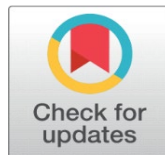# BETWEEN CALAMITY AND COMMUNICATION: THE ROLE OF BROADCAST MEDIA IN THE 2014 KASHMIR FLOODS

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ABSTRACT

The media continues to have significant relevance in crises as they play an essential role in guiding the state's response toward reconstruction and rehabilitation. Although there has been a phenomenal advancement in media systems, the existing literature suggests that the media impact has either been ineffective or minimal in post-disaster scenarios. This study aims to assess the media reaction during post-disaster scenarios and to understand if the media convergence sufficiently influences the state action and policy toward disaster preparedness and mitigation. In this direction, this research undertakes the case study of the 2014 Kashmir flood to examine the role played by electronic media in disaster management. Interviews of working journalists, academicians, and scholars were conducted to study electronic media's response during the crisis. Additionally, the document analysis, as a secondary source, has helped in understanding the crucial situations during different natural disasters. The inferences and conclusions from the study would guide further research into conceptualizing a mechanism for the development of a sustainable media policy to meet the sustainable development goal.

Keywords: Media in Disasters, Post-Disaster Management, Disasters in Kashmir, Reconstruction, 2014 Kashmir Floods

1. INTRODUCTION

Disasters represent immediate, catastrophic events that disrupt the wholesome functioning of society, leading to significant human, material, and economic or environmental losses (International Federation of Red Cross, 2015). Therefore, a disaster is a representation of a condition wherein society experiences societal paralysis due to the incapacitation of its core operations. As a result, society becomes incapable of effectively mitigating the repercussions. These notable disturbances in the functioning of society cause it to exceed the capacity of society to manage its resources (Dwivedi, 2010)

Both natural and man-made disasters can cause immense deficiencies in some vital resources like food and shelter, adversely affecting survivors. Electronic media plays an important role in disseminating the narratives of survivors that can nurture their social conditions, improve their social connections, and provide them with psychological support. For instance, in the post-disaster rehabilitation phase of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, in the aftermath of the 2010 Haiti earthquake, social media platforms facilitated rehabilitation efforts comprehensively (Jain, 2013).

Natural disasters can cause severe damage to both infrastructure and communication systems, hindering rescue, relief, and reconstruction efforts in post-disaster scenarios. In the September 2014 Kashmir floods, social media played a notable role in assisting the survivors and other vulnerable people. Effective and efficient disaster preparedness is of utmost importance in comprehensively dealing with hazards and preparing for the other phases of disaster mitigation. Electronic media can play an important role in disseminating vital information in this regard.

The union territory of Jammu and Kashmir has a strategic and unique geographical location because there are abundant renewable resources unmatched elsewhere. The valley's enchanting beauty, natural scenery, snow-clad mountains, attractive lakes, springs, and beautiful valleys serve as a great attraction for tourists who visit the valley from around the globe. However, the region has a history marked by natural disasters, particularly floods of considerable magnitude (Hassan, 2014).

Electronic media is very crucial for comprehensively investigating natural disasters. Moreover, in this globalized world, the importance of electronic media is elevating in an upward spiral. Scholarly literature holistically highlights the social responsibilities of electronic media in addressing natural disasters in both during & post-disaster scenarios. This study aims to scrutinize the role of electronic media in post-disaster scenarios, focusing specifically on the September 2014 Kashmir floods.

Existing literature suggests that media coverage during the post-disaster phase has sometimes been inappropriate and biased, potentially negatively impacting affected individuals. For instance, in 2010, floods in China received disproportionately less media attention compared to those in Pakistan, as evidenced by the unequal coverage on the web portal 'Relief Web' administered by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). It had posted 2500 entries on the Pakistan floods, however, there were only 250 entries on China floods that occurred in the same year (Jurgita balaisyte, 2011).

Media, bound by social responsibility, must uphold societal values and obligations while covering disasters. The watchdog function and the social responsibility theory of media provide the framework that truth, accuracy, objectivity, and balance are important parameters to facilitate a well-informed citizenry. Consequentially, that carves out a definite path for a healthy, meaningful, and well-rounded social structure.

Considered a reliable source of information, electronic media can mobilize administrations in formulating laws, policies, and citizen-government interactions, influencing public perception during and after disasters. Consequently, the media serves as an essential source for creating awareness to facilitate comprehensive rescue, relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction strategies (Khan, 2009).

2. AIM AND APPROACHES

Due to the recent advancements in technology and the internet, the importance of effective communication in mitigating natural disasters is in an upward spiral. Electronic media is emerging as a powerful tool for creating awareness and developing post-disaster mitigation efforts. Certain key elements like public awareness, disaster preparedness, risk, and response are of utmost importance because they craft a path for electronic media to deliver valuable & relevant information to the people.

This paper aims to delve into the evolving landscape of communication amidst natural disasters, particularly focusing on the role of electronic media in post-disaster scenarios in Kashmir, specifically the 2014 Kashmir floods. Central to this investigation are the objectives to scrutinize the coverage provided by electronic media during the Kashmir floods and subsequent recovery phases, elucidating the extent to which it contributed to disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts. Furthermore, the study endeavors to compile and analyze significant cases where electronic media played pivotal roles in disseminating crucial information.

The multi-faceted methodological approaches employed for this paper are predominantly qualitative that include Qualitative content analysis, specifically document analysis, and interviews of stakeholders. This involved the systematic interpretation of documents to extract pertinent information from multiple sources including newspapers, magazines, and YouTube videos about the Kashmir floods. Multiple reliable sources like published news, official records, books, research-based conferences and seminars, and meeting reports were scrutinized to ensure the reliability and relevance of the gathered information.

Furthermore, interviews played a crucial role in gathering in-depth insights into the experiences, perspectives, and motivations of relevant stakeholders. Academicians, sociologists, psychologists, and senior journalists from esteemed institutions such as the University of Kashmir (KU), All India Radio (AIR) Srinagar, and Big 92.7 FM were interviewed. These interviews were structured around the objectives of the study, with a semi-structured questionnaire employed to systematically gather data.

An interview schedule is a methodological tool that provides structured guidance for researchers to accelerate data collection and facilitate comprehensive analysis (Taherdoost, 2022). In the present study, a semi-structured questionnaire was drafted to maintain consistency and gather reliable data.

To gather the relevant and comprehensive data for this study, I engaged in interviews with two Academicians affiliated with Media Education Research Centre of the University of Kashmir University, two Kashmir-based Psychologists & Sociologists from Kashmir University, and four senior broadcast journalists, two each associated with television and radio. These interviews were structured to explore various facets of the problem under investigation, aiming to acquire crucial insights and information.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Electronic media plays an important role in disaster situations and the aftermath of a disaster by raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and shaping the perception of people. The existing literature has reiterated that electronic media extensively covers natural disasters which in turn influences public understanding and response. Despite limited research on electronic media's role in disaster

management in Kashmir, this paper aims to provide insights and recommendations to enhance media effectiveness in post-disaster scenarios.

The existing literature related to this research shows the role of electronic media during and in post-disaster scenarios is advantageous for gaining crucial insights. The study of Himanshu Upadhyaya's 'Unprepared for Flood Disasters' in 2018 highlights the main challenges that electronic media and journalists face while covering disasters. The study stresses the inadequacies of coverage in reports from different media houses. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need for improved disaster communication strategies (Upadhyaya, 2018). This highlights the urgent need for improved/well-developed disaster journalism and cross-border collaboration in electronic media coverage.

The coverage of Ravi Chopra in one of the leading newspapers of India, 'The Hindu', about the Uttarakhand floods recognizes holistic reporting by electronic media. However, he identified certain limitations in conveying the magnitude of devastation caused by the flood. He reiterated that the electronic media was proactive during the disaster, but the magnitude of the disaster was not appropriately conveyed in the aftermath of the disaster (Chopra, 2013).

The study of Ali Asghar on the East Azerbaijan 2012 earthquake highlights the important role of electronic media before, during, and post-disaster scenarios. However, the study has identified a lack of systematic reporting and some other deficiencies in media coverage in the reconstruction and rehabilitation phases. The study enunciates that there is a need to enhance the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of electronic media reporting in facilitating post-disaster mitigation phases (Asgary & Ayvaziankari, 2013). This calls for a well-organized approach to electronic media reporting to ensure effective disaster recovery and rehabilitation.

A comprehensive study on the history of natural disasters in Kashmir was done by Sidrat-Ul-Muntaha and M. Sultan Bhat. The study focused on the growing frequency of earthquakes in the UT of Jammu & Kashmir. The study highlighted the need for disaster mitigation strategies (Muntaha Anees & Bhat, 2007). The study comprehensively underscores the importance of disaster management strategies for vulnerable regions. Another research article published in 2014 provides historicity and an overall in-depth overview of the natural disaster scenarios in Jammu and Kashmir. Additionally, the research provides an overview of the different natural disasters witnessed in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir from time to time. Moreover, the research lays the foundation for a better understanding of the disaster landscape in Jammu and Kashmir (Hassan, 2014).

Khurshid Ahmad Mir's study on the September 2014 Kashmir floods dives into the political impact of the natural disaster and stylistically highlights media fabrication in the aftermath of the crisis (Mir, 2017). The study provides the urgent need for courteous journalism and accountability in electronic media reporting during and aftermath of disasters.

On an international scale, research on electronic media in post-disaster scenarios provides valuable insights into global disaster communication. John W. Cheng and his co-authors discuss the coverage of the Great East Japan Earthquake and emphasize the importance of understanding how ICT and mass media influence individual behavior and perceptions (Cheng et al., 2015). This highlights the need for coordination of media governance on a global scale. The studies by Wenger and Quarantelli, Susana Arroyo Barrantes, Martha Rodriguez, and Ricardo Pérez emphasize the role of local mass media and the importance of accurate information from various media sources in disaster management (Wenger & Quarantelli, 1989)

(Barrantes et al., 2009). The literature review offers insights into the specific challenges and lessons learned from disaster reporting and provides a broader perspective on disaster communication and media ethics. The above studies collectively contribute to our understanding of the role of electronic media in post-disaster scenarios, not only in Kashmir but also on a global scale.

4. MEDIA AND KASHMIR FLOODS

The Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir has a good history of flooding events of huge magnitudes because of its distinctive geographical features and the hydrological dynamics of the mighty Jhelum River. These floods have been extensively recorded, with notable occurrences documented in scholarly literature. Among the most severe flooding events in the region is one dating back to AD 879, when a substantial landslide occurred in the Khadanyar Mountains near Baramulla. This event led to the blockage of the River Jhelum's channel, resulting in extensive flooding across the valley (Lawrence, 1895). The valley of Jammu and Kashmir also experienced significant flooding events notably following the disaster of 1893, highlighting the recurrent nature of such calamities in the region (Walter, 1893)

The UT of Jammu and Kashmir is characterized as a disaster-prone region, vulnerable to various natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, avalanches, high-velocity winds, and snowstorms. Over the past few decades, Kashmir has witnessed a broad spectrum of these natural calamities, resulting in considerable loss of life and extensive damage to property summing up to substantial economic costs. The table below provides an overview of the typical natural and anthropogenic disasters observed in the state of Jammu and Kashmir:

Table 1

Table 1 The Key Types of Natural Disasters in the UT of J&K		
Types of Natural Disaster	*Description*	*Most vulnerable areas*
Earthquakes	Seismic events cause ground shaking, often resulting in structural damage and casualties.	Most of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir including the districts like, Ganderbal, Baramulla, Kupwara, Bandipora, Budgam, Pulwama, Anantnag, Doda, Ramban, and Kishtwar, are classified as 'Seismic Zone V.' This zone is characterized by high seismic activity. In contrast, the remaining areas of the UT account for approximately 90% of the total area of the state and fall under 'Seismic Zone IV.'
Floods	Inundation of land due to excessive water flow from overflowing rivers or heavy rainfall.	Low-lying areas of the UT of Jammu & Kashmir, especially Sonawari, Srinagar are prone to high magnitude floods. Upper catchments of all the tributaries of the Jhelum, Indus, Chenab, and Tawi rivers are prone to flash floods.
Landslides	Movement of earth and rock down a slope, posing a threat to infrastructure and settlements.	Areas along major highways, particularly Ramban, Panthal, Banihal, Doda, Kishtwar, Gulmarg, Dawar, Gurez, Tangdhar, Rajouri, etc., are prone to landslides.
Avalanches	The rapid descent of snow, ice, and debris down a mountainside, potentially causes fatalities and property damage.	Higher reaches of Kashmir including Anantnag, Kulgam, Gurez, Doda, Ramban, Kishtwar, Banihal, etc., face avalanches.
Snowstorms	Heavy snowfall accompanied by strong winds, leads to	

	hazardous travel conditions and infrastructure damage.	
High-velocity Winds	Strong atmospheric winds can cause structural damage and disrupt daily activities.	Most parts of J&K

Data Source J&K State Disaster Management Policy (Sdmp), 2011)

2014 Kashmir Floods: The incessant rains in September 2014 continued for several days starting from 3rd September to 6th September 2014 (Bhatt et al., 2017) resulting in devastating floods. The unprecedented flood caused massive destruction in terms of both lives and property. Additionally, thousands of people were displaced due to the huge magnitude of the disaster. The flooding had several reasonable factors, including atypical precipitation intensity, inadequate readiness measures, and insufficient weather forecasting systems. According to Tiwari (2014), the state (now the Union Territory) of Jammu and Kashmir, especially the Kashmir division, faced formidable challenges in effectively managing the disaster. Numerous residences were washed away, there was a communication blackout both in terms of transportation & media and loss of life occurred. According to the Environment, Ecology, and Remote Sensing, excessive rainfall especially in catchment areas resulted in pervasive inundation throughout the valley. The September 2014 Kashmir floods had a substantial impact which affected thousands of individuals and caused massive destruction in the horticulture, agriculture, and tourism arenas. The gravity and the huge magnitude of the disaster highlighted the need for enhanced disaster management mechanisms both at the local and state levels (Khan, 2023) (ICRC, 2014).

5. MEDIA RESPONSIVENESS AND CHALLENGES BEFORE AND DURING THE FLOODS

In our interview, Syeda Afshana, a professor at MERC, Kashmir University, emphasized that electronic media during the Kashmir floods of September 2014 was not reported sufficiently. She noted that only a few broadcast channels such as Radio Kashmir Srinagar (now AIR) updated and reported timely updates on rising water levels and incessant rainfall. Prof. Syeda Afshana underscored that all the stakeholders at that time were not ready for the huge scale of the floods. Professor Syeda Afshana highlighted the failure of electronic media's role in disaster communication. She reiterated. "During the September 2014 Kashmir floods, the electronic media's efforts were insufficient to effectively prepare the public and administration for the disaster. However, there were a couple of broadcasting media channels like Radio Kashmir Srinagar (now AIR) that provided warning updates on rising water levels and incessant rainfall. People were not fully prepared for the huge magnitude of the floods. The media, especially the local media failed to adequately cover the disaster" (S. Afshana, personal communication, April 2, 2024).

Throughout the disaster event, communication networks were severely affected resulting in significant disruptions. Consequently, Radio Kashmir Srinagar (now AIR) emerged as one of the media channels that could disseminate important information to the general public and the administration. In our interview with Syed Humayun Qaisar, former Program Head of AIR Srinagar, he highlighted that "Radio Kashmir (now AIR) Srinagar persevered by relocating to higher ground to sustain its transmission" (H. Qaisar, personal communication, March 7, 2024). The failure of

other media channels to maintain communication during the crisis highlighted a significant gap in disaster preparedness and response.

Notwithstanding the challenges faced during the disaster, certain electronic media channels played an important role in providing relevant information to the public. Additionally, a few of the electronic media channels coordinated rescue efforts too. In this regard, we interviewed Rifat Abdullah and Mr. Hussain of ETV Urdu Kashmir and Zee News respectively. They reiterated that ETV Urdu and Zee News "provided comprehensive coverage of the floods and unfolded the disaster by coordinating rescue, relief, and rehabilitation efforts both during and aftermath of the disaster" (R. Abdullah, personal communication, April 3, 2024) (Hussain, personal communication, January 1, 2015). There were online editions of print media during the disaster to inform both local and international readers about the inclement situation on the ground. However, electronic media faced a lot of challenges in covering the September 2014 Kashmir flood. "Radio Kashmir Srinagar (now AIR) and ETV Urdu showed unwavering commitment to disseminating information effectively both during and aftermath of the disaster. Other media channels faced enormous difficulties in sustaining operations and fulfilling their duty in disaster communication, but their dedication was truly remarkable" (H. Qaisar, personal communication, March 7, 2024) (R. Abdullah, personal communication, April 3, 2024). Moreover, one of the psychology academicians at Kashmir University, Dr Mukhtar Ahmad said while we interviewed him that "the reliable information was limited and the conflicting reports from various local and national media sources created confusion and anxiety among the general public. Moreover, the footage was disturbing which was one of the reasons for anxiety disorders among people who witnessed the disaster closely" (M. Ahmad, personal communication, May 15, 2015).

6. ROLE OF MEDIA IN POST-DISASTER RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION

Electronic media plays a pivotal role in the post-disaster reconstruction and recovery phases. A lot of studies convey the participation of electronic media, community engagement, and people in post-disaster mitigation phases as crucial in conveying alerts, warning surveillance, and official notifications. Coppola (2015) provides an outline of post-disaster rescue, recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction phases (Coppola, 2015). Furthermore, the phases are the stages that can restore the disaster-prone region to normalcy following the significant consequences of the disaster event. Electronic media can exert an influence on the post-disaster process by promoting informed citizenry about the repercussions, challenges, solutions, and engagements concerning post-disaster reconstruction mechanisms.

Asgary (2013) underscores the essentiality of electronic media in promoting reconstruction activities by encouraging effective efforts and keeping post-disaster reconstruction on the public agenda. The researcher further enunciates that electronic media can highlight post-disaster mitigation policies and campaigns to facilitate social change. However, media professionals need to have a thorough understanding of disaster mitigation mechanisms to ensure effective communication by addressing loopholes (Asgary & Ayvaziankari, 2013).

The September 2014 Kashmir floods effectively exemplify the capabilities and constraints of electronic media in post-disaster reconstruction mechanisms. In this regard, Professor Syeda Afshana reiterated "Undoubtedly there was good coverage showcasing acts of heroism and volunteerism. However, there was an absence of

ethical and investigative journalism concerning the origins of the disaster. The proactive approach of the electronic media was absent both at local and national levels. The reporting and the broadcasting stories were not serious in addressing crucial concerns such as the construction of the damaged houses, insurance claims, and other similar kind of challenges" (S. Afshana, personal communication, April 2, 2024).

7. CONTRIBUTIONS OF VARIOUS ELECTRONIC MEDIA PLATFORMS IN POST-DISASTER SCENARIO

In an interview with RJ Nasir of Big 92.7 FM, he said that, In the post-disaster scenario, "Radio Kashmir Srinagar (now AIR) and Big 92.7 FM played an integral part in rescue, relief, and rehabilitation. The educational and charitable initiatives were broadcast to provide a platform for the government and stakeholders to engage with affected communities" (H. Qaisar, personal communication, March 7, 2024) (R. Nasir, personal communication, May 14, 2015).

Their efforts aided in disseminating relevant information and brought post-disaster reconstruction activities to a pace. "Electronic media channels such as ETV Urdu and Zee News focused on relief and rehabilitation measures. These broadcasting channels not only highlighted grassroots initiatives but also governmental shortcomings" (R. Abdullah, personal communication, April 3, 2024).

"Social media also played a notable role in the post-disaster phase by coordinating relief measures. The website jkfloodrelief.org by the JK government initiated an effective campaign by empowering volunteers to facilitate rescue and relief activities. Furthermore, there were a lot of people who participated in facilitating rescue operations. Social media and social networking sites have great significance when it comes to post-disaster mitigation mechanisms" (Hussain, personal communication, January 1, 2015).

8. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The document analysis used in this research provides valuable insights into the challenges of electronic media in disaster management. The role of electronic media in disaster management was also drawn from both firsthand accounts and secondary sources obtained through interviews and content respectively. The document analysis provides an essential and in-depth understanding of the responsiveness of electronic media both during and aftermath of the disaster.

The literature review of this study highlighted the role of electronic media in disaster situations like raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and shaping public perception. However, a few studies such as Upadhyaya's work present the challenges and inadequate reporting by electronic media outlets in effectively covering natural disasters, including insufficient coverage. There is a need for improved disaster communication strategies. This aligns with the observations made by interviewees regarding the shortcomings in media preparedness and coverage during the September 2014 Kashmir floods. Syed Humayun Qaisar reiterated that "Disaster communication strategies are of utmost importance in disseminating news about disaster, disaster psychiatry, and disaster communication. Because these parameters are contributing factors in maintaining communication strategies during and aftermath of a disaster".

Furthermore, studies on other natural disasters at the international level, such as the East Azerbaijan earthquake and the Great East Japan Earthquake, provide

insights into global disaster management & communication practices. These studies emphasize balanced, accurate, comprehensive reporting, and media governance in coordinating disaster response efforts in post-disaster scenarios. Such insights also resonate with the experiences shared by interviewees regarding the need for coordinated media efforts in natural disasters. According to an interview with RJ Nasir, "Balanced and unbiased reporting is important for a journalist to create an ethical atmosphere in the industry and the disaster aftermath". Moreover, historical accounts of flooding events in Kashmir highlight that the Kashmir region is vulnerable to these natural disasters.

The coverage of electronic media in the aftermath of the 2014 Kashmir floods reflects both strengths and limitations in post-disaster reconstruction efforts. The disaster responsiveness of certain electronic media outlets was average. The focal points of the coverage of these media channels were critical information and coordinated relief efforts both during and post-disaster scenarios respectively.

All India Radio Srinagar (then Radio Kashmir Srinagar) played an important role in disseminating valuable information keeping in view the timeliness of the news. Additionally, it proved a viable source of information during the crucial phase of the disaster by providing timely updates on rising water levels due to incessant rainfall. However, when it comes to the coverage of the entire electronic media, there was a general inadequacy in the coverage of the calamity. This dichotomy was also reiterated by one of the interview experts, Professor Syeda Afshana, who highlighted that "Effective communication was lacking in overall electronic media outlets". Consequently, it has contributed to insufficient public and administrative readiness.

Furthermore, the communication disruption was also a contributing factor in causing a significant gap in the disaster communication & its infrastructure. Despite these challenges, Radio Kashmir Srinagar (now AIR) demonstrated resilience by relocating its office to Shankar Acharya and Narbal stations to sustain the transmission. Therefore, a significant gap in contingency planning has been highlighted.

Along with Radio Kashmir Srinagar (now AIR), there was a handful of electronic media platforms, such as ETV Urdu and Zee News, that also emerged as key players in not only disseminating information but also coordinating rescue and relief efforts in the aftermath of the disaster. These entirely highlighted not only the grassroots initiatives but also the shortcomings of the administration. Consequentially, it paved the way for contributing to transparency and accountability in disaster coverage during the reconstruction process. Electronic media platforms like Big 92.7 FM focused primarily on charitable initiatives, that bridged a gap between the government and the affected communities during the crucial post-disaster reconstruction phase. However, as noted by Professor Syeda Afshana, "There was a significant absence of ethical and investigative journalism in addressing critical post-disaster concerns such as housing reconstruction and insurance claims".

The role of social media proved a significant asset in post-disaster mitigation as it comprehensively facilitated the coordination of relief measures and empowered volunteers through platforms like jkfloodrelief.org. There was active involvement of youth and other organizations (both Governmental and NGOs) that thrust on the importance of digital media in recovery efforts.

By synthesizing the findings obtained from both firsthand accounts like interviews and the document analysis, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of dichotomous media coverage, the challenges, and opportunities in disaster communication, both on a national and global scale. The research positively

emphasizes the historical precedents of flooding events in Kashmir to further contextualize the contemporary challenges. Moving forward, enhancing media coordination and disaster communication strategies are very much imperative to effectively mitigate the impacts of disasters and facilitate effective post-disaster reconstruction efforts. The paper entirely focused on the need for a balanced approach by the media that will combine speed with accuracy, and national reach with local relevance. Addressing these aspects could largely improve the efficiency of the media's contribution to future disasters.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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