
**The Role of Servant Leadership on Employee Advocacy on Social Media:
The Mediating Role of Employee-organization Relationship**

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Abstract

The rapid development of social media has led to various new initiatives and strategies in its use, one of which is employee advocacy. This study aims to fill the research gap related to employee advocacy by focusing on the context of government agencies. Based on Social Exchange Theory, the study seeks to examine factors that are strongly suspected to have a significant influence on the willingness of employees in the Directorate General of Customs and Excise, to engage in employee advocacy through their personal social media. This research employs a quantitative approach, with data collected through an online questionnaire. A total of 145 valid responses were successfully gathered and analyzed using the SEM-PLS method with the assistance of the SmartPLS software. The findings indicate that servant leadership has a significant direct impact on employee advocacy on social media. The Employee-Organization Relationship also has a positive and significant effect on employee advocacy on social media. Additionally, servant leadership is proven to have a significant indirect impact through the mediating role of the Employee-Organization Relationship. Theoretical and practical implications will also be discussed in this study.

Keywords: employee advocacy, servant leadership, social exchange theory, social media

1. Introduction

Social media has become a revolutionary force that has shaken the world due to its massive developments. The use of social media is regarded as highly significant for organizations across various sectors, including private, non-profit, and governmental entities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The awareness of organizations about the significance of social media has triggered various new initiatives and strategies, one of which is employee advocacy. Employee advocacy refers to the voluntary actions of employees in promoting positive information about their organization and actively supporting or defending it to external audiences, either through words or actions (Men, 2014; Walden & Kingsley Westerman, 2018). Employee advocacy is often regarded as a form of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Walden & Kingsley Westerman, 2018) due to its similar characteristics. Tsarenko *et al.* (2018) stated that despite the significant social and economic advantages of employee advocacy, organizations should not

assume that this voluntary and informal behavior will develop naturally. Strong encouragement and motivation are needed for employees to willingly use their personal digital networks for the benefit of the organization.

To investigate the key determinants of employee advocacy as a voluntary behavior, this study employs Social Exchange Theory (SET) as the underlying framework. This is based on the argument that exchange relationships within organizations are not always formal; sometimes, such relationships are based on the voluntary willingness of one party to invest their resources, even if they do not explicitly receive something in return (Walden & Kingsley Westerman, 2018). Previous research has successfully identified several factors related to employee advocacy, including leadership style (Men, 2014; Thelen, 2021; Thelen & Yue, 2021) and Employee-Organization Relationship (Men, 2014; Lee & Kim, 2021; Thelen, 2021; Ghorbanzadeh *et al.*, 2023).

Due to the common perception that most leaders prioritize their own interests (O'Reilly III *et al.*, 2014), servant leadership has gained attention from scholars and researchers as a leadership style oriented toward the needs of its followers (Van Dierendonck, 2011). According to Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), when employees believe that organizational leaders exhibit servant leadership behaviors, they are more likely to view their relationship with the leader positively and engage in extra-role behaviors that go beyond job descriptions as a form of reciprocation for the leader's support (Ehrhart, 2004).

Furthermore, Lei *et al.* (2021) stated that leaders who focus on empowering and serving employees have a positive impact on the creation of a high-quality Employee-Organization Relationship. Servant leadership is a leadership style characterized, among other things, by empowering employees (Liden *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, servant leadership is believed to positively influence the employee-organization relationship. Moreover, as a concept within social exchange theory, the employee-organization relationship (EOR) can serve as a socio-emotional resource that is associated with positive employee behaviors. Employee advocacy, identified as a beneficial behavior, can be promoted by cultivating a strong employee-organization relationship (EOR) (Walden & Kingsley Westerman, 2018).

In stark contrast to the rapid development of employee advocacy practices, empirical research and academic literature on this topic are still considered lacking (Thelen, 2020). Reviewing previous studies on employee advocacy, it is evident that almost all research has been conducted within private sector organizations, with little literature exploring employee advocacy in the context of public sector organizations, especially government organizations. Although there are differences in characteristics between the private and public sectors, it is undeniable that public sector management has increasingly adopted private sector management practices (Alford & Greve, 2017), particularly in the area of human resource management. While the evolving environmental dynamics have forced public organizations to adapt by adopting practices and systems from private organizations, the public sector still retains distinct characteristics from the private sector. Considering these conditions, research on employee advocacy within public sector

organizations, especially government agencies, becomes both interesting and important to conduct.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Servant Leadership

Leadership is one of the most extensively researched social influence processes in the behavioral sciences. Servant leadership has garnered increasing attention from researchers as it is considered the leadership style most oriented toward the needs of employees (Van Dierendonck, 2011). Servant leadership is a leadership approach that primarily focuses on prioritizing the needs of others. This concept was first introduced more than four decades ago, in 1970, by Robert K. Greenleaf. In contrast to other leadership styles that prioritize the well-being of the organization as the ultimate goal, servant leadership is oriented toward the satisfaction and fulfillment of the work needs of its followers (Liden *et al.*, 2000). The other-oriented nature of servant leadership can help leaders better understand the unique capabilities and characteristics of employees, as well as foster stronger relationships between leaders and followers (Van Dierendonck, 2011).

2.2. Employee-Organization Relationship

In organizational behavior studies, the relationship between an organization and its external public, often referred to as the Organization Public Relationship (OPR), has long been recognized. Broom *et al.* (2000) define OPR as a pattern of interactions, transactions, exchanges, and relationships between an organization and its public or audience. On the other hand, organizations also have relationships with their internal public, namely employees, known as the Employee-Organization Relationship (EOR). Numerous scientific studies have discussed EOR and consider it a key antecedent that links human resource management practices and strategies to positive organizational outcomes such as employee loyalty, service quality to customers, and organizational performance (Kang & Sung, 2017). Shore *et al.* (2004) simply define EOR as an integral term that describes the relationship between employees and the organization. In other literature, Men dan Stacks (2014) define EOR as the extent to which mutual trust exists between the organization and employees, the extent to which both parties agree on who holds the legal power to influence, and the extent to which they provide satisfaction and commit to each other.

2.3. Employee Advocacy

Numerous studies have examined advocacy from various perspectives, ranging from the customer perspective (Sweeney *et al.*, 2020; Yeh, 2014) to the perspective of organizational employees (Frank, 2015; Thelen, 2020; Thelen, 2021; Thelen & Men, 2020; Ghorbanzadeh *et al.*, 2023; Lee & Kim, 2021; Tsarenko *et al.*, 2018; Walden & Kingsley Westerman, 2018). This research will focus on advocacy conducted by employees. The term "employee advocacy" has gained increasing attention recently, yet research in academic circles is still considered lacking. Men (2014), in his study, defines employee advocacy as a behavioral construct involving voluntary promotion and defense by employees on behalf of their organization. Due to the similarity in characteristics, employee advocacy is often referred to as a form of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Walden & Kingsley Westerman, 2018). Employee advocacy is

considered to meet the criteria of OCB through its shared features, where employees are willing to voluntarily contribute to the organization and make efforts that go beyond formal job duties, even though these efforts are not explicitly rewarded by the organization (Tsarenko *et al.*, 2018; Walden & Kingsley Westerman, 2018; Thelen, 2020). Employee advocacy only emerges when employees have commitment and attachment to the organization (Yeh, 2014), as well as trust in the organization's values (Tsarenko *et al.*, 2018).

3. Hypothesis Development

3.1. Servant Leadership and Employee Advocacy

Servant leadership has emerged as a leadership style that is increasingly gaining attention in research. Van Dierendonck (2011) noted that servant leadership is garnering more attention from researchers due to its perceived orientation toward employee needs. Referring to social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), when employees believe that their supervisors demonstrate servant leadership behaviors oriented towards empowerment, growth, and development, they tend to view their relationship with their supervisors more positively and engage in extra-role behaviors that go beyond their job descriptions as a form of reciprocity for the leader's support (Ehrhart, 2004). Several studies have shown a positive relationship between servant leadership and the extra-role behaviors exhibited by employees, such as (Bambale & Shamsudin, 2015; Rosnani, 2018). The findings of Thelen (2021) indicate that servant leadership is positively related to employee advocacy. Previous research by Wang *et al.* (2018) identified servant leadership among supervisors as a strong predictor of service performance and extra-role behavior among frontline employees.

H1: Servant leadership has a positive influence on employee advocacy on social media.

3.2. Servant Leadership, Employee-Organization Relationship, dan Employee Advocacy

Yukl (2013) stated that servant leadership can foster commitment, satisfaction, trust, and employee loyalty toward the organization and its leaders. Given that servant leadership behavior prioritizes the needs of its followers, it has the potential to create a positive communication climate between leaders and employees, which can lead to the development of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Hu & Liden, 2011). This, in turn, may improve the quality of the relationship between employees and the organization. The findings of Lei *et al.* (2021) indicate that empowering leadership has a positive influence on Employee-Organization Relationships (EOR). Servant leadership is a leadership style characterized, among other things, by empowering employees (Liden et al., 2015). Furthermore, based on the positive impact of both servant leadership and EOR on employee work outcomes, the researchers assume that there is a positive relationship between servant leadership and EOR. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Servant leadership has a positive influence on Employee-Organization Relationships.

As a concept of social exchange, the Employee-Organization Relationship (EOR) can function as a socio-emotional organizational resource because it is associated with positive employee behavior. Employee advocacy, known as one form of positive employee behavior, can be facilitated by the quality of EOR within the organization (Walden & Kingsley Westerman,

2018). In other words, employees who are committed, trustful, and maintain a mutual relationship with the organization are more likely to generate and share positive information about the organization where they work (Kim & Rhee, 2011). The findings of Lee & Kim (2021) indicate that EOR can positively encourage employees to voluntarily create and disseminate positive information about the organization on their personal social networks. Moreover, Mazzei *et al.* (2012) mention that a high-quality relationship between employees and the organization can motivate employees to commit to protecting the organization during crises and to minimize criticism of the organization. Thelen (2020) revealed that when employees perceive a high-quality EOR with the organization, they are motivated to voluntarily share positive aspects of the organization, not only with internal stakeholders but also with external parties, as a form of extra-role behavior. Furthermore, Thelen (2021) stated that EOR has a positive relationship with employee advocacy. In their latest research, Ghorbanzadeh *et al.* (2023) mentioned that EOR is positively related to employee advocacy. This means that when employees feel trust, satisfaction, and commitment towards the organization, they will voluntarily take pride in, protect, and defend the organization and spread positive messages about the organization to those closest to them. Based on this explanation, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: The Employee-Organization Relationship has a positive influence on employee advocacy on social media.

H4: The Employee-Organization Relationship mediates the influence of servant leadership on employee advocacy on social media.

4. Method

This study employed a quantitative method with a final sample of 145 employees from a government agency in Indonesia, the Directorate General of Customs and Excise (DGCE). The sampling design in this study was probability sampling, with the specific technique used being stratified proportionate random sampling. Questionnaires were distributed to all respondents online using Google Forms. The data collected through the questionnaires, which were distributed and filled out online by the respondents, will be processed using SmartPLS.

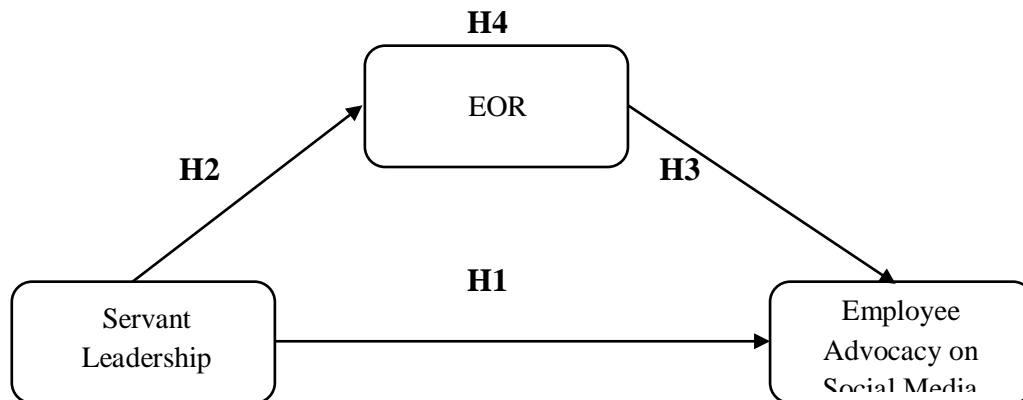


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Servant leadership was measured using 7 items adapted from Liden *et al.* (2015). The Employee-Organization Relationship was measured using 19 items adapted from Hon & Grunig (1999). Employee advocacy on social media was measured using 3 items adapted from (Kim & Rhee, 2011) and (Walden & Kingsley Westerman, 2018).

5. Results

In evaluating the reflective measurement model, we examined outer loadings, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability. First, the measurement model was evaluated by testing convergent validity through outer loadings and AVE (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Table 1 shows that all item factor loadings meet the recommended value of 0.6 (Chinet *et al.*, 2008). The AVE values, which indicate the overall variance accounted for by the latent construct, also meet the recommended value of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Second, discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. Table 2 presents the results of the discriminant validity test, where the square root of the AVE (diagonal values) for each construct is greater than its correlation coefficients. This indicates that discriminant validity is adequate (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Third, reliability was tested using Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability. The recommended values for Cronbach’s alpha and CR are 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Table 1 shows that the Cronbach’s alpha and CR values for all latent constructs exceed the recommended threshold.

Table 1. Construct validity and reliability

Construct Name	Items	Loading	Cronbach	CR	AVE
Servant Leadership	SL1	0.764	0.871	0.901	0.569
	SL2	0.899			
	SL3	0.621			
	SL4	0.767			
	SL5	0.652			
	SL6	0.845			
	SL7	0.692			
Employee-Organization Relationship	CM1	0.764	0.966	0.969	0.620
	CM2	0.763			
	CM3	0.762			
	CM4	0.746			
	CT1	0.830			
	CT2	0.859			
	CT3	0.763			
	CT4	0.708			
	CT5	0.659			
	ST1	0.769			
	ST2	0.872			
	ST3	0.816			
	ST4	0.868			
	ST5	0.818			

	TR1	0.832			
	TR2	0.729			
	TR3	0.801			
	TR4	0.810			
	TR5	0.755			
Employee Advocacy	EA1	0.937	0.907	0.941	0.842
	EA2	0.931			
	EA3	0.884			

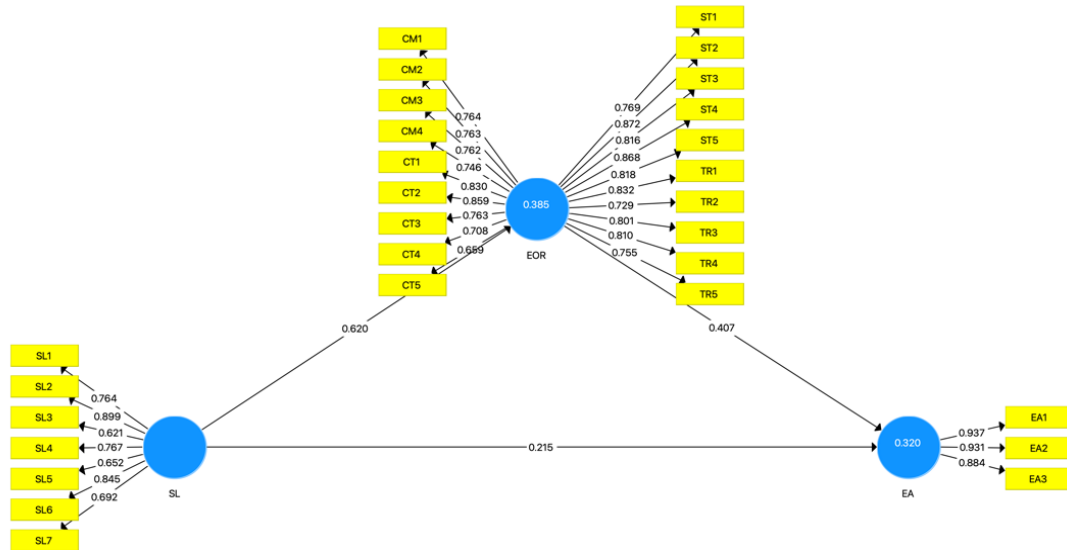
Source: Data Processed, 2024

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	EA	EOR	SL
EA	0.918		
EOR	0.541	0.787	
SL	0.467	0.620	0.754

Source: Data Processed, 2024

Based on the results of the measurement model evaluation, it was found that the convergent and discriminant validity, as well as the reliability of all constructs, were adequate. Therefore, the testing proceeded with the evaluation of the structural model to test the research hypotheses. The structural model was tested using SmartPLS 3.2.9. The structural model in this study was evaluated based on the coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2). R^2 is used to measure the variance explained by each endogenous variable. Hair *et al.* (2019) provide guidelines for determining the accuracy of R^2 values: R^2 values greater than 0.75 are considered substantial; 0.5 is considered moderate; and below 0.25 is considered weak. Table 3 shows that all constructs serving as endogenous variables in this study have R^2 values categorized as moderate. The variable employee advocacy is explained by servant leadership by 31.1%, while the employee-organization relationship is explained by servant leadership by 38.1%.



Next, the predictive relevance was tested using the blindfolding procedure by examining the Q^2 value. According to Hair *et al.* (2017), a Q^2 value greater than 0 indicates that the model has adequate predictive relevance. Chin (1998) provides guidelines by categorizing Q^2 values into three criteria: 0.35 (high), 0.15 (moderate), and 0.02 (small). Table 3 shows that all endogenous variables have predictive relevance with their exogenous variables at a moderate level.

Table 3. R^2 & Q^2

Endogenous Latent Construct	R^2	Q^2
EA	0.311	0.255
EOR	0.381	0.232

Source: Data Processed, 2024

6. Hypothesis Testing

The four hypotheses in this study were tested using the PLS-SEM approach. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS software, applying a significance level of 0.05 or 5%. Table 4 presents the results of the hypothesis testing for the direct effects of each variable.

Table 4. Results of Direct Effects

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
EOR -> EA	0,407	0,411	0,101	4,042	0,000
SL -> EA	0,215	0,218	0,107	2,001	0,046
SL -> EOR	0,620	0,627	0,055	11,234	0,000

Source: Data Processed, 2024

Next, Table 5 presents the results of the hypothesis testing for indirect effects in this study.

Table 5. Results of Indirect Effect

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
SL -> EOR -> EA	0,253	0,258	0,071	3,563	0,000

Source: Data Processed, 2024

7. Discussion

This study aims to investigate the role of servant leadership and the Employee-Organization Relationship in promoting employees' willingness in government agencies to engage in employee advocacy. Hypothesis testing indicates that servant leadership has a significant positive effect on employee advocacy on social media. This is evidenced by a T-statistic value of 2.001, which exceeds the critical value of 1.96, and a P-value of 0.046, which is less than 0.05. Hair *et al.* (2019) state that if the T-statistic value is greater than the critical value, the coefficient is statistically significant at a 5% error probability. Furthermore, the P-value of 0.046 (<0.05) indicates that servant leadership significantly positively influences employee advocacy on social media. This means that Hypothesis (H1) of this study is supported. These findings are consistent with Thelen (2021), which shows that servant leadership positively affects employee advocacy. According to Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964), when employees perceive that their supervisors exhibit servant leadership behaviors, including empowerment, growth, and development, they tend to view their relationship with their supervisors more positively and are ultimately more willing to engage in extra-role behaviors that go beyond job requirements as a form of reciprocity for the leader's support (Ehrhart, 2004). Leaders who display servant leadership behaviors are strong predictors of organizational service performance and employees' extra-role behaviors (Wang *et al.*, 2018). This implies that employees will voluntarily provide performance beyond assigned tasks and exhibit Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), such as employee advocacy, when leaders demonstrate support and a serving attitude. In other words, when employees feel that their supervisors provide support, serve, and empower them, they are likely to contribute more in return.

The results of the hypothesis testing further indicate that servant leadership has a significant positive impact on the Employee-Organization Relationship. This significance is confirmed by the results showing a P-value of 0.000 (< 0.05) and a T-value of 11.234, which is well above the critical T-value of 1.96. Based on these results, it can be concluded that Hypothesis H2 in this study is accepted. This means that when leaders are able to foster employee trust in the organization, enhance employee commitment, engagement, and satisfaction with the organization, as well as empower employees and build a positive organizational culture, it will improve the quality of the Employee-Organization Relationship. This finding is supported by Lei *et al.* (2021), who state that leaders who are able to empower employees positively impact the quality of EOR.

Furthermore, Table 4 shows that the Employee-Organization Relationship has a significant positive impact on employee advocacy on social media. This is confirmed by the test results, which reveal a coefficient value of 0.407, P-values of 0.000 or below 0.05, and a T-statistic value of 4.042, which exceeds the critical T-value of 1.96. Based on these results, it can be concluded that Hypothesis H3 in this study is supported. This finding aligns with the studies by Thelen (2021) and Lee & Kim (2021), which state that the Employee-Organization Relationship has a significant positive effect on employee advocacy. This implies that when the quality of the relationship between employees and the organization is good, employees are likely to voluntarily exhibit positive behaviors, such as employee advocacy. Recent research by Ghorbanzadeh *et al.* (2023) also confirms that EOR is positively related to employee advocacy.

The hypothesis testing for indirect effects reveals that servant leadership has a significant positive indirect effect on employee advocacy on social media, mediated by the Employee-Organization Relationship. This is confirmed by a coefficient value of 0.253, a T-statistic value of 3.563, which exceeds the critical T-value of 1.96, and a P-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). These results indicate that Hypothesis H4 in this study is supported. This finding contrasts with Thelen (2021), where EOR did not mediate the effect of servant leadership on employee advocacy. This result supports Lei *et al.* (2021), which indicates that leaders who empower employees can enhance EOR, where EOR positively encourages employees to create and disseminate positive organizational information on their personal social networks voluntarily (Lee & Kim, 2021). Leaders with servant leadership characteristics can build employee trust, enhance employee commitment to the organization, and increase employee satisfaction, thereby making employees more emotionally connected to the organization. This, in turn, leads employees to voluntarily support the organization to external audiences through employee advocacy.

8. Implications

This study contributes to bridging the gap in research related to employee advocacy in the context of public organizations, specifically government agencies. Through statistical analysis conducted using SEM-PLS, this study offers a research model that can serve as a reference for researchers interested in the topic of employee advocacy within government organizations. The findings demonstrate that the social exchange relationship between employees and leaders, which has been shown to underpin employee advocacy behavior in private sector organizations, is also evident in public sector organizations, particularly government organizations.

The results of this study are expected to provide benefits to the leadership and management of government organizations, particularly the Directorate General of Customs and Excise (DJBC), by enhancing and optimizing the role of these factors to ensure that employee advocacy practices are implemented effectively and efficiently. Additionally, this empirical evidence can aid DJBC in formulating the foundations and policies for decision-making related to the implementation of employee advocacy. Beyond DJBC, the findings are anticipated to offer clear insights and adequate understanding for management practitioners, leaders, and organizational management, especially within government agencies, that are planning or currently implementing employee advocacy programs.

9. Limitations

This study is not without limitations, including the use of a quantitative method to explain the phenomena under investigation. Future research could employ a mixed-method approach to gain a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomena. Additionally, the scope of this study is limited to employees of a single government agency, the Directorate General of Customs and Excise (DGCE). Therefore, the implications of these findings are not easily generalized to other government or public organizations due to differences in culture and organizational characteristics. Future research could apply the developed research model to different public or governmental organizations. Furthermore, this study focused only on a few organizational factors believed to influence employees' willingness to engage in employee advocacy. Future research may consider additional factors or variables.

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