructure, such as unreliable internet access, and limited resources for training in digital literacy are significant barriers. Furthermore, cultural perceptions that prioritise competitive advantage over collaboration often prevent youth entrepreneurs from fully engaging in knowledge-sharing practices (MSE Act of 2012). The lack of formal knowledge-sharing frameworks in many youth-owned enterprises exacerbates these challenges, making it difficult for entrepreneurs to systematically share insights and best practices (Wanjohi & Mugure, 2008). Additionally, an underdeveloped regulatory environment, which lacks clear guidelines on knowledge management for SMEs, further complicates the sharing of both tacit and explicit knowledge (Douglas et al., 2017).

Various strategies have been proposed to enhance knowledge sharing among youth entrepreneurs. The establishment of digital hubs for youth entrepreneurs, equipped with internet access and digital learning tools, is one approach that could improve accessibility and engagement in knowledge-sharing activities (Igwe et al., 2018). Government agencies, such as the Micro and Small Enterprises Authority (MSEA), have introduced training programmes to support digital literacy, emphasising the importance of online platforms in connecting youth entrepreneurs with relevant business information and networks (KNBS, 2016). Knowledge-sharing portals, where entrepreneurs can exchange resources, documents, and insights, could also support structured and sustained knowledge-sharing practices.

Youth entrepreneurs are encouraged to form peer learning groups and mentorship networks, as these can facilitate informal knowledge exchange. For example, using wikis and collaborative repositories can help document and retain experiential knowledge within an organisation, supporting both new and existing members (Assistant Director Enterprise Development, MSEA). Furthermore, online coaching and mentoring sessions could provide youth entrepreneurs with the support needed to navigate complex business challenges, improving their confidence and fostering a supportive entrepreneurial community.

Finally, knowledge sharing is critical for fostering a resilient entrepreneurial culture among Kenya's youth. However, limitations to effective knowledge sharing in youth-owned SMEs underscore the need for focused interventions that address both technological and cultural issues. Stakeholders can establish an environment for youth entrepreneurs to succeed by improving digital literacy, promoting organised frameworks for information sharing, and encouraging a collaborative approach. Investments in digital infrastructure, along with government policies that encourage information exchange, have the potential to make a significant impact on the Kenyan economy, empowering young entrepreneurs to contribute more effectively.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was adopted, using a case study design focused on youth-owned SMEs in Nairobi County, which had a population of 1,147 registered youth groups in 2022. Data were collected through interviews and focus groups with youth entrepreneurs, enabling a deep understanding of knowledge-sharing practices and barriers. Sampling was purposive, targeting 30 youth entrepreneurs across various sectors and six key informant interviews (KIIs), with two participants each from the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF), the Public Service, Youth, and Gender (PSYG) in the State Department of Public Service and Youth Affairs, and the Industrialisation, Trade, and Enterprise Development (ITED). Data were analysed through thematic coding to identify recurring themes related to knowledge-sharing practices, challenges, and their impacts on business outcomes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the impact of knowledge sharing on developing an entrepreneurial culture among Kenyan youth, with findings that highlight its essential role in business sustainability, innovation, and resilience. The benefits observed align with the views of several scholars, emphasising the importance of knowledge sharing in creating a supportive environment for young entrepreneurs

in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The study participants expressed various motivations for sharing knowledge within their enterprises, focusing on organisational sustainability, collective decision-making, and innovation. Respondent G from Youth Group 1 stated, “*I believe that knowledge sharing helps in retaining knowledge in case one opts out of the business organisation.*” Similarly, Respondent P noted that knowledge sharing enhances innovation, contributing to competitiveness within the industry. These insights reinforce Hsu and Fang’s (2018) findings that effective information-sharing practices foster a culture of innovation, enabling enterprises to adapt to changes and improve processes. This alignment suggests that young Kenyan entrepreneurs recognise the value of knowledge sharing as a strategy for sustaining their businesses and enhancing agility within competitive markets.

Additionally, participants from Youth Group 2 observed that knowledge sharing reduces errors in decision-making, promotes creativity, and enables continuity by establishing a repository of knowledge accessible to all members. These reflections echo findings from Wong and Huang (2019), who emphasise trust as a fundamental enabler of knowledge sharing, facilitating open communication and collaboration. The shared focus on minimising decision-making errors and enhancing creativity indicates that trust among team members is crucial in fostering an environment conducive to knowledge exchange, which is consistent with Elfring and Hulsink’s (2017) findings on the role of trust and social networks in knowledge dissemination.

The study identified two primary benefits of knowledge sharing: organisational achievement and team achievement. Organisational achievements were described in terms of enhanced competitiveness, improved decision-making, goal attainment, knowledge retention, and reduced mistakes. For instance, Respondent A from Youth Group 3 highlighted that “*knowledge sharing helps in retaining knowledge even when one of us leaves and is a way of motivation as one shares knowledge.*” This aligns with Alavi and Leidner’s (2001) argument that effective leadership is crucial in fostering a knowledge-centric culture, where knowledge sharing is embedded as a motivational and supportive practice. Additionally, Respondent Y from Youth Group 4 remarked that “*knowledge sharing helps the team find solutions faster, discover better ways of doing things, and maintain workflow continuity.*” This observation supports the findings of Bowen et al. (2009), who emphasised the benefits of collaborative networks in driving entrepreneurial success and client satisfaction.

On team achievement, factors such as equity, mentorship, and motivation emerged. Respondent S from Youth Group 12

emphasised that knowledge sharing establishes mentorship relationships, guiding new hires and increasing productivity. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Chege et al. (2020), who advocated for structured knowledge-sharing platforms to build resilient entrepreneurial networks. Similarly, Respondent L from Youth Group 14 noted that knowledge sharing preserves organisational knowledge and achieves a competitive advantage, echoing Polanyi’s (1966) emphasis on the value of tacit knowledge in sustaining long-term organisational competence. This aspect of mentorship and retention through knowledge sharing underscores its critical role in building resilient business practices among young entrepreneurs in Kenya.

Despite these benefits, the study identified significant barriers to knowledge-sharing practices, particularly limited digital access, lack of awareness, and infrastructural constraints. These challenges are consistent with findings by Wachira et al. (2017), who observed that inadequate digital infrastructure inhibits entrepreneurial growth in Kenya, particularly in rural areas. Respondent T from Youth Group 2 expressed frustration with the limited availability of digital tools, reinforcing Tengeh and Iwu’s (2018) assertion that digital access is critical for effective knowledge sharing.

The lack of awareness regarding the benefits of knowledge sharing also emerged as a barrier. As noted by Muteti (2021), many young entrepreneurs are focused on immediate operational challenges, often overlooking the long-term advantages of collaborative networks. Respondent K from Youth Group 7 stated that knowledge sharing enables quicker problem-solving, improved decision-making, and innovation in market segmentation. However, without sufficient awareness, entrepreneurs may miss out on these advantages. This finding agrees with Kinyua’s (2019) recommendation for awareness campaigns to foster a collaborative mindset among young entrepreneurs.

The absence of formal knowledge-sharing structures was also highlighted. While informal networks do facilitate some knowledge exchange, participants advocated for digital hubs and formal mentorship programmes to ensure consistent knowledge sharing, which supports Ansari and Tabrizi’s (2012) call for institutionalised platforms to drive entrepreneurial culture. This study also noted regulatory barriers to open knowledge sharing, with respondents emphasising the need for a streamlined regulatory framework. This aligns with Ndungu (2020), who observed that bureaucratic obstacles discourage entrepreneurs from engaging in knowledge-sharing activities. Simplifying these regulations would likely foster a more supportive knowledge-sharing environment among young entrepreneurs in Kenya.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study concludes that knowledge sharing is a crucial pillar in cultivating an entrepreneurial culture among Kenyan youth. The exchange of ideas, experiences, and resources not only promotes innovation and resilience but also creates a more sustainable business environment that allows young entrepreneurs to navigate the challenges they face. The study's findings underscore the importance of trust, supportive leadership, and social networks in facilitating effective knowledge sharing. However, barriers such as limited digital access and low awareness of the benefits of knowledge exchange persist. These insights align with broader entrepreneurship and knowledge management research, which emphasise that a successful entrepreneurial ecosystem relies on a conducive environment for free-flowing knowledge among stakeholders.

Overall, the findings highlight the need for more mechanisms that promote collaboration, mentorship, and interaction within the youth demographic. This study suggests that supporting knowledge sharing could be instrumental for Kenya's economic growth, helping youth entrepreneurs build resilient businesses that contribute to the nation's stability and development.

Recommendations

To effectively harness the benefits of knowledge sharing, it is essential to implement structured digital knowledge-sharing platforms. These platforms should be designed to facilitate communication, collaboration, and resource exchange among youth entrepreneurs. By leveraging technology, young entrepreneurs can share best practices, seek mentorship, and access valuable information that can help them navigate the complexities of starting and sustaining a business. Initiatives such as online forums, webinars, and virtual networking events could be instrumental in creating a vibrant community of entrepreneurs who are willing to support each other through knowledge sharing. Additionally, the development of mobile applications tailored to the needs of young entrepreneurs could further enhance accessibility and engagement.

Government support is critical in addressing the infrastructural challenges that limit knowledge sharing. Investments in digital infrastructure, particularly in underserved areas, are paramount for bridging the digital divide. Improved internet connectivity and access to technology will empower youth entrepreneurs to participate actively in knowledge-sharing initiatives. The government can collaborate with private sector

stakeholders to create public-private partnerships aimed at enhancing digital infrastructure and ensuring that youth have the tools necessary to thrive in the digital economy. Furthermore, promoting policies that encourage innovation and knowledge sharing can create a more favourable environment for entrepreneurship, enabling young people to contribute effectively to the economy.

Targeted training programmes focused on improving digital literacy and awareness of the benefits of knowledge sharing are also crucial. Educational institutions, non-governmental organisations, and other stakeholders can play a pivotal role in designing and implementing these programmes. By equipping young entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to utilise digital tools and platforms, these training initiatives can enhance their capacity to share knowledge and collaborate effectively. Additionally, workshops and seminars can be organised to highlight successful case studies of knowledge sharing within the entrepreneurial community, thereby motivating youth to engage in these practices actively.

Moreover, fostering a culture of knowledge sharing requires a shift in mindset among youth entrepreneurs. It is essential to instil the understanding that sharing knowledge is not a threat but rather an opportunity for collective growth and development. Campaigns aimed at promoting the value of collaboration and knowledge sharing can help in changing perceptions and encouraging participation. Mentorship programmes that connect experienced entrepreneurs with younger individuals can also serve as a powerful means of knowledge transfer, helping to cultivate a spirit of sharing within the entrepreneurial community.

Addressing the factors that hinder knowledge sharing among Kenyan youth is imperative for strengthening youth entrepreneurship and enhancing economic resilience in the country. By establishing digital knowledge-sharing platforms, improving infrastructure, and implementing targeted training programmes, stakeholders can create an environment that not only supports young entrepreneurs but also drives innovation and economic growth. The proactive engagement of government, educational institutions, and private sector players is essential to foster a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem. By investing in knowledge sharing, Kenya can empower its youth to become the driving force behind the nation's economic future, ultimately leading to a more sustainable and resilient economy.

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