RESEARCH

Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration in Preventing and Dealing With Gendered Disinformation in Digital Media

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: This research aims to determine multi-stakeholders' role in collaborating to prevent and handle the spread of gendered disinformation.

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH: The research utilised a qualitative approach through secondary data analysis and a descriptive literature review.

FINDINGS: The research results show that gendered disinformation is not only experienced by women who are active in the public sphere, but can also be directed at children as well as young women who utilise social media. The spread of gendered disinformation prevents women from actively voicing their aspirations in utilising social media.

ORIGINALITY/VALUE: The research provides a comprehensive analysis of hoax information, offering practical recommendations for mitigation, emphasising the importance of digital literacy, media literacy, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to combat misinformation and empower individuals to make informed decisions.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS: This research highlights the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address the pervasive issue of hoaxes, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women and children. These strategies should prioritise digital literacy and media literacy education, foster multi-stakeholder collaboration, and implement targeted policies to combat misinformation and empower individuals to make informed decisions.

KEYWORDS: *Gendered Disinformation; Multi-Stakeholder; Digital Media; Cyber Security*

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements have burgeoned rapidly, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a significant shift in the utilisation of technology. In Indonesia, social media utilisation in 2022 was recorded at 167.0 million, equivalent to 60.4% of the Indonesian population, with Internet utilisation also increasing by 5.2% from the previous year (Kemp, 2023). The burgeoning of the Internet and technology also presents challenges for communities. There has also been an increase in technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), also called online Gender-Based Violence, due to the development o digital technology and the increasing use of social media. TFGBV is an act carried out using the Internet or mobile (digital) technology that harms others, using their sexual or gender identity or harmful gender norms (Hinson *et al.*, 2018). Increasing use of social media has led to violence among young people, women, girls, and individuals with diverse gender identities and expressions (Flynn *et al.*, 2021). Previous research explains that one form of protection for women is through reporting to the relevant authorities. This allows society to utilise social services provided by formal institutions to access the justice they deserve (Jati, 2023). The main issue concerning children and young women is the increasing misinformation referring to harassment, violence, and other issues.

Fake news and hoaxes have circulated widely on social media in Indonesia, spreading quickly and continuously; sometimes, the spread flow is difficult to contain. The spread of misinformation and disinformation with a variety of viral content, including hate speech, digital identity impersonation, doxing (publishing personal information); manipulation of private information, sextortion (blackmail with threats to publish sexual information, photos, or videos), image-based harassment (sharing intimate photos without consent), cyberbullying, online gender and sexual harassment, cyberstalking, online grooming for sexual assault, hacking, and the use of digital technology to find victims to harass who are then made victims of violence. Based on other research, the unequal relationship between women (as victims) and men (as perpetrators) affects the victim's ability to express rejection and identify the actions they experience as rape (Husein *et al.*, 2021).

This problem is very complex and occurs globally, not only in Indonesia. Gender-based violence, also known as gendered disinformation, is a violation of human rights with gender justice not yet being achieved (UN-Women, 2020). This problem needs to be resolved immediately so as not to hinder efforts to achieve the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs), achieving gender equality, empowerment, and overcoming violence against women (sdgs.un.org); gendered disinformation causes significant consequences on health (physical and psychological), safety, politics, and economic aspects in sustainable development (Hicks, 2021). The impact of this violence silences women in online/digital spaces, reduces women's involvement/participation in public and political spaces, in democratic processes, and leadership roles as agents of change.

During the pandemic, there was an increase in the use of social media by women due to lockdown, as many activities were conducted from home. This condition apparently left digital traces of personal data, photos, and various items of personal information; these were manipulated, resulting in the spread of gendered disinformation accompanied by online gender-based violence (Lesher *et al.*, 2022). This content is part of online lies with false and misleading digital content (OECD, 2022).

According to data from the Directorate General of Informatics Applications - Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, from August 2018 to May 2023, 11,642 hoaxes were identified by the AIS Team of the Directorate General of Informatics Applications. The total amount of hoax, disinformation, and misinformation content from January to May 2023 has increased compared to the same period in 2022. Meanwhile, reports of cases of online gender-based violence experienced by women in Indonesia have increased, as depicted in Figure 1.
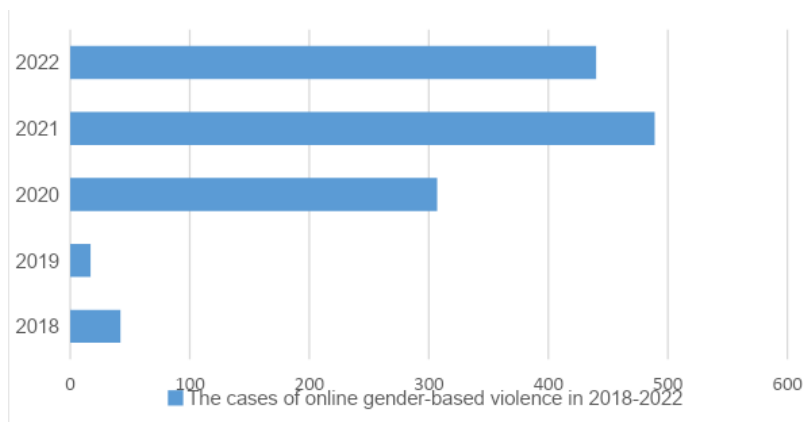
Figure 1: The Cases of Online Gender-based Violence in 2018-2022
Source: LBH APIK, 2022

In 2020, there was an increase in reports of online gender-based violence, which increased 18 times compared to 2019. In 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 307 cases.

This number increased significantly in 2021, reaching a total of 489 cases. By 2022, there were 440 cases recorded by the LBH APIK (Indonesian Women's Association for Justice), marking a decrease of 49 cases compared to the previous year. LBH APIK is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that provides legal aid by implementing the concept of Gender-Based Structural Legal Aid (BHGS). In addition to data from LBH APIK, there are other data that show an increase in the number of cases; data from SAFEnet shows that there were 1,357 complaints of online gender-based violence cases in 2019-2021. Meanwhile, data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) from 2018-2020 reported that there were 679 cases of online sexual violence against children, with the majority of victims being girls.

According to Herrero-Diz *et al.* (2020), gendered disinformation is part of misogynistic harassment and violence against women (gender-based violence), utilising misleading gender and sex-based narratives. It is characterised by its content affecting women victims of several types of sexual, physical, verbal, psychological, and intellectual attacks due to their condition as a woman. This content not only discredits and defames, but also targets individuals by spreading hoaxes to tarnish their reputations, undermine their credibility, or challenge their societal roles.

The strategic goal of gendered disinformation is to evoke an emotional response from its targets. The use and selection of language is hyperbolic to create inaccurate and misleading perceptions, and the depiction of women as sexual objects to justify the narrative (Bradshaw and Henle, 2021). The spread of gendered disinformation is aimed at preventing women from participating in public spaces, and is also conducted to weaken women's competence by spreading false information regarding their qualifications, experience, and intelligence.

This effort fundamentally attacks women's identities in the form of defamation; this can provoke reactions from netizens and other social media users, leading to comments that trigger anger and negative accusations. Gendered disinformation often builds on existing gender stereotypes to prevent women and marginalised groups from participating in politics and public spaces (Jankowicz *et al.*, 2021). Based on the perspective of cyberfeminism, a comprehensive approach is needed to combat disinformation, online harassment, stalking, and the spread of pornography, because it is necessary to create a safe online space, challenge patriarchal norms, and advocate for policies that protect women from digital violence. At the global level, many organisations have attempted to campaign for education on gendered disinformation. In 2023, on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day (WPFD), the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), together with the UN Population Fund, UN Women, and the Global Partnership for Action against Gender-Based Online Harassment and Violence, organised an event called "Freedom of Expression and Gender Justice" (Martins *et al.*, 2024).

In this research context, violence against women in digital media is related to several aspects, including hate speech, discrimination, and defamation. This research aims to describe the role of multi-stakeholders in collaborating to prevent and address the spread of gendered disinformation,

with a contribution to the evaluation of cyber security policies for all groups of digital media users. The co-operation and collaboration carried out need to gain support from every sector and at the multi-level to strengthen digital literacy and critical thinking skills, foster resilience to the negative impacts of disinformation, and the importance of empowering individuals to be able to distinguish fact, especially using a gender perspective (Sessa *et al.*, 2024).

Efforts to combat gender disinformation currently still face obstacles due to polarised gender norms (strong patriarchal culture and capitalism) and the complexity of interests for regulatory measures needed in digital surveillance (Hedling, 2024). This requires collaborative efforts with the Hexa-helix co-operation model (Rachim *et al.*, 2020) consisting of six stakeholders, namely government, business, academics, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), media, and communities. This collaborative strategy needs to prioritise the principles of diversity and inclusivity. Handling gendered disinformation in an integrated manner with multi-stakeholders is very necessary to support the achievement of SDG targets 4 (education), 5 (gender), and 16 (peace).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with secondary data analysis and descriptive literature review. Data collection was carried out in 2022-2024. Secondary data in the form of case reports obtained from the website of the Directorate General of Informatics Applications, Ministry of Information and Communication of the Republic of Indonesia (since 20 October 2024, the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs), and non-governmental institutions, namely the Legal Aid Institute LBH APIK (Indonesian Women's Association for Justice) and the Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet) for data on the spread of disinformation and its relationship to online gender-based violence. A selection of websites from government and non-governmental institutions were used to obtain strategies and efforts made in dealing with and resolving the problem of the spread of gender-based disinformation. The data were mapped and analysed using qualitative content analysis; this was then linked to the results of observations on social media, both content containing gendered disinformation and misinformation related to women's identity, as well as other types of content that include gender-based digital violence.

To elaborate the context and conceptualisation related to strategies for handling gender-based disinformation, this was complemented by a descriptive literature review. In the literature review process, document searches were conducted using the keywords "gender disinformation" and "gender-based violence" in digital media. A total of 20 documents were obtained in the form of research reports and policy briefs, including research reports from UNESCO and World Bank in Indonesia. Literature exploration was also carried out by searching on GoogleScholar from 2015-2024 with the keywords "gender and disinformation"; 48 documents were obtained in the form of books, reports, dissertations, and journal articles. The selection/filter was carried out again using the

keyword "gendered disinformation" and the type of data requested were only journal articles; eight articles were obtained that specifically discussed and used the concept of gendered disinformation in their presentation. Efforts to maintain the quality and validation of research data were carried out by triangulating data sources (multiple data sources). The author traced and re-checked the conformity of secondary data from websites with data on social media, as well as data on news in online media (which quoted data from research institution data sources quoted in the news).

RESULTS

The results of the study show that gendered disinformation is categorised as a form of online gender-based violence. The content is categorised as violence due to violation of privacy, surveillance and monitoring of targets (victims), damage to reputation/credibility, harassment (abusive comments, hate speech, depiction of women as sexual objects), threats (identity theft, impersonation), and attacks with disclosure of certain information. In 2024, there was a four-fold increase in cases during January-March 2024 with 480 complaints, while in the first quarter of 2023 there were 118 cases. The form of content distribution contained threats to distribute intimate content, sexual blackmail, and distribution of intimate content without permission. The age of the victims was mostly in the 18-25 age group with 272 cases, and children under 18 with 123 cases.

Based on analysis and literature review results, there are two forms of disinformation targeting women, namely:

- **Sexual content distribution:** This involves the distribution of photos, videos, and screenshots of conversations between the perpetrator and the victim. The distributed content contains intimate and pornographic elements of the victim. An example of this case involved 14 teenage girls in South Lampung, Indonesia, where sensitive photos were distributed. These threats and actions were conducted to obtain sexual and financial benefits from the victim.
- **Revenge pornography and deepfake pornography:** This involves parties who have had intimate relationships, where the perpetrator disseminates intimate content with the victim in order to defame, take revenge, or gain financial gain. One example of this case is the distribution of intimate photos of former girlfriends by students in Banyumas, Central Java, and another case of the spread of non-consensual manipulation of pornographic videos of women in the Telegram group.

Based on the two forms of disinformation explained above, in 2024 the types of content that occurred most often include sextortion (threats to spread intimate content), doxing (spreading sexual information (personal photos/video) without consent and blackmail), flaming (provocative messages), morphing (changing images/photos/videos with other people's faces), and accessing accounts without permission.

In the case faced by Indonesian women, gendered disinformation was spread by perpetrators through platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. The perpetrator typically has a prior acquaintance with the victim or has accessed the victim's personal information, which is then manipulated with explicit content to humiliate the victim. Gendered disinformation is relatively consistent in defaming and spreading hatred. In addition, content on gendered disinformation utilises tropes to portray women in public life as lacking competence, overly sexualised, or morally questionable, thereby undermining their voice and aspirations or entering the public sphere.

Each party involved in addressing cyber violence plays an important role. Therefore, all parties are obliged to build a supportive space and be able to co-operate effectively, as shown in Figure 2. Gender should not be a differentiating factor in these efforts; conversely, collective action is essential to ensure a conducive environment to prevent gender-based cyber violence. The multi-faceted approach involves various stakeholders and strategies, including:

- **A multi-level approach:** This strategy sees that everyone is involved and must try to complete or have a role in fighting and overcoming it with state or government supervision and responsibility;
- **Interdepartmental:** As the name suggests, this approach holds that they must co-ordinate with each other (between people and communities);
- **Cross-movement approach:** This strategy emphasises collaboration with other parties (external) to share and overcome disinformation issues; and
- **Intersectional approach:** Recognising that disinformation issues are complex, this approach encourages people to collaborate and raise their voices to get follow-up from the government or large technology companies.
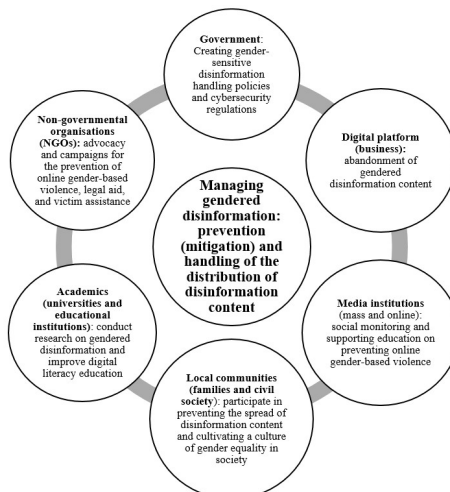
Figure 2: Collaborative Model (Hexahelix) for Handling Gendered Disinformation
Source: Data analysis results

DISCUSSION

Hoaxes circulate widely in Indonesia and significantly impact victims' emotions, often creating confusion and division. Children and young women are very vulnerable to hoax information and frequently become victims. Teenagers, in particular, face great pressure when surfing in cyberspace, encountering the spread of hoaxes, hate speech, and even intolerance. This can increase unhealthy digital behaviour.

Digital Literacy and Media Literacy

The prevalence of Internet addiction, particularly among youths exposed to misinformation, raises concerns about mental health. Developing digital literacy is essential for teenagers to navigate social media and other digital platforms responsibly: it is a fundamental pillar of future education. Digital literacy and media literacy are tools to combat the spread of misinformation. This involves critical thinking skills to consume and understand information from digital media. These skills are crucial for safe and responsible Internet use, particularly for children and teenagers who are heavy Internet users. Protecting them and guiding their online behaviour is essential to prevent misuse and ensure they use the Internet wisely. To address the need for digital literacy and media literacy, various stakeholders, including the government, schools, and the private sector, are working together to improve literacy rates in Indonesia. Low media literacy can undermine a nation's resilience.

This research is supported by Al-Zou'bi (2021), who stated that media literacy is an alternative to increasing individual control in obtaining information. This involves critically assessing information, understanding it, and determining appropriate responses. Therefore, to prevent and address disinformation, especially gender-based disinformation, all stakeholders must collaborate to tackle disinformation and protect the younger generation from its detrimental effects.

Women's involvement in digital media literacy offers a new opportunity for women to participate in preventing cyber violence. Women can identify needs, contribute new experiences, and inform others regarding cyber security (UN-Women, 2020); however, the issue is that women's involvement in cyber security is still minimal. Even when women have entered the cyber security world, they are still underestimated. In fact, women are stakeholders who play an important role in decision or policy-making, so their participation is very important, especially when accompanied by a high level of digital literacy.

Efforts to improve digital literacy skills with various programmes and development of digital media utilisation skills are a way to bridge the gender gap in access and use of technology. Socio-cultural support is needed in society in realising digital inclusion for women and children as vulnerable groups regarding gendered disinformation and all forms of online gender-based violence. The patriarchal structure of society is accused of being the cause of society not empowering women in the cyber security field. While women are vulnerable to being targeted in cyber violence, they are also key agents in resolving it. Recognising the importance of women's role, governments

worldwide provide scholarships to enhance women's skills in the cyber security field. When more women enter the cyber security field with the necessary knowledge, it becomes a solution to prevent and resolve gender-related cyber violence.

Multi-stakeholder for Preventing and Handling Disinformation

Government

Legal policy in Indonesia is considered insufficient to protect cyber victims, especially children and women. Law enforcement still refers to the ITE Law, Pornography Law, and Criminal Code Law and prosecutes more victims than perpetrators. The patriarchal norm system in Indonesia often states that women as victims are the ones to blame.

The government is one of the stakeholders tasked with breaking the cyber violence chain against women. As the legislative party, the government is tasked with formulating and implementing regulations for women's protection against cyber violence. To address cyber violence, the government still refers to the ITE Law, Pornography Law, and the Criminal Code. Additionally, the government passed Law No. 12 of 2022 concerning criminal acts of gender-based violence. Article 14 of this law specifically discusses electronic-based sexual violence, including provisions for victim rehabilitation, procedures for investigation and prosecution and examination in court (Chapter IV), and victims' rights regarding protection and recovery (Chapter V). Article 46 of Law No. 12/2022 states sexual violence content elimination, while Article 66 concerns victims' rights, while Article 70 discusses rehabilitation forms for victims. Within Law No. 12 of 2022, regulations regarding cyber crime are still minimal, urging the government to design special regulations to address cyber violence against women effectively.

Despite the established regulatory framework, the government also needs to improve complaint and conflict resolution services. These efforts aim to protect women and children from violence and achieve gender equality. Effective policy formulation and enforcement should be tailored to community needs, as determined by research and evidence from the field. Identifying protection needs, particularly as articulated by women, is essential (UN Women, 2020). In addition, regulation design should include both women and men in surveys to help reduce gender discrimination and violence.

Law enforcement

The government needs to ensure that regulations are implemented and enforced by the relevant institutions. The issue encountered in Indonesia is the inadequate quality of law enforcement officers, who are not sufficiently trained or equipped to implement these regulations. Although Law No. 12 of 2022 Article 81(1) states that central and regional governments must implement education and training programmes for law enforcement officers, government, and service institutions, this mandate is not always fulfilled.

It is necessary to emphasise to justice enforcers that cyber violence against women and children is a serious crime that must be correctly addressed. Justice enforcers need to be educated on understanding discrimination, recognising the negative impact on victims, identifying and responding to victims, and avoiding revictimisation (ICJ, 2023). When women dare to report attempts at harassment or violence, it is not uncommon for them to be made the guilty party; this can hinder case resolution and deter future reporting. Law No. 12 of 2022 also states that investigators, prosecutors, judges, and lawyers must adopt the victim-oriented approach, emphasising the importance of understanding the victims.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

NGOs have also played an important role in protecting women's rights in cyberspace. They combat gender-based violence by conducting several methods, including education/training, advocacy, and assistance to victims. Indonesia has collaborated with NGOs, particularly in Southeast Asia, which launched a programme in 2018 for cyberviolence awareness. However, reporting cases of violence against women, especially in cyberspace, remains challenging due to societal attitudes and stigma. Public opinion has worsened regarding resolving the cyberviolence against women process (ICJ, 2023). Women often face great pressure, shame, ostracism, and invasion of privacy, leading them to be reluctant to report incidents. Moreover, the anonymity of online platforms complicates the documenting, reporting, and investigation process for victims (Van der Wilk, 2021).

NGOs dealing with violence in Indonesia are still hampered by regulations availability or regulations implementation. Within Law No. 12 of 2022, there is still a gap in preventing and punishing cyberviolence acts against unknown perpetrators (ICJ, 2023), and this is one of the obstacles in seeking justice for violence victims. Within several situations, it was found that victims or survivors had minimal understanding regarding reporting to digital platforms (SAFEnet, 2020). It is therefore necessary to provide them with understanding.

Social media platforms

Social media platforms share a commitment with the government to prevent cyberviolence. LBH APIK collaborates with platforms such as Meta and X (formerly Twitter), aiming to increase the clarity of user identities, thereby making it easier for women to report violent incidents. Several media also form supervisory boards to monitor content distributed on their platforms (ICJ, 2023). Notably, social media giants such as YouTube regulate bullying and harassment policies by including a comment reporting button. YouTube and Facebook also utilise AI and machine learning technology to make it easier for users to report, imposing sanctions ranging from content deletion to account deactivation. However, a dilemma persists regarding the balance between freedom of users' expression and personal data protection.

Despite numerous reports of disinformation on social media, some platforms have been criticised for their unresponsiveness to incidents experienced by victims (SAFEnet, 2020). In fact, reports indicate no reports resulting in content removal regarding cyberviolence. However, Law No. 12 of 2022 states that victims of violence or harassment have the right to request the removal of harmful content. Article 31(1) of Law No. 12 of 2022 strictly requires law enforcement officials, public prosecutors, and judges to notify the victims of their rights to compensation.

The government as the regulator and social media companies as media managers have an important role in mitigating harassment, intimidation, and attacks that women face in online public spaces. Involving local communities and media institutions, as well as journalist organisations, by conducting multi-stakeholder coalitions and collaboration is very necessary to fight the spread of disinformation and gender-based violence online. Within connection with multi-stakeholder collaboration, the government can implement strategies to overcome disinformation, hoaxes, and misinformation at three levels, namely:

1. **Upstream level:** Together with local communities, academics, cyber communities, media, and the private sector, conduct campaigns, educational classes, and digital literacy training through the National Digital Literacy Movement (Siberkreasi). Increasing digital literacy is one of the main foundations and sustainable solutions for building community resilience against hoaxes and misinformation. Efforts should be made to educate and spread awareness to ensure a better understanding of cyber threats.

2. **Middle stream level:** Actively monitor and take action against dangerous content circulation on the Internet. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, utilising the Kominfo crawling machine through the AIS Team of the Directorate General of Aptics has enabled the identification of the circulation of daily hoaxes related to COVID-19 on social media.

3. **Downstream level:** Conduct law enforcement efforts to be processed by the Criminal Investigation Agency of the Indonesian National Police (Bareskrim POLRI). In order to anticipate the rise of hoaxes in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections, the Ministry of Communication and Information collaborated with the KPU, the Election Supervisory Agency, and the National Police.

To prevent and address gender disinformation, everyone has responsibilities and must collaborate to support digital and media literacy. This involves creating spaces for understanding, renewing skills, and practicing appropriate literacy practices for both children and adults. Informal learning places are important spaces to utilise in digital literature. A more holistic perspective views informal and formal digital literacy contexts as knowledge of ecosystem components. Purnama *et al.* (2022) indicate that improved digital literacy has a positive impact on achieving balanced gadget use. Therefore, the pillar aspect of digital literacy lies in practicing digital ethics.

CONCLUSIONS

Multi-stakeholder collaboration is a way or strategy to prevent and handle gendered disinformation in digital media, with handling steps that are structured and involve all agency levels in the community. This is needed as an approach that can include cultural aspects related to gender equality and the utilisation of safer technology. The contribution of this study is to the evaluation of cyber security policies for all groups of digital media users. A recommendation from this research is to continue research on stakeholder partnerships in protecting one's personal information and reducing psychological trauma due to online disinformation. Otherwise, this research recommends that there be a better organisational structure for women affected by gendered disinformation by building a support network for women.

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BIOGRAPHY

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