

The Influence of Ambience and Social Interaction on Young Adults' Intention to Patronize Coffee Shops

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ABSTRACT

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Due to the enormous increase of independent café establishments over the past few years, the coffeehouse industry is currently characterised by severe competition. This is a result of the fact that there is an increase in frequent visits to coffee shops among young individuals. The current study demonstrates that a variety of characteristics, such as the coffee shop's ambience and social interaction, influence customers' decisions to frequent them. The purpose of this study is to determine what factor encourages customers to return to a coffee shop. This study specifically looks at the effect of ambience and social interaction on customer behaviour at neighbourhood coffee shops. Young adults between the age of 18-29 years old in Kuching, Sarawak, were the focus of this investigation. This study included a sample of 370 people who were coffee shop customers. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson's Correlation, and Multiple Regression Analysis were utilized to analyse the collected data. The results meet the research objectives: to identify the relationship between two variables (ambience and social interaction) towards the intention to patronage coffee shops. The study's findings generally demonstrated that both social interaction and ambience had a significant and favourable impact on customers' intentions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, coffee shop trends are expanding significantly, and Malaysia is one of them. In May 2019, the world exported 11.6 million bags of coffee, up from 9.71 million bags in May 2018 (Ong, 2021). One of the reasons for the spike in coffee consumption in Malaysia is urbanisation and busy lives, which also enhance customers' spending power in Malaysia (Carolyn, 2014, as cited in Beh et al., 2014). Increased consumer satisfaction is primarily to blame for coffee businesses' rising market share in view of the fact that customers' satisfaction increased the likelihood that they would return to the same coffee shops. Thus, business owners should make an effort to determine the elements that could raise customers' happiness. According to AbuThahir and Krishnapillai (2018), the coffeehouse is one of the food service types in the hospitality industry. A coffeehouse, which can be also referred to as a coffee shop, or café is an establishment that focuses on the sale of hot and cold beverages, primarily coffee as well as selections of food such as light snacks, sandwiches, muffins, fruit, and pastries (Ellis, 2008; and Lim et al., 2020). This establishment is typically located in almost all urban and suburban regions where they are normally more exclusive and premium-priced than regular restaurants due to their unique concepts and pleasant ambience (AbuThahir & Krishnapillai, 2018).

Every year, the coffee shop industry in Malaysia expands, judging from the rapid opening of new coffee shops around the country. At all times, lifestyle elements converge to keep the coffee industry thriving. Fast-paced Malaysians see passing through a coffee shop as part of their daily routine. Coffee shops provide a peaceful, energizing environment where individuals may interact, relax, or catch up on work. Young people's growing interest in coffee ensures a broad, receptive, and sophisticated customer base now and in the future (Carolyn, 2014, as cited in Beh et al., 2014). In the article, Joachim Leong, a barista, claimed that people nowadays are increasingly looking for a 'third zone' to unwind in between their homes and offices. Coffee shops can be a more cost-effective option than restaurants, bars, or clubs for young adults or university students when it comes to hanging out with friends (Carolyn, 2014, as cited in Beh et al., 2014). Many young adults in Malaysia are eager to try different trendy coffee shops every time there is a new coffee shop established. However, not all coffee shops can grab loyal customers even though they were able to attract newcomers in the early phase of the establishment. This is because there is heavy competition among coffee shop establishments as there are more and more coffee shop establishments in particular areas normally in big cities.

One of the most important aspects customers consider when selecting a coffee shop is previous experience (Lin et al., 2016). Customer's experience after visiting a café of which didn't meet their expectation could be the reason why they did not intend to revisit. According to Hakim and Syahban Amir (2022), younger generations today, including millennials, contribute more to the market because they see coffee as more than just a beverage, but as a form of self-expression. This is when socialization becomes crucial for them. They prefer to meet up with their peers in coffee shops that provide a comfortable environment for gatherings or study discussions. Choosing a coffee shop for these coffee consumers currently involves considering the quality of the coffee and other elements such as the coffee shop's environment and social interaction. In this developing industry, business owners and managers must get insights into their customers' behaviour to avoid dissatisfaction and eventually affect behavioural intention. Nevertheless, little is known about whether ambient elements are most significant to the coffee shops, or whether there

are any interactions between ambience and social interactions on customer behaviour. There is a scarcity of research on ambience, social interaction, customer satisfaction, and behavioural intentions in the Malaysian context, specifically in the coffee industry. Therefore, there is a need to study the ambience and social interaction towards behavioural intention. This study also aims to identify the impact of ambience and social interactions on young adults' intention to patronize local coffee shops, with the hope that this study's results would lead to positive change and improvements among local business owners in Kuching, Sarawak to attract more younger customers into their coffee shops.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since coffee was discovered, it has been spread worldwide and has become a common beverage among consumers. Today, coffee has become one of the world's most consumed beverages (Marcus et al., 2023). The values of foreign cafés have profoundly influenced Malaysian coffee shop culture. Coffee culture has expanded so widely worldwide that it has become an essential part of people's daily lives (Abdul Rahim et al., 2019). Malaysia, once known as a tea-drinking country, has been impacted by Western coffee culture (Abdul Rahim et al., 2019). Malaysian coffee culture differs from European coffee culture, as Malaysians are more influenced by tea as their main brew, resulting from British colonization, which brought their culture into the country (Abdul Rahim et al., 2019). Nowadays, people no longer visit coffee shops for coffee only, but also for the ambience and a more exclusive place to socialize. Coffee shops are primarily social gathering places from a cultural aspect. Whether individually or in small groups, a coffee shop provides patrons with a space to mingle, talk, read, write, entertain one another, or pass the time (Hakim & Syahban Amir, 2022). Since the wide availability of Wi-Fi, coffee shops with this capability have become popular venues for customers to use their laptops and tablets to access the Internet (Ellis, 2008). Thus, coffee shops become a place for young adults to meet up.

2.1 Ambience

Based on the Mehrabian-Russel model (M-R model) of environmental influence by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), as cited in Yusof et al. (2016), there has been mounting evidence that environmental variables can have a significant impact on consumer behaviour and emotions in physical surroundings. Customer and marketing service study that examines retail atmospheres frequently uses the term ambience (AbuThahir and Krishnapillai, 2018; Ilakya et al., 2020; Mishra et al., 2014; Muhammad et al., 2014;). It appears that the store's ambience is sometimes more essential than the product (AbuThahir and Krishnapillai, 2018; Ilakya et al., 2020). Also, a person's expectations of a product might be just as essential as the thing itself. Liao et al. (2012) postulated that the coffee shop's ambience has a positive relationship with customers' purchase intentions, particularly if the shop is able to provide a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere that enhances the consumer's mood and sense of happiness. Customers will visit coffee shops more frequently if they are clean, comfortable, and engaging (Abdul Rahim et al., 2019). Several ambience elements influence customer behaviour such as music, store layout and artefacts and decoration.

2.1.1 Music

Customers' preferences towards music influence their satisfaction level. Han et al. (2009) justified that coffee shop managers should fine-tune background music to stimulate customers' emotional states by adjusting volume (from loud to gentle), tempo (from rapid

to slow), and genre (from classical to jazz). Music has also an impact on customers' emotions, moods, and pleasure. The listener's mood can be positively or negatively influenced by the music depending on the type or genre of the music played (Rea et al., 2010). Classical and pop music can ease listeners' feelings and decrease worry or tension. Thus, music is one of the elements of ambience that has a significant impact on the customer's intention to revisit as music has directly stimulated consumer behaviour to revisit coffee shops (AbuThahir & Krishnapillai, 2018). Abdul Rahim et al. (2019) also mentioned that a pleasing ambience with soothing background music can encourage customers to spend more time in coffee shops, thereby converting them into regular or repeat customers. In contrast, inferior quality and loud music will result in submissive customer experiences.

2.1.2 Spatial Layout

The layout and display of the coffee shops, such as the furniture and equipment arrangements, have an impact on the customer's intention to revisit. Coffee shops that are equipped with comfortable seating and electrical outlets for electronic devices, and no-smoking areas ensure that all customers are content in the physical environment (Wu, 2017; Paryani, 2011). Heung et al. (2012) also pointed out that the seating arrangement, equipment, and furnishings at a coffee shop should be prioritized to maximize client satisfaction and encourage them to spend more time there. To facilitate in-store traffic patterns and enhance consumers' efficient movement around the shop, well-planned layouts are necessary (AbuThahir & Krishnapillai, 2018).

2.1.3 Café Decorations

Wilson et al. (2012) insisted that the coffee shops' decorations and artefacts not only give aesthetic impressions but also serve as a sign of the uniqueness of the chosen dining area, leading to the customer's desire to return. Customers can get a first impression of the coffee shop's overall environment by looking at the decoration. Decoration and artefacts are crucial aspects in attracting customers to the pleasant appearance of the coffee shops' setting, which influences customer satisfaction and loyalty (Jang et al., 2009). Quynh et al. (2020) stressed that it is essential to emphasise harmony and unity in terms of overall design style, from employee uniforms to the aesthetics of the physical facility, in order to maximise the effects of the ambience of the coffee shop. Customers who wish to socialize in coffee shop surroundings are likely to patronize coffee shop operators who can provide such situations (Lim et al., 2020). Thus, this study hypothesized:

H1: Ambience positively related to the young adult's intention to patronize the coffee shop.

2.2 Social Interactions

Lim et al. (2020) described social interaction as the exchange of communication activities between two or more persons in society, such as exchanging ideas or information, which falls within a broad range of social factors: interpersonal influence, social crowding, social media, and a sense of belonging. In service environments in the hospitality business, social variables play a crucial role in fostering desired customer behaviours, such as patronage (Lim et al., 2020). Social interaction has a positive effect on customer satisfaction and customer experience. Bitner et al. (1994) suggested that customer satisfaction is often determined by the quality of the interpersonal relationship between the customer and the contact staff. According to Suprenant and Solomon (1987), interpersonal interactions that

occur during the delivery of services have the biggest impact on overall service perception. They also claimed that in a service environment, customers and employees were mutually dependent and that a positive relationship and engagement boosted customer experience. The personal interaction between a customer and a service employee creates social influences. Person-oriented behaviours focus on dealing with customers in a pleasant, understanding, and personable manner rather than on the primary work, such as delivering a restaurant meal. Several previous studies (e.g., Barnes, 1994; Bitner et al., 1990; Goodwin & Frame, 1989; Hall, 1993; Hurley, 1998; Iacobucci & Keaveney, 1995; and Ostrom, 1993) as cited in Butcher (2002), showing that friendly-type behaviours of service staff are important to improve service outcomes. Apart from physical attributes, social interactions should be considered an integral element of the coffee shop environment's customer experience (Quynh et al., 2020). Relatively to coffee shops, it was assumed that there would be a positive relationship between social interactions and customer patronage, as customers often perceive coffee shops as comfortable 'third zone' to unwind in between their homes and offices where they can have a conversation and socialize (Hong, 2014; Ong, 2021; and Sethi, 2017). Hence, this study hypothesized:

H2: Social interaction positively related to the young adult's intention to patronize the coffee shop.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study used a survey approach to construct and deliver a questionnaire to obtain the data needed to evaluate its hypotheses. The survey instruments were adapted from AbuThahir and Krishnapillai (2018), Lim et al. (2020), and Lin and Yun (2016). The parameter for selecting participants was determined through a convenient sampling technique because it is fast, inexpensive, and easy, and the subjects are readily available (Aaker et al., 2011). According to Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table, the recommended sample size is 370. Therefore, 370 male and female young adults ranging between the ages of 18 years old to 29 years old who are customers of a coffee shop were invited to participate in this survey. This criterion was designed to ensure that the participants were familiar with the ambience of a coffee shop and the social interactions that take place there.

There is a tremendous growth of coffee shops available, by both local and global companies all over Malaysia, especially in the urban and cities area. This phenomenon can be associated with the rising coffee consumption by the Malaysians' younger generations, believed to be due to urbanisation and hectic lifestyles (Ahmad, 2022). Kuching, Sarawak being one of the largest cities in East Malaysia is no exception in the rising of coffee drinking culture. Besides, Sarawak is also long-known as a Liberica bean grower and producer in Malaysia, hence the traditional coffee culture began long before. This study targeted 10 coffee shops in Kuching to recruit its participants to guarantee that the condition was met. The top ten coffee shops were picked based on their popularity and recommendations from various sources which are from the Wanderlog website they claimed they had read through 8 reputable sites and blogs like Culture Trip and Softinn Solutions then they gathered the results to rank them by how many times they were mentioned in those

websites and blog. Besides Wanderlog, Tripadvisor is also one of the sources to choose the café as the website has also gathered the reviewers' ratings. Café chosen were based on the rank of the top 10 café from both websites.

The questionnaire is divided into three sections. The first section of the questionnaire was designed to gather information about the participants' socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, and the frequency with which they visited the coffee shop. Participants will be asked to assess the importance of ambience elements such as spatial layout, noises or music selection, artefacts, coffee shop decorations, and social interactions in coffee shops in the second part of the questionnaire. The third part of the questionnaire focused on customer behaviours. Specifically, participants were asked to rate their intentions of patronizing coffee shops. The study's variables were all measured using a five-point Likert scale except for the demographic part. A pilot test was conducted among 30 visitors then a reliability test was carried out. Cronbach's Alpha was used to examine the internal reliability of the pilot test. Table 1.0 shows the level of acceptance of Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and Table 1 shows the results of the pilot test. Based on the table, all the variables are significant since Cronbach's alpha value is more than 0.7.

Table 1: Results of the Pilot Test

Measurement items	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Ambience	12	0.958
- Café decoration	4	0.910
- Music	4	0.891
- Spatial layout	4	0.900
Social interaction	5	0.918
Intention to patronize	4	0.908

This study used Statistical Package for Society Science (SPSS) Version 21 software to analyse data. Data analysis methods used are first, the descriptive statistics of the sociodemographic characteristics used to characterize the usable sample: their gender, age, and the frequency of visits to coffee shops. Second, reliability analysis was conducted to determine the validity and reliability of the items used to assess the impact of ambience and social interactions at the coffee shop. Third, Pearson Correlation and multiple linear regression were used to investigate the influence of the ambience and social interactions on young adults' intentions to visit a coffee shop.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

As per the data in Table 2, most of the 370 respondents are females (60.5%), and 39.5% male respondents respectively. As for the age group, it is shown that 37.3% of the participants were between the ages of 19 and 22, 33% were between the ages of 23 and 26, and 25.9% were between the ages of 27 and 30. All the participants patronized local coffee

shops, at least once per week, 56.8% patronized the coffee shops one to two times per week, and 43.2% patronized the coffee shops three times or more per week.

Table 2: Demographic Statistic

Demographic Characteristic		Frequency N = 370	Percentage, 100%
Gender	Male	146	39.5
	Female	224	60.5
Age	19 – 22 yearsold	138	37.3
	23 – 26 yearsold	122	33
	27 – 30 yearsold	110	29.7
Number of Visits to Local Coffee shop per week	One to twotimes	210	56.8
	Three times or more	160	43.2

4.2 Reliability Analysis

The variables were analyzed for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, as indicated in Table 3. All of the variables' values were greater than 0.7, indicating that the variables' measurement scales were stable and consistent. These results showed that the multi-item measures used in the study were valid and reliable measures of the independent variables used in this study.

Table 3: Results of reliability analysis

Measurement items	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Ambience	12	0.940
- Cafédcorations	4	0.990
- Music	4	0.965
- Spatial layout	4	0.994
Social interaction	5	0.984
Intention to patronize	4	0.959

4.3 Pearson Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation analysis was used to measure the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. Table 4.0 shows that the independent variables are positively related to the intention to patronize coffee shops among young adults at a significant level of $p < 0.01$. The result indicates that ambience has the weakest correlation to the dependent variable. The Pearson correlation between ambience and the dependent variable obtained is equal to 0.788 at a significant level of 0.00 which shows that ambience positively affects young adults' intention to patronize coffee shops, but the correlation is weak between these two variables. Meanwhile, social interaction has the strongest correlation to the dependent variable. The Pearson correlation between social interaction and the dependent variable obtained is equal to 0.921 at a significant level of 0.00 which shows that ambience positively affects young adults' intention to patronize coffee shops.

The Pearson correlation analysis was used to measure the strength of the linear relationship between two variables. Table 4 shows that the independent variables are positively related to the intention to patronize coffee shops among young adults at a significant level of $p < 0.01$. The result indicates that ambience has the lowest correlation to the dependent variable. The Pearson correlation between ambience and the dependent variable obtained is equal to 0.788 at a significant level of 0.00 which shows that ambience positively affects young adults' intention to patronize coffee shops, but the correlation is weak between these two variables. Meanwhile, social interaction has the strongest correlation to the dependent variable. The Pearson correlation between social interaction and the dependent variable obtained is equal to 0.921 at a significant level of 0.00 which shows that ambience positively affects young adult's intention to patronize coffee shops.

Table 4: Result of correlation analysis

Hypotheses		Pearson Correlation	Sig.	Remark
H1	Ambience positively related to the young adults' intention to patronize the coffee shop	0.788	0.00	Accepted
H2	Social interaction positively related to the young adults' intention to patronize the coffee shop	0.921	0.00	Accepted

4.4 Multiple Linear Regression

Multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to test the relationships between the independent variables and the motivation to patronize independent specialist coffee shops among young adults. Table 5.0 shows that the R square is 0.849. To put it more simply 84.9% of the variation in the intention to patronage coffee shops was influenced by the two variables which are ambience and social interaction. There is a significant relationship between ambience, social interaction, and the intention to patronize coffee shops. Among the independent variables, social interaction has a stronger influence on the intention to patronize coffee shops where the standardized beta is equal to 0.998 compared to the ambience which is -0.88. Based on the table, the beta coefficient for ambience is negative. Therefore, for every 1-unit increase in ambience, the intention to patronize decreases by the beta coefficient value.

Table 5: Result of multiple linear regression analysis
Dependent Variable: Intention to Patronize the Coffee Shop

Independent Variables					
Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Std. coefficients beta	t-value	Sig.
	Beta	Std. error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.120	0.136		0.886	0.376
Ambience	-0.141	0.070	-0.88	-2.025	0.044
Social Interaction	1.154	0.50	0.998	22.865	0.000

R square =0.849 $F = 972.197$	Adjusted R square= 0.848 p -value= 0.000
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5. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the results, it is shown that there is a positive relationship between the ambience and young adults' intention to patronize coffee shops. These results are consistent with Lim et al. (2020), where ambience positively affects customers' intention to patronize coffee shops. The ambience was found to enhance approach behaviours among customers and their mood perceptions and attachments to places (Lim et al. 2020). This finding also supports Abdul Rahim et al. (2019), which concluded that ambience significantly impacts purchase intention in a coffee shop. It is also in line with the study from AbuThahir and Krishnapillai (2018), which showed that all the five sub-dimensions of ambience which are cleanliness, decoration, store layout, light, and music had a significant and positive influence on coffee shops' customers' revisit intention. These also concur with Hussain and Ali (2015), whereby it was found that general ambience variables such as music, harmonious colour, scent, cleanliness, and lighting will greatly affect the customers' purchase intention. However, even though ambience has a positive relationship with the intention to patronize coffee shops, the result from multiple regression suggests that the beta value for ambience is negative. It can be interpreted that ambience may decrease the intention to patronize coffee shops.

According to Chandra (2015), a negative beta value can be implied into several interpretations: (a) the independent variable is negatively correlated with the dependent variable, (b) the dependent variable, on average, will reduce by an amount equal to the beta value for a unit change in the independent variable, (c) the independent variable is known to depend on X but the study design, used generate the data, does not have sufficient power to detect dependence. Unfortunately for this study are not able to tell which one is the best interpretation for this result. However, a study by Xu (2007) found that the influence of ambience on customer satisfaction is limited to a specific age group. Based on Xu (2007) study, it is found that ambience enhanced consumer satisfaction among Generation Y consumers. Generation Y were born between 1981 and 1994, which makes them currently in the age between 25 and 40 years old. This study targeted young adults ranging between 19 and 30 years old. This study has collected surveys mostly from participants aged between 19 and 22 years old. Participants aged 27 and above are the least. Hence explain that ambience probably doesn't influence most of our participants to patronize the coffee shop. Regardless, the objective to study the relationship between ambience and young adults' intention to patronize coffee shops has been achieved.

On the other hand, social interactions were found to be positively related to the intention to patronize coffee shops. This finding is consistent with Lim et al. (2020) who identified social interaction along with ambience as having a significant and positive effect on customers' intention to revisit coffee shops. Both ambience and social interaction have a significant relationship with the intention to patronize coffee shops, but social interaction has a stronger

influence on the intention to patronize. Lin and Yun (2016) also stated that social factors play a major part in influencing desired young adults' customer behaviour in service settings, such as patronage, in the hospitality industry, specifically in coffee shops. Thus, social interaction is the most important factor to motivate frequent patronage of coffee shops. The objective to study the relationship between social interaction and young adults' intention to revisit coffee shops has been achieved.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examines the impact of ambience and social interaction on young adults' intention to patronage coffee shops. The results meet the research objectives: to identify the relationship between two variables (ambience and social interaction) towards the intention to patronage coffee shops. The outcome of the reliability test, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression showed that all two independent variables have a positive significant relationship with the intention to patronage coffee shops. Furthermore, social interaction is the most important factor influencing young adults' intention to patronage coffee shops. Therefore, it can be concluded that both ambience and social interaction have an impact on young adults' patronage of coffee shops.

This study makes three significant contributions to the field of hospitality theory. First, the findings indicate there is a positive relationship between ambience and young adults' intentions to visit a café backing up past research that has highlighted the significance of the ambience. The elements of ambience factors including cafe decorations, type of music, and spatial layout are very important to the younger generation where daily social media content posting is a current lifestyle. It is worth noting that social media influencers impacted their followers' decision to visit places they shared over various platforms, where attractive cafe decorations and layouts could be viewed by the followers. These created flowing interests, which business owners should be mindful of when planning and decorating their coffee shops. Apart from that, the choice of music played in the coffee shops could create comfort, peace of mind, and excitement among the young adult coffee shop goers. For instance, Starbucks in the United States recently played Taylor Swift's playlist consisting of 122 songs in their stores nationwide coinciding with the popular singer's The Eras Tour (Forbes, 2023). Based on this, coffee shop operators should plan their stores' playlists according to the customer's background and age group during operation time, especially towards the young adults' customers.

Second, the findings indicate a positive relationship between social interactions and young adults' intentions to visit a coffee shop suggesting that young adults believe that convivial social interactions between customers and staff have an experiential value that they can find and satisfy through the coffee shop's hospitality services. As a result, social interactions might be included in the hospitality services' experiential benefits list. The study will be helpful for local coffee shops or café entrepreneurs who want to boost customer traffic by implementing a socioenvironmental strategy. This research reveals empirical evidence that coffee shop operators can drive customer patronage by providing values that fulfil customers' higher-level demands, such as social interactions between customers and employees. For

that matter, coffee shops or café entrepreneurs must establish an environment that encourages social interaction.

Nevertheless, this research has its limitations in terms of geo-demographic study analysis as it only covers young adults in Kuching, Sarawak. Future researchers may expand this study to include other relevant age groups and other cities in Malaysia. Furthermore, it is recommended that future studies incorporate experiential satisfaction as the mediating variable between ambience, social interactions, and customers' intention to patronize coffee shops.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

AO initially carried out all the sections, specifically the introduction, literature review, methodology, and data collection and performed data analysis using the SPSS software. AO also wrote the discussion and implication sections. PDAR supervised the work of all sections, provided advice and suggestions, and final written improvements on all sections. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared.

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