

Building a Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem through Institutional Support and Digital Transformation: The Mediating Role of Destination Trust in Aceh, Indonesia

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Abstract: Sustainable halal tourism requires more than religious compliance, it depends on institutional capacity, technological transformation, stakeholder coordination, and tourists confidence in destination management. However, existing halal tourism research has largely examined destination attributes, tourist trust, or sustainability related factors separately, leaving limited empirical evidence on how institutional and technological conditions jointly contribute to a sustainable halal tourism ecosystem through destination trust. This study develops and tests an integrated model in which Government Support and Digital Transformation are proposed as antecedents of the Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem, with Destination Trust as a mediating mechanism. A quantitative research design was employed using a survey of 300 Muslim tourists who had visited halal tourism destinations in Aceh, Indonesia. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics through descriptive analysis, multiple linear regression, and mediation analysis with the PROCESS Macro. The findings indicate that government support, digital transformation, and destination trust each have positive and significant effects on the sustainable halal tourism ecosystem. Furthermore, destination trust significantly mediates the relationships between government support, digital transformation, and ecosystem sustainability. These findings highlight that sustainable halal tourism development requires not only supportive government policies and digital innovation but also the establishment of tourists' trust in destination management and halal compliance. The study provides practical implications for policymakers and tourism stakeholders in developing integrated strategies to strengthen the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of halal tourism destinations.

Keywords: Destination Trust, Digital Transformation, Government Support, Halal Tourism, Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem.

INTRODUCTION

Halal tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors within the global halal economy, driven by the increasing number of Muslim travelers seeking destinations that provide services compatible with Islamic values. The Global Muslim Travel Index consistently reports that Muslim travel demand continues to expand, encouraging many countries to position halal tourism as a strategic driver of economic development and destination competitiveness. Beyond religious compliance, halal tourism has evolved into an integrated ecosystem involving government regulations, tourism businesses, local communities, financial institutions, and digital technologies that collectively shape sustainable destination development (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Hariani et al., 2024).

Indonesia has emerged as one of the leading

halal tourism destinations due to its rich Islamic heritage, cultural diversity, and strong government commitment to developing the halal industry. Among its provinces, Aceh occupies a distinctive position because it is the only province implementing Islamic law comprehensively, supported by regional regulations (*Qanun*) governing tourism and Islamic economic activities. These regulatory frameworks provide Aceh with a unique institutional advantage in developing a sustainable halal tourism ecosystem. Nevertheless, despite possessing strong religious identity and abundant tourism resources, Aceh continues to face challenges related to destination competitiveness, digital promotion, stakeholder collaboration, and the integration of technology into tourism management. Recent studies suggest that stronger coordination among government

agencies, tourism stakeholders, and digital service providers is required to maximize Aceh's competitiveness as an international halal tourism destination.

The sustainability of halal tourism destinations cannot rely solely on attractive tourism resources or religious branding. Instead, it requires a comprehensive ecosystem in which government support, digital transformation, and destination trust reinforce one another. Government Support establishes the institutional conditions necessary for ecosystem sustainability through tourism policies, infrastructure, halal standards, stakeholder coordination, and policy incentives. In halal tourism, this role is particularly important because halal integrity and service provision require credible standards and institutional coordination (Adham et al., 2025). At the same time, Digital Transformation changes the underlying capabilities and processes through which tourism resources, information, services, and stakeholders are connected and managed. By enabling more effective information integration, service delivery, stakeholder engagement, and operational efficiency, digital transformation has become an important capability for sustainable and competitive tourism development (Liu et al., 2023; Jokom et al., 2025). Thus, Government Support and Digital Transformation are positioned as upstream antecedents because they shape the institutional and technological conditions that enable ecosystem sustainability, rather than merely representing additional destination-related factors. This positioning provides the foundation for understanding how these conditions may subsequently influence tourists' Destination Trust and their perceptions of a sustainable halal tourism ecosystem.

Another essential component of a sustainable halal tourism ecosystem is destination trust. Tourism decisions involve uncertainty because tourists evaluate destinations before experiencing them directly. Consequently, trust becomes a critical psychological factor influencing destination selection, satisfaction, and long-term loyalty. Within halal tourism, destination trust extends

beyond service quality to include confidence that destinations consistently provide halal-certified products, Muslim-friendly facilities, transparent information, and services aligned with Islamic principles. When tourists perceive destinations as trustworthy, they are more likely to develop positive behavioral intentions, revisit destinations, and recommend them to others. Recent empirical evidence from Aceh confirms that trust significantly strengthens tourist loyalty and is closely associated with tourists' perceptions of halal destination competitiveness and service quality.

Although previous studies have investigated halal tourism from perspectives such as destination competitiveness, tourist satisfaction, destination image, perceived value, and loyalty, relatively few have examined how government support, digital transformation, and destination trust jointly contribute to building a sustainable halal tourism ecosystem. Existing research in Aceh has largely focused on policy implementation, halal destination management, or digital promotion as separate issues rather than integrating these dimensions into a comprehensive framework. Consequently, limited empirical evidence explains how institutional support, technological innovation, and tourists' psychological trust interact to strengthen the sustainability of halal tourism destinations.

Addressing this gap, the present study proposes an integrated model to examine the relationships among government support, digital transformation, destination trust, and the sustainable halal tourism ecosystem in Aceh. By positioning government support and digital transformation as strategic antecedents and destination trust as a key mechanism for strengthening ecosystem sustainability, this study extends the literature on halal tourism from a policy and industry perspective. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective halal tourism policies, strengthen stakeholder collaboration, and provide strategic recommendations for policymakers and tourism practitioners seeking to enhance Aceh's competitiveness as a sustainable global halal tourism destination.

The theoretical novelty of this study lies in integrating institutional, technological, and psychological mechanisms to explain sustainable halal tourism ecosystem development. While previous studies have examined government support and digital transformation largely as separate factors, this study positions them as upstream antecedents, with Destination Trust serving as the psychological mechanism linking these conditions to tourists' perceptions of ecosystem sustainability. Thus, the study contributes an integrated institutional, technological, trust framework for sustainable halal tourism in Aceh (Jabeen et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2025).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Government Support

Government support refers to the commitment of public institutions to facilitate the sustainable development of halal tourism through regulations, infrastructure, halal certification, financial incentives, destination governance, and stakeholder collaboration. Effective government policies create an enabling environment that encourages tourism businesses to provide halal compliant services while increasing destination competitiveness. Recent destination-level research demonstrates that institutional pressures can shape sustainability transitions by establishing the formal conditions within which tourism organizations pursue sustainability (Dodds et al., 2025). In halal tourism, government intervention is considered a strategic driver because it ensures regulatory certainty, service standardization, and institutional coordination, all of which strengthen tourists confidence in halal destinations (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Adham et al., 2025). Government support is therefore expected to enhance tourists' trust in the destination and contribute directly to the development of a sustainable halal tourism ecosystem.

Digital Transformation

Digital transformation refers to a destination level strategic process through which digital technologies and digital capabilities reshape tourism services, destination management, marketing communication, and stakeholder

interaction. It goes beyond digitalization, which primarily involves converting analogue information or processes into digital formats, and digital marketing, which focuses mainly on digital communication and promotional activities. It is also broader than smart tourism technology, which refers to specific technological applications that enable data driven and context aware tourism experiences. Thus, Digital Transformation concerns the broader reconfiguration of tourism processes, services, and organizational capabilities through digital technologies (Jovicic et al., 2022; Gutierrez et al., 2025).

Within halal tourism, Digital Transformation includes the integration of digital information, payment and reservation systems, technology enabled destination management, and reliable digital communication. These capabilities can reduce information asymmetry, improve service transparency, facilitate stakeholder coordination, and provide access to halal certified information, prayer facilities, accommodation availability, and other destination services. Consequently, Digital Transformation is expected to strengthen Destination Trust and contribute to the development of a Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Jabeen et al., 2025).

Destination Trust

Destination trust refers to tourists confidence that a destination consistently delivers safe, reliable, and halal-compliant tourism experiences. Following the destination trust literature, the construct is treated as a general destination-level trust construct rather than a separate construct of halal trust (Liu et al., 2019). Trust develops when tourists perceive that destination information is accurate, tourism services meet expectations, and halal principles are implemented consistently. In the context of Aceh, destination trust includes confidence in halal-certified products, Islamic hospitality, religious facilities, destination governance, and service quality. Previous studies indicate that destination trust positively influences tourists'

behavioral intentions and plays an important mediating role between destination attributes and tourism sustainability. Therefore, destination trust is proposed as the mediating mechanism through which government support and digital transformation contribute to building a sustainable halal tourism ecosystem.

Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem

A sustainable halal tourism ecosystem represents an integrated tourism system in which government institutions, tourism businesses, local communities, digital technology providers, and tourists collaboratively create economic, social, environmental, and religious sustainability. Unlike conventional tourism sustainability, a halal tourism ecosystem incorporates Islamic values alongside sustainable development principles. A sustainable ecosystem is characterized by effective governance, digital innovation, stakeholder collaboration, halal compliance, environmental responsibility, and long-term destination competitiveness. Recent studies emphasize that sustainable halal tourism can only be achieved through the integration of supportive public policies, technological innovation, and tourists' trust in destination management. Consequently, the construct is theoretically closer to a formative or composite conceptualization: changes in one dimension do not necessarily imply equivalent changes in the other dimensions, but the dimensions collectively define the breadth of sustainable halal tourism ecosystem development. This conceptualization is consistent with recent research that evaluates sustainable halal tourism through multiple dimensions encompassing economic, social, environmental, and halal-related performance (Hanafiah et al., 2024).

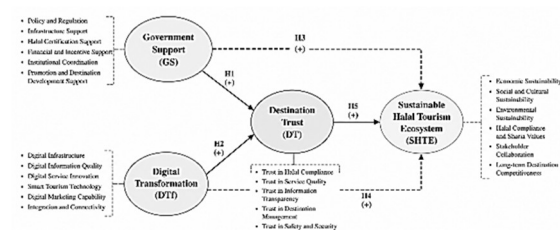


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationships among Government Support, Digital Transformation, Destination Trust, and the Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem in Aceh, Indonesia. The research focused on domestic and international Muslim tourists who had visited halal tourism destinations in Aceh and were familiar with the tourism services and facilities available in the province. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and their right to discontinue participation at any time. Informed consent was obtained before respondents proceeded to the questionnaire. No personally identifiable information was collected for analytical purposes.

The target population consisted of Muslim tourists who had visited Aceh at least once within the last two years. A purposive sampling technique was applied to ensure that respondents met the following criteria: (1) Muslim; (2) at least 18 years old; (3) had visited one or more halal tourism destinations in Aceh; and (4) were willing to complete the questionnaire voluntarily. A total of 300 valid questionnaires were collected and used for data analysis. This sample size is considered adequate for multivariate statistical analysis and exceeds the minimum recommended sample size for regression-based studies (Hair et al., 2019).

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms and offline surveys at several halal tourism destinations in Aceh. The measurement items for each construct were adapted from previous validated studies. Government Support was measured using six indicators related to policy support, infrastructure, halal certification, financial incentives, institutional coordination, and destination development. Digital Transformation consisted of six indicators reflecting digital infrastructure, digital services, smart tourism technology, and digital marketing capability. Destination Trust was measured through six indicators assessing tourists' confidence in halal compliance, service quality, destination management, safety, and information transparency. Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem was measured using six indicators covering economic sustainability, social sustainability, environmental sustainability, halal compliance, stakeholder collaboration, and destination competitiveness. All items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

agree).

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics were first conducted to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics. Subsequently, the quality of the measurement instrument was evaluated through validity and reliability tests. Construct validity was assessed using Corrected Item–Total Correlation, with values greater than 0.30 considered acceptable, while internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, where values above 0.70 indicated satisfactory reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

To test the proposed hypotheses, multiple linear regression analysis was employed. Before conducting regression analysis, the classical assumption tests including normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and linearity were performed to ensure that the regression model met the required assumptions. The mediating role of Destination Trust was examined using the PROCESS Macro for SPSS (Model 4) developed by Hayes (2022), with 5,000 bootstrap resamples to estimate indirect effects and their corresponding 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. Mediation was considered significant when the confidence interval for the indirect effect did not include zero. Statistical significance for all analyses was determined at the 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Validity and Reliability Test

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Results

Construct	Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha
Government Support	GS1	0.701	0.903
	GS2	0.744	
	GS3	0.689	
	GS4	0.768	
	GS5	0.721	
	GS6	0.752	
Digital Transformation	DT1	0.734	0.916
	DT2	0.771	
	DT3	0.809	
	DT4	0.748	
	DT5	0.783	
	DT6	0.821	
Destination Trust	DST1	0.746	0.921
	DST2	0.788	
	DST3	0.834	
	DST4	0.806	
	DST5	0.773	
	DST6	0.819	
Sustainable	SHTE1	0.728	0.914

Construct	Item	Corrected Item–Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha
Halal Tourism Ecosystem	SHTE2	0.781	
	SHTE3	0.825	
	SHTE4	0.794	
	SHTE5	0.748	
	SHTE6	0.809	

The corrected item-total correlation values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.30, indicating satisfactory construct validity. Furthermore, Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.903 to 0.921, confirming excellent internal consistency reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	GS	DT	DT R	SHTE
Government Support (GS)	4.16	0.58	1			
Digital Transformation (DT)	4.11	0.62	.521**	1		
Destination Trust (DTR)	4.24	0.55	.604**	.639**	1	
Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem (SHTE)	4.18	0.57	.589**	.612**	.701**	1

The correlation analysis shows that all variables were positively and significantly correlated, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.521 to 0.701, indicating moderate to strong relationships.

Classical Assumption Test

Table 3. Classical Assumption Test

Test	Variable	Result	Conclusion
Normality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov)		Sig. = 0.087	Normal
Multicollinearity (VIF)	Government Support	1.629	No multicollinearity
	Digital Transformation	1.825	
	Destination Trust	2.11	

	n Trust	8	
Tolerance	Government Support	0.614	Acceptable
	Digital Transformation	0.548	
	Destination Trust	0.472	
Heteroscedasticity (Glejser)	Government Support	0.351	No heteroscedasticity
	Digital Transformation	0.281	
	Destination Trust	0.858	

Overall, the results of the classical assumption tests indicate that all assumptions required for multiple linear regression analysis have been satisfied. The residuals are normally distributed, no multicollinearity exists among the predictor variables, the variance of the residuals is homoscedastic, and no autocorrelation is detected. Therefore, the regression model is considered appropriate for hypothesis testing.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4. Regression Results

Relationship	β	t	Sig.
Government Support → Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem	0.318	5.842	0.000
Digital Transformation → Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem	0.362	6.497	0.000
Destination Trust → Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem	0.401	7.136	0.000

Model Summary

Table 5. R-Square

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig
0.801	0.642	0.638	176.54	0.000

The regression model explains 64.2% of the variance in the Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem. Government Support, Digital Transformation, and Destination Trust all have positive and significant effects on the sustainable halal tourism ecosystem.

Mediation Analysis (PROCESS Macro Model 4)

Table 6. Indirect Effect Results

Relationship	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Government Support → Destination Trust → Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem	0.143	0.037	0.078	0.223
Digital Transformation → Destination Trust → Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem	0.186	0.042	0.109	0.271

The bootstrap analysis indicates that the indirect effects are statistically significant because the 95% confidence intervals do not include zero. Therefore, Destination Trust significantly mediates the relationship between Government Support and the Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem as well as between Digital Transformation and the Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem. Since the direct effects also remain significant, these relationships indicate partial mediation. These findings suggest that improvements in government policies and digital transformation strengthen the sustainability of the halal tourism ecosystem by enhancing tourists' trust in Aceh as a halal tourism destination.

Discussion

Government Support and Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem

The findings indicate that Government Support has a positive and significant effect on the Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem, supporting the proposed hypothesis. This result suggests that effective government policies, adequate tourism infrastructure, halal certification programs, and stakeholder coordination play a crucial role in strengthening the sustainability of halal tourism in Aceh. As the only province in Indonesia implementing Islamic law comprehensively, Aceh possesses a unique institutional framework that enables the government to integrate Islamic values into tourism development. Consequently, strong governmental commitment not only improves destination competitiveness but also ensures that tourism development aligns with halal principles and sustainable development objectives.

These findings are consistent with Institutional Theory, which argues that government institutions create formal regulations and governance mechanisms that shape organizational behavior and improve industry performance (Scott, 2014). In the context of halal tourism, supportive regulations

reduce uncertainty among tourism businesses and encourage the adoption of halal standards, thereby enhancing tourists' confidence in destination quality. This finding is in line with Adham et al. (2025), who reported that government intervention significantly strengthens halal tourism development through effective governance and policy implementation. Similarly, Hariani et al. (2025) found that government commitment positively influences the competitiveness of halal tourism destinations by improving tourism infrastructure and institutional collaboration. Recent destination-level evidence further demonstrates that institutional pressures can influence sustainability transitions because government and other institutional actors shape the environment in which tourism stakeholders operate (Dodds et al., 2025).

From a policy perspective, the results imply that the Aceh Government should continue strengthening regulations, improving tourism infrastructure, simplifying halal certification procedures, and increasing collaboration with tourism stakeholders to ensure the long-term sustainability of the halal tourism ecosystem.

Digital Transformation and Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem

The study also demonstrates that Digital Transformation positively influences the Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem. The increasing adoption of digital technologies enables halal tourism destinations to provide more efficient services, improve destination promotion, and facilitate tourists' access to reliable information. Digital platforms also increase operational efficiency and strengthen communication between tourism providers and visitors, thereby improving the overall tourism experience.

This finding supports the Smart Tourism Destination Theory, which emphasizes that digital technology enhances destination competitiveness by improving information accessibility, service quality, and stakeholder collaboration (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015). In halal tourism, digital transformation is particularly important because Muslim tourists require accurate information regarding halal-certified restaurants, prayer facilities, accommodation, and Islamic-friendly services before making travel decisions.

The results are consistent with Jabeen et al. (2025), who concluded that digital innovation is one of the key drivers of sustainable halal tourism development. Likewise, Aprullah et al. (2024) reported that digital transformation significantly improves the performance of halal tourism

destinations in Aceh through enhanced digital services and integrated tourism information systems. Therefore, investment in digital infrastructure and smart tourism technologies should become a strategic priority for destination managers.

Destination Trust and Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem

The findings further reveal that Destination Trust has the strongest positive effect on the Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem. This indicates that tourists are more likely to support sustainable halal tourism when they trust that the destination consistently provides halal-compliant products, transparent information, safe environments, and high-quality services.

This finding is consistent with Trust Theory, which explains that trust reduces uncertainty and encourages long-term relationships between consumers and service providers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Within halal tourism, trust extends beyond service quality to include confidence in halal certification, Islamic hospitality, and destination governance. When Muslim tourists trust a destination, they are more willing to revisit, recommend the destination, and contribute to its long-term sustainability.

The findings support previous studies by Wibawa et al. (2025), who found that destination trust significantly influences tourists' behavioral intentions toward halal tourism destinations. Similarly, Hariani et al. (2025) emphasized that trust is an important determinant of tourist loyalty and destination competitiveness. Therefore, tourism managers should continuously maintain service quality, transparency, and halal compliance to strengthen tourists' trust.

The Mediating Role of Destination Trust

The mediation analysis demonstrates that Destination Trust significantly mediates the relationships between Government Support, Digital Transformation, and the Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem. This finding indicates that government policies and digital transformation alone are insufficient to create a sustainable tourism ecosystem unless they simultaneously increase tourists' trust in the destination.

Government support contributes to trust by ensuring clear regulations, consistent halal standards, and adequate tourism infrastructure. Meanwhile, digital transformation enhances trust by providing transparent, accessible, and reliable tourism information through digital platforms. As tourists perceive higher levels of trust, they become

more confident in choosing halal tourism destinations, which ultimately strengthens the sustainability of the tourism ecosystem.

This finding provides an integrated perspective on the relationships among institutional support, digital transformation, destination trust, and sustainable halal tourism. The results indicate that destination trust plays an important mediating role in the relationships between government support, digital transformation, and the sustainable halal tourism ecosystem. Rather than claiming that these relationships have not been examined previously, the findings highlight how institutional and technological conditions may contribute to ecosystem sustainability both directly and indirectly through tourists' trust. This perspective provides further insight into how government policies and digital capabilities can support the sustainable development of halal tourism.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that policymakers should not only formulate supportive tourism policies but also ensure their effective implementation to enhance public trust. Similarly, tourism businesses should continue investing in digital technologies that improve information transparency, service efficiency, and tourist engagement. Strengthening these aspects will contribute to a more resilient and sustainable halal tourism ecosystem in Aceh.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Government Support and Digital Transformation contribute to the Sustainable Halal Tourism Ecosystem in Aceh, with Destination Trust proposed as a mediating mechanism. The findings reveal that government support through appropriate policies, infrastructure development, halal certification, and stakeholder collaboration contributes directly to sustainable halal tourism development. Likewise, digital transformation enhances the accessibility, efficiency, and transparency of tourism services, thereby strengthening destination competitiveness. Among the examined variables, Destination Trust emerged as a key determinant of a sustainable halal tourism ecosystem and also mediated the relationships between government support, digital transformation, and ecosystem sustainability. These findings extend the literature on halal tourism by integrating institutional support, digital innovation, and trust into a single framework, highlighting that sustainable halal tourism cannot be achieved

solely through policy initiatives or technological advancement but also requires tourists' confidence in destination governance and halal compliance. From a practical perspective, the results suggest that policymakers in Aceh should strengthen cross-sector collaboration, accelerate digital transformation, improve halal certification systems, and ensure consistent implementation of halal tourism policies to enhance destination trust and long-term sustainability. Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations, including its focus on Muslim tourists in Aceh and the use of a cross-sectional research design, which may limit the generalizability of the findings and the ability to capture changes in tourists' perceptions over time. Therefore, future research is encouraged to examine other halal tourism destinations in Indonesia or different countries, employ longitudinal or comparative research designs, and incorporate additional variables such as destination image, tourist engagement, perceived value, religiosity, service quality, environmental sustainability, or artificial intelligence adoption to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the sustainable development of halal tourism ecosystems.

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