



Exposure to Government Campaigns and Street Traders' Attitude Towards Street Trading in Edo

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Abstract

This study investigated how street traders respond to government communication campaign messages against street trading, focusing on their exposure to the campaigns and their attitudes towards street trading regulation. A mixed-methods design was used, guided by the Elaboration Likelihood Model, Yale persuasion theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Questionnaires were administered to 341 traders in nine markets (327 valid), and 20 key informants, including market union leaders and government officials, were interviewed. Most traders (78.3%) were aware of the campaigns, and face-to-face contact was the main channel (62.7%). However, exposure was not significantly associated with attitude, $\chi^2(1, N = 327) = 2.04, p = .153$. Interviewees reported that compliance lasted only while enforcement officers were visible. Traders viewed the campaigns as punitive and cited unaffordable market stalls, distrust of government officials, and unclear instructions as obstacles. The most preferred strategy was collaboration with market leaders (40.7%). The study suggests that information alone is not enough to change attitudes. It recommends delivering messages face to face through trusted market leaders, explaining rules and risks clearly, addressing the cost of compliance, and holding regular dialogue with traders alongside enforcement.

Keywords: attitude, campaigns, elaboration likelihood model, exposure, street trading

Introduction

Street trading in Edo State has become a critical urban governance challenge, worsening traffic congestion, environmental degradation, and public safety risks. Data from the Edo State Ministry of Environment (2024) indicate a 34% increase in roadside stalls in Benin Metropolis between 2020 and 2024. Despite sustained interventions by the Edo State Public Works Volunteers (PUWOV) and multimedia campaigns on radio and television, trader compliance remains erratic. This raises questions about campaign exposure, message design, and audience trust. Scholars of Nigerian environmental communication have examined the effectiveness of radio jingles (Ikeokwu, 2023), participatory approaches to waste management (Obuah & Okon, 2017), and electoral attitudes (Ogono et al., 2023). However, few studies integrate exposure measures, attitudinal dimensions, and behavioural compliance within a unified framework. Empirical work that examines the mediating role of market leadership structures among street traders is particularly scarce. Ikeokwu (2023) reported high awareness of anti-street-trading jingles in Port Harcourt but did not test whether exposure frequency or source credibility mediated the outcomes. Ogono et al. (2023) found that candidate credibility mattered more than media exposure in Benin City elections, yet no parallel work exists for regulatory campaigns.

This study addresses these gaps through a convergent mixed-methods design across nine major markets in Edo State.



Statement of the Problem

Street trading in Nigeria has reached an alarming level and is now a concern to city planners, citizens, and the government (Egbuna & Alom., 2024). Despite its economic benefits, it has led to traffic congestion, encroachment on the right of way, defacement of the city's appearance, and environmental pollution through waste and noise (Egbuna & Alom., 2024). This has prompted the Edo State Government to run campaigns promoting its policies to curb street trading. However, these campaigns do not appear to have achieved the desired outcome, which suggests a disconnection between the government's efforts and traders' attitudes of mistrust, resistance, and limited cooperation.

Contributing factors include a lack of clear communication, insufficient stakeholder engagement, and inadequate support services, such as training and financial assistance for moving to alternative trading arrangements. PUWOV officials, who monitor and coordinate traders' activities, have expressed frustration over traders' persistent disregard for the campaigns. One official in a studied local government area lamented, "It is disheartening that some individuals prioritise short-term gains from street trading over the state's developmental goals." When campaigns resonate with their audience, people are more likely to accept the message and adopt the desired behaviour. This may not be the case among traders in the state. Understanding traders' perspectives on these campaigns, and the challenges the campaigns face, is therefore crucial. It would allow the government to redesign its strategies to influence traders' attitudes and improve compliance. On this premise, this study investigates Edo State street traders' attitudes towards government campaigns against street trading.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study was to investigate the attitudes of street traders in Edo State towards government campaigns against street trading. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. ascertain the extent to which street traders in Edo State are exposed to the state government's campaigns against street trading;
2. determine the relationship between traders' exposure to the campaigns and their attitude towards street trading regulation;
3. examine the factors that shape traders' attitudes towards the campaigns; and
4. identify the strategies traders prefer for encouraging compliance with street trading regulations.

Hypothesis

1. Exposure to government campaigns on street trading will not lead to change in the attitude of street traders in Edo State.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three theories: the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Yale persuasion theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The ELM, developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986), explains how attitudes are formed and changed. It describes the different ways in which people process persuasive messages, why they process them in those ways, and what outcomes follow for attitude change. The model proposes two routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route. Under the central route, persuasion results from careful and thoughtful consideration of the merits of the information presented in support of a campaign or advocacy. This route involves a high level of elaboration, in which the receiver generates a great



deal of thought about the arguments. Under the peripheral route, persuasion depends on simple cues, such as the credibility of the source or the presence of authority, rather than on the quality of the arguments. In this study, the ELM helps to explain why traders who know about the campaigns may still not change their attitudes: if the messages are infrequent or unclear, traders are unlikely to think carefully about them and may respond only to cues such as the presence of enforcement officers.

Yale persuasion theory originated in the work of Carl Hovland and his colleagues at Yale University during the Second World War (Aronson et al., 2010). It is summarised as “who says what to whom”: the source of the communication, the nature of the message, and the nature of the target audience. The theory holds that these factors determine whether a message changes attitudes. The source strongly influences how far the audience accepts a message, and the words of a professional or expert are more likely to persuade than those of a non-expert. Likewise, the stronger and more convincing an argument is, the more attitude change it produces, and the weaker it is, the less change it produces (Asemah et al., 2017). The theory also assumes that attitude change comes before behaviour change. Here, the theory directs attention to who delivers the campaign messages (PUWOV officials or market leaders), how clear the messages are, and the circumstances of the traders who receive them.

The TPB, proposed by Ajzen (1991) as an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action, explains that behaviour is guided by intention. Intention is in turn shaped by three factors: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. The stronger a person’s intention to perform a behaviour, the more likely they are to perform it, provided they have control over it (Ajzen, 1991). In this study, the TPB links attitude to compliance. It also helps to interpret the interview findings: traders’ views of trading as an accepted livelihood reflect subjective norms, and unaffordable stall rents limit their perceived control over complying.

Literature Review

A well-documented problem in environmental and development communication is the awareness-action gap: knowing about an issue or a campaign often does not lead people to change what they do (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). In Nigerian cities, this gap is especially visible in street trading. For many traders it is a means of economic survival, so regulatory campaigns ask them to give up their income, usually without offering an alternative. Studies suggest that campaigns fail when they are treated as one-way transmission of information from government to the public.

Nigerian studies point to the same pattern. Ikeokwu (2023) surveyed 400 traders in Port Harcourt and found that 81% had heard anti-street-trading radio jingles, yet compliance remained low, and traders returned once enforcement eased. Obuah and Okon (2017) found a similar gap in the Rivers State waste campaigns: 68% of 400 residents were aware of the “Keep Rivers Clean” slogan, but only 29% reported changing their behaviour. In both cases, exposure produced recall without compliance.

Two studies help explain why. Ogono et al. (2023) found no significant association between exposure to political advertising and voting intention among 398 Benin City voters, $\chi^2(3, N = 398) = 4.12, p = .249$, and 62% said candidate credibility was their main motivation. Ogbu et al. (2025) found, among 412 traders in Enugu, that exposure had no direct effect on compliance (β



= .07, $p = .31$), but trust in the source did ($\beta = .41$, $p < .001$). Compliance was about three times higher (3.2 times) when market union chairmen, rather than government agents, delivered the message. Taken together, these findings suggest that who delivers a message matters more than how often it is heard, which is consistent with Yale persuasion theory and with the ELM's account of peripheral cues. The strategies the studies evaluated point the same way. Fear-based jingles threatening arrest produced only temporary dispersal (Ikeokwu, 2023). Obuah and Okon (2017) found that one-way billboards failed without community dialogue, whereas participatory waste committees improved disposal when combined with media. The more successful approaches used two-way communication and trusted intermediaries, which Edo State's PUWOV-led model does not yet use.

Three limitations run through this literature. First, exposure is usually measured as a yes-or-no question and not as frequency, channel, or clarity. Second, the studies treat compliance as the direct result of receiving a message and rarely examine barriers such as economic hardship and distrust of officials. Third, most rely on cross-sectional surveys and self-reports, which cannot explain why receivers reject or only superficially process a message. By combining survey data on exposure and attitudes with interviews on why compliance fails, the present study addresses all three, and it applies this to traders in Edo State, a context that has not been studied.

Methodology

Research Design

A convergent mixed-methods design was used, following Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). This design was selected because the research questions required both prevalence data on exposure and attitudes, and explanations of why compliance fails. Quantitative data alone could not explain the non-significant χ^2 result, and qualitative data alone could not establish how widespread distrust was. Converging the survey and interview data in a joint display enabled a direct comparison of statistical patterns with the narratives of traders in the nine markets covered by the study.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population comprised 4,095 registered traders across nine major markets in nine Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Edo State, drawn from the records of the nine local government administrative offices. The markets were purposively selected on the basis of documented high incidence of street trading: New Benin, Uselu, Oregbeni, Afuze, Uzebba, Jattu, Uromi, Irrua, and Ekpoma. This selection was justified because the study sought to examine areas where campaigns were most active, not state-wide prevalence. A sample size of 341 was determined using Taro Yamane's formula at a 95% confidence level and a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error. Of the 341 questionnaires administered, 327 were valid, a response rate of 95.9%. Non-response was due to refusal ($n = 9$) and incomplete questionnaires ($n = 5$).

A multi-stage sampling technique was used. First, nine LGAs were purposively selected. Second, one dominant market was selected in each LGA. Third, every 12th trader ($k = 4,095 \div 341 \approx 12$) was systematically sampled, starting from a random point at each market entrance, between 10:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon and between 4:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Systematic sampling was chosen over simple random sampling because no complete list of traders existed, and it ensured spatial coverage of each market.

For the qualitative data, 20 participants were purposively interviewed: nine market union leaders (one per market) and 11 government officials (PUWOV officials and Local Government Information Officers). Purposive selection was used to capture the perspectives of norm-setters



and enforcers. Recruitment ceased at $n = 20$, when no new themes had emerged after the 18th interview, which met the criterion for thematic saturation.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using two instruments developed for this study. The questionnaire contained 28 closed-ended items adapted from Ikeokwu (2023) and Obuah and Okon (2017). It measured three constructs: (a) campaign exposure (five items on frequency, channel, and message recall), (b) attitude towards regulation (seven items on a 5-point Likert scale), and (c) self-reported compliance (four items). A new instrument was developed because no validated scales exist for Nigerian street-trading campaigns. A semi-structured interview guide with nine open-ended questions explored campaign recall, trust in PUWOF, economic constraints, and preferred engagement methods. The questions were phrased in Nigerian Pidgin and English to match the traders' language. Interviews were chosen over focus groups because traders were reluctant to discuss enforcement in groups.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was established by three professors from the Department of Mass Communication, University of Benin, who reviewed the instruments for relevance, clarity, and coverage. Following their feedback, two double-barrelled items were split, and terms such as "PUWOF" were defined. A pilot study was conducted with 30 traders at Oba Market, Oredo LGA, in May 2024. Oba Market was excluded from the main study. Cronbach's alpha was .72 for the attitude scale and .69 for the exposure scale, indicating acceptable to moderate internal consistency for an exploratory study. Construct validity was assessed using exploratory factor analysis: the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure was .81, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$), confirming sampling adequacy.

For the qualitative data, credibility was ensured through member checking. Transcripts were returned to four participants in the New Benin and Uromi markets, and all confirmed that the accounts reflected their views. Dependability was addressed by keeping an audit trail of coding decisions in NVivo 14.

Data Collection Procedure

Fieldwork took place between 5 November 2024 and 10 January 2025. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Benin Research Ethics Committee before data collection began. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and for non-literate traders, the consent form was read aloud in Pidgin. Questionnaires were researcher-administered to accommodate mixed literacy levels, and each administration lasted 12–18 minutes. Interviews were conducted in the stalls of market leaders, at the duty posts of PUWOF officials, and in the offices of the local government information officers. They lasted 25–40 minutes and were audio-recorded with the participants' permission. No incentives were provided.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Quantitative data were coded and analysed in SPSS 27. Descriptive statistics summarised the frequencies of exposure and attitude. A chi-square test was used to test H_{01} because both variables were categorical. Pearson's r was used to test H_{02} because education and campaign knowledge were treated as interval data. The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

Qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically in NVivo 14, following Braun and Clarke (2006). The six-step process involved (a) familiarising oneself with the data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining



themes, and (f) producing the report. This method was chosen because it allows the inductive identification of barriers that were not specified in advance. The two strands were integrated through a joint display and narrative weaving. The joint display compared the χ^2 and r results with the five qualitative themes to produce meta-inferences, as the convergent design requires.

Findings

The data generated from the Quantitative results were presented as follow.

Table 1. Responses on awareness and exposure to Campaigns

Variable	Response Category	Frequency	%
Awareness of Campaigns	Strongly Agree	142	43.4
	Agree	114	34.9
	Undecided	31	9.5
	Disagree	18	5.5
	Strongly disagree	22	6.7
Message Frequency	Daily	51	15.6
	Weekly	60	18.3
	Often	57	17.4
	Rarely	105	32.1
	Not at all	54	16.5
Responses on the frequency respondents got messages on information against street trading	Very High	99	30.3
	High	74	22.6
	Can't Tell	46	14.1
	Low	75	22.9
	Very Low	33	10.1
Exposure Channels	Television	39	11.9
	Radio	24	7.3
	Billboard	35	10.7
	Face to Face	205	62.7
	Social Media	15	4.6
	None	9	2.8

The above table reveals a critical disconnect between campaign reach and campaign penetration, with direct implications for ELM. Even though 78.3% of traders reported high awareness of anti-street trading campaigns, 48.6% rarely received messages about the campaigns. The gap indicates that awareness is driven by environmental cues and word of mouth rather than sustained media engagement. It also suggests that shallow exposure enables peripheral route processing.

Table 2. Factors for Compliance and preferred Engagement strategies among traders in Edo State

Variable	Response Category	Frequency	%
Primary barrier to Compliance	Low knowledge on dangers of street trading	159	48.6
	Distrust in PUWOF/Government Officials	109	33.3
	Economic needs Outweighs legal risk	42	12.8
	Campaigns lack clear risk	17	5.2
Total		327	100

The above table indicates why high campaign awareness did not translate into attitude change. A total of 48.6% of traders cited low knowledge of the dangers of street trading as the primary barrier, which is paradoxical given the 78.3% awareness rate. This implies a failure of message elaboration under ELM. Traders hear the prohibition but do not process specific risk arguments, leaving them on the peripheral route. Awareness of PUWOV exists, but awareness of why it exists does not.

Table 3. Preferred strategies for achieving Attitudinal change towards anti-street trading campaigns

Variable	Response Category	Frequency	%
Preferred Strategies	Collaboration and partnership with market leaders and stakeholders	133	40.7
	Provide clear enforcement information and relocation alternatives	81	24.8
	Regular engagement and dialogue sessions	75	22.9
	Offer rewards and incentives for compliance	26	8.0
	Use of visuals, storytelling and local-language jingles	12	3.7
Total		327	100

Table 3 indicates that 40.7% endorsement of collaboration with market leaders is key lever for attitude change under the theory of planned behaviour. Traders prefer that information flow on campaigns against street trading should go through in-group authorities, not from PUWOV. The campaign needs different messengers.

Thematic structure of Traders' and Officials accounts of campaign failure

Theme	Sub-themes	Illustrative Quote
Economic survivalism	Unaffordable rent, Subsistence priority	"A woman selling tomatoes worth N5,000 cannot afford N50,000 rent" (New Benin Market trader)
Source credibility	Past betrayals, revenue perception.	"Traders obey when we involve market leaders. They trust them more than us. They feel that if they give us money by way of bribe, then we will allow them to shed along the road. Some traders see us as revenue collectors."(PUWOV official 3)
Message Elaboration failure	Unclear directives, One-way flow.	"We know about campaigns, but don't understand what government wants besides leaving the streets.No provision for alternative or a way out for us ." (Uromi market trader)
Enforcement Paradox	Temporary compliance, Fear-based tactics	"The moment we leave, they go back to selling".(PUWOV official 1)
Cultural Embeddedness	Intergenerational norm	"Our mothers sold on the streets and fed us. We don't see trading along the road as an offence here. The market is an open place for everyone."(A market Leader)

Themes were derived from inductive coding of 15 semi-structured interview using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase approach. Five themes emerged and were presented in the order of

explanatory weight. These themes collectively form a chain, which explains that exposure cannot change attitude when receiver lacks ability, distrust source and perceive message as threat. Under the theory of planned behaviour, subjective norm is the strongest predictor of intention when behaviour is culturally sanctioned. Therefore, attitude change requires framing compliance as protection of legacy not erasure of it.

HO: Exposure to government campaigns on street trading will not lead to a change in the attitude of traders in Edo State.

The researcher uses a Chi-square test of independence to examine the relationship between exposure to government campaigns and attitude change (i.e., willingness to comply or positive perception of campaign intent).

Contingency Table: Exposure vs Attitude

	Negative Attitude	Neutral/Positive Attitude	Total
High Exposure	201	55	256
Low Exposure	50	21	71
Column Total	251	76	327

Note: Chi-square test statistic: $\chi^2 = 2.04$

Degrees of freedom = 1; Critical value at $\alpha = 0.05 = 3.84$

Since the calculated chi-square value (2.04) is below the critical value (3.84) at $df = 1$ and $\alpha = .05$, the null hypothesis is retained, $\chi^2(1, N = 327) = 2.04$, $p = .153$. There is therefore no significant association between traders' exposure to government campaigns and their attitude towards street trading regulation. The data provide no evidence that higher exposure is associated with more favourable attitudes. The interviews help to explain this result. As Theme 2 (source credibility) shows, traders distrust PUWOF officials as messengers, and where a source lacks credibility, more frequent messages are unlikely to shift attitudes. The result does not mean that the campaigns are inherently ineffective. It suggests that they did not meet the conditions for persuasion. The analysis also tested attitude, not compliance. The joint display indicated that attitude change is more likely to require credible intermediaries and messages that encourage careful processing (central-route processing), as the preferred strategies in Table 3 suggest.

Discussion of findings

The first objective was to ascertain the extent to which traders were exposed to the government's campaigns. Most traders (78.3%) were aware of the campaigns, but exposure was uneven. Almost half (48.6%) said they rarely or never received campaign messages, and only 15.6% received them daily. Face-to-face contact was the main channel (62.7%), while television (11.9%), billboards (10.7%), radio (7.3%), and social media (4.6%) reached far fewer traders. This suggests that traders learned of the campaigns mainly through direct contact, probably with PUWOF officers and fellow traders, and not through sustained media messaging, so they know the campaigns exist without regularly receiving their arguments. The pattern reflects the awareness-action gap described by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), and it is similar to the high recall that Ikeokwu (2023) found in Port Harcourt (81%) and Obuah and Okon (2017) found in Rivers State (68%). It differs in one respect: in those studies awareness came largely through radio and slogans, whereas in Edo State broadcast media reached few traders. Under the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), irregular and shallow exposure gives receivers little chance to think carefully about arguments, which leaves them responding to simple cues such



as the presence of officers. The implication is that radio and television jingles are not the main way the state reaches traders, so the campaign needs channels that work where traders trade.

The second objective was to determine the relationship between exposure and attitude. The relationship was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 327) = 2.04, p = .153$. Most traders held negative attitudes (76.8%), and the share was no lower among the high-exposure group (78.5%) than among the low-exposure group (70.4%). Interviewees explained this by saying that compliance lasted only while enforcement officers were present, and that traders saw officers as revenue collectors and the campaigns as punitive. This agrees with Ogono et al. (2023), who found no association between exposure to political advertising and voting intention in Benin City, and with Ogbu et al. (2025), who found no direct effect of exposure on compliance among Enugu traders. It also agrees with Ikeokwu's (2023) finding that compliance in Port Harcourt fell when enforcement eased. The result challenges the assumption that more exposure leads to more favourable attitudes. It is consistent with the ELM, because exposure without credible sources or clear arguments does not produce lasting attitude change, and with Yale persuasion theory, which treats the source as decisive (Aronson et al., 2010). Because the survey was cross-sectional, it shows the absence of an association, not that attitudes failed to change. The implication is that increasing the volume or frequency of campaign messages is unlikely to improve attitudes unless the messenger and the message also change.

The third objective was to examine the factors that shape traders' attitudes towards the campaigns. The survey and the interviews pointed to partly different explanations. In the survey, the most common primary barrier to compliance was low knowledge of the dangers of street trading (48.6%), followed by distrust of PUWOV and government officials (33.3%), economic need (12.8%), and unclear risk information (5.2%). In the interviews, economic survivalism (for example, stall rents far above traders' capital), source credibility, unclear directives, temporary compliance under enforcement, and the cultural acceptance of trading as an inherited livelihood were the dominant themes. The fact that nearly half of the traders cited low knowledge, despite 78.3% awareness, suggests that knowing a campaign exists is not the same as understanding the risks it describes, which is a failure of message elaboration under the ELM. The importance of distrust supports Yale persuasion theory and the findings of Ogbu et al. (2025) and Ogono et al. (2023), who both found that source credibility outweighed exposure. The prominence of rent costs and cultural norms in the interviews suggests that traders may lack control over complying and may see trading as socially accepted, which fits the perceived behavioural control and subjective norm components of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), although these constructs were not measured directly. Economic need was less prominent in the survey than in the interviews, which may mean that traders treated it as a given condition and not as a "primary" barrier. The implication is that campaigns must explain specific risks, win trust, and address the costs of compliance together, because tackling one factor alone is unlikely to change attitudes.

The fourth objective was to identify the strategies traders prefer for encouraging compliance. The largest group of traders (40.7%) chose collaboration with market leaders and stakeholders, followed by clear enforcement information and relocation alternatives (24.8%) and regular dialogue sessions (22.9%). Rewards and incentives (8.0%) and visual, storytelling, and local-language jingles (3.7%) were the least preferred. Together, the three options that involve market leaders, dialogue, and clear information account for 88.4% of responses, and interviewees, including a PUWOV official, said that traders obey when market leaders are involved. This agrees



with Ogbu et al. (2025), who found compliance about three times higher in Enugu when market union chairmen delivered the message, and with Obuah and Okon (2017), who found that participatory approaches worked better than one-way billboards. It contrasts with the fear-based jingles that Ikeokwu (2023) found produced only temporary dispersal. The low preference for jingles also matches the low reach of radio in this study. These preferences are consistent with Yale persuasion theory, since traders favour a trusted source, and with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, since the preferred strategies work through social norms and practical alternatives. The implication is that the PUWOV-led model should shift towards co-delivery with market leaders, regular two-way sessions, and clear information on relocation options, with incentives treated as a supporting measure.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. The Edo State Ministry of Information should intensify face-to-face engagement in the markets. Regular, short market visits will work better than additional radio or television jingles.
2. Campaigns should stop relying on message volume and focus on who delivers the message. The Ministry and PUWOV should use trusted messengers, and enforcement should come after explanation, not in place of it.
3. Messages should explain the specific risks and rules in simple language, and the government should address the cost of compliance. The government should publish clear information on relocation options and affordable stalls.
4. PUWOV should work with market union leaders and hold regular two-way dialogue sessions in each market. Traders prefer collaboration with their own leaders and open dialogue over one-way messages. Incentives can support these efforts but should not replace them.

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AI Use Declaration:

None
