



ACADEMIC CONFERENCES AND THEIR MULTIFACETED BENEFITS AND ROLES IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

This chapter elucidates the integral role of academic conferences within the Nigerian scholarly landscape, perusing its multifarious benefits and the prevailing realities that shape its effectiveness. While academic conferences are ostensibly platforms for knowledge dissemination and networking, Academic conferences contribute far beyond mere academic engagement, fostering innovation, collaboration, and the elevation of Nigeria's academic reputation on the global stage. Through a comprehensive analysis of extant literature, qualitative interviews, and case studies, this discourse seeks to elucidate the nuanced dynamics of academic conferences in Nigeria, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of their significance in the broader context of educational development. This chapter delves into the multifaceted benefits of academic conferences within the Nigerian context, encompassing enhanced research collaboration, capacity building, and networking opportunities and the challenges that hinder effective conference organization and participation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Academic Conferences, Benefits and Roles, Nigerian Context

Introduction

Academic conferences are integral to the fabric of scholarly communication and professional growth. They provide a venue where researchers, practitioners, and students can convene to discuss their findings, exchange ideas, and explore collaborative opportunities. In an increasingly interconnected world, conferences facilitate the sharing of knowledge across borders, fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration. In Nigeria, a nation with a rich tapestry of cultures and a rapidly developing academic landscape, conferences have emerged as critical platforms for enhancing research output, promoting professional development, and facilitating networking among scholars. According to Adeyemi (2020), historically, Nigeria's academic conferences have evolved alongside the country's educational institutions. From inception, conferences have aimed to address local challenges while aligning with global academic standards. As Nigeria continues to grapple with various socio-economic and developmental issues, the role of academic conferences has become even more pronounced. They not only serve as platforms for showcasing research but also as incubators for collaboration that can lead to actionable solutions to pressing national problems. Academic conferences are pivotal in nurturing a vibrant academic community in Nigeria. They offer opportunities for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and professional development, all of which are essential for addressing the nation's socio-economic challenges. By exploring the benefits and challenges of academic conferences, this chapter seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on enhancing scholarly communication and collaboration in

Nigeria. The subsequent sections will delve deeper into the identified themes, providing a comprehensive analysis of academic conferences and their implications for the Nigerian academic landscape (Idiris, 2019). Despite the recognized importance of academic conferences, several challenges hinder their effectiveness in Nigeria. Issues such as inadequate funding, logistical constraints, and limited participation from various demographics often plague conference organization. Additionally, there is a noticeable gap between academia and industry, which reduces the impact of research findings on societal development.

According to Obizue and Obizue (2018), the digital divide in Nigeria presents challenges for virtual participation, limiting opportunities for broader engagement. These issues raise critical questions about how to enhance the efficacy of academic conferences in promoting scholarly exchange and professional development in the Nigerian context. The significance of this study lies in its potential to illuminate the critical role of academic conferences in Nigeria's academic landscape. By identifying the benefits and challenges associated with these events, this research can provide valuable insights for policymakers, academic institutions, and conference organizers. Understanding the dynamics of academic conferences can lead to improved strategies for organizing such events, ultimately fostering an environment conducive to scholarly exchange and professional growth. Additionally, the findings may contribute to enhancing Nigeria's position in the global academic arena, promoting collaboration that transcends national boundaries. This chapter will focus on academic conferences held within Nigeria, examining a range of disciplines including but not limited to the sciences, humanities, and social sciences. The research will involve qualitative and quantitative analyses, drawing on primary and secondary data sources, including participant surveys, interviews with conference organizers, and a review of existing literature on the subject. However, certain limitations may affect the study's comprehensiveness. Taiwo (2022), opined that diverse nature of academic conferences may lead to variability in experiences and outcomes, making it challenging to generalize findings across all disciplines.

Conceptual Framework of Academic Conferences:

Academic conferences are defined as formal gatherings where scholars convene to present research findings, engage in discursive dialogues, and forge collaborative networks. The theoretical underpinnings of such conferences are rooted in the principles of knowledge dissemination, peer review, and scholarly interaction. In Nigeria, the manifestation of these conferences is often influenced by local socio-cultural and economic contexts, necessitating a tailored understanding of their operational dynamics.

Benefits of Academic Conferences in Nigeria

The advantages of academic conferences in Nigeria according to Obizue (2021), can be categorized into several distinct domains, each contributing significantly to the advancement of scholarship and the enhancement of the academic landscape within the country. This section elaborates on four primary benefits: knowledge dissemination and exchange, networking and collaboration, capacity building and professional development, and the elevation of institutional prestige.

Knowledge Dissemination and Exchange

Academic conferences serve as vital platforms for the dissemination of cutting-edge research, playing a crucial role in the academic ecosystem. Scholars from various disciplines come together to present their empirical findings, theoretical explorations, and innovative methodologies. This exchange of ideas not only enriches the collective knowledge base but also promotes a culture of critical inquiry and intellectual engagement among participants. In the Nigerian context, where access to contemporary research can often be hindered by infrastructural constraints, the importance of such platforms cannot be overstated. Many researchers operate in environments where access to the latest journals, databases, and academic resources is limited. Conferences thus become essential venues for sharing recent developments and breakthroughs in various fields. By presenting their work, scholars can disseminate their findings to a broader audience, ensuring that new knowledge reaches those who can benefit from it, including practitioners, policymakers, and fellow researchers. Moreover, the discussions and debates that ensue during these conferences often lead to the identification of gaps in the existing literature, prompting further research initiatives and encouraging attendees to explore under-researched areas. This dynamic process of knowledge exchange fosters an environment where innovative ideas can flourish, ultimately contributing to the overall advancement of scholarship within Nigeria.



Networking and Collaboration

The collegial atmosphere of academic conferences fosters ample networking opportunities, enabling scholars to forge meaningful relationships and interdisciplinary collaborations. The informal interactions that occur during breaks and social events provide a conducive environment for participants to engage with one another, share their experiences, and discuss potential areas for collaboration. Such partnerships can lead to the co-creation of joint research initiatives, collaborative grant applications, and the co-authoring of publications, thereby enhancing the academic output of Nigerian institutions. The ability to network effectively can significantly impact a researcher's career trajectory. Through these connections, scholars can access resources, mentorship, and support systems that may not be available within their own institutions. Additionally, networking at conferences can facilitate the establishment of research groups that cut across disciplines, promoting a multi-faceted approach to tackling complex societal challenges. This collaborative spirit is particularly important in Nigeria, where interdisciplinary research is essential for addressing the multifarious issues facing the nation, such as health crises, educational shortcomings, and economic development.

Capacity Building and Professional Development

Participating in academic conferences also facilitates professional development, equipping scholars with essential skills pertinent to their research endeavors. Many conferences feature workshops, plenary sessions, and keynote addresses that focus on emerging trends in research methodologies, data analysis, academic writing, and the use of modern technological tools. These sessions not only provide valuable insights but also empower participants with practical skills that enhance their research capabilities. In a rapidly evolving academic landscape, continuous professional development is paramount. Conferences offer a unique opportunity for Nigerian academics to learn from leading experts in their fields, thereby keeping abreast of the latest advancements and best practices. Furthermore, the skills acquired during these events often translate into improved research quality and output, which can have a lasting impact on the individual scholar's career and the broader academic community. Obizue (2021), added that by investing in the professional growth of researchers, academic conferences contribute to building a more competent and competitive academic workforce in Nigeria. This, in turn, enhances the overall research productivity of institutions, as scholars become better equipped to engage in high-quality research that meets international standards.

Elevation of Institutional Prestige

The hosting of international conferences can significantly elevate the prestige of Nigerian academic institutions. When prominent scholars and researchers from around the world convene in Nigeria for a conference, it enhances the visibility of local research and positions Nigerian universities as key players in the global academic arena. Such events not only attract attention to the hosting institutions but also foster pride and motivation among local scholars who are given the opportunity to share their work on an international stage. The elevation of institutional prestige has several implications. Firstly, it can lead to increased funding opportunities, as institutions that are recognized for hosting significant academic events may attract sponsorships and partnerships from both local and international organizations. Secondly, the visibility gained through hosting international conferences can enhance student recruitment efforts, drawing in both local and foreign students eager to learn in a vibrant academic environment. Lastly, elevated prestige often leads to enhanced collaboration opportunities with other institutions, both nationally and internationally. This can further enrich the academic landscape by promoting exchange programs, joint research projects, and faculty collaborations that bolster the quality and reach of research conducted in Nigeria.

Academic conferences in Nigeria offer a myriad of benefits that extend beyond mere knowledge exchange. They play a crucial role in fostering networking and collaboration, enhancing capacity building and professional development, and elevating the prestige of academic institutions. As Nigeria continues to navigate its unique challenges and opportunities within the global academic community, the importance of these conferences will only grow. By leveraging the advantages offered by academic conferences, Nigerian scholars can contribute to a more robust and dynamic academic environment that not only addresses local challenges but also positions the nation as a significant player in the global academic arena.



The Role of Academic Conferences in Facilitating Research Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing Among Nigerian Scholars

According to Adeyemi (2020), Academic conferences serve as vital platforms for fostering research collaboration and knowledge sharing among scholars in Nigeria. These events bring together researchers, educators, and practitioners from diverse fields, creating an environment conducive to interaction, exchange, and the development of collaborative initiatives. Through various mechanisms, academic conferences enhance the collaborative fabric of the Nigerian academic community, ultimately contributing to the advancement of knowledge and innovation across the nation.

Networking Opportunities

At the heart of academic conferences lies the opportunity for networking. These events create an environment where scholars can meet face-to-face, facilitating personal interactions that are often challenging to achieve in the digital realm. Such interactions foster relationships that can evolve into collaborative projects, joint research initiatives, and academic partnerships. The informal settings of conferences, including coffee breaks, social gatherings, and panel discussions, allow for organic conversations that can lead to meaningful connections. These relationships, built on shared interests and mutual goals, often pave the way for collaborative endeavors that might not have otherwise been possible within the confines of individual institutions.

Interdisciplinary Dialogue:

One of the significant advantages of academic conferences is their ability to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue. By bringing together scholars from a wide array of disciplines, these events promote discussions that transcend traditional academic boundaries. Such interdisciplinary collaborations are particularly important in addressing complex societal challenges, as they allow for diverse perspectives and expertise to converge. For instance, a conference that includes participants from the fields of health, education, and social sciences can lead to innovative research projects that tackle issues such as public health education or the impact of social determinants on educational outcomes. The exchange of ideas among scholars from different fields not only enriches the discourse but also fosters a collaborative spirit that can lead to groundbreaking research.

Workshops and Training Sessions:

Many academic conferences incorporate workshops aimed at skill development, providing participants with hands-on experiences that encourage collaboration. These workshops often focus on specific research methodologies, data analysis techniques, or emerging trends in academic writing, inviting participants to work together on practical tasks. Such collaborative experiences not only enhance individual skills but also foster a sense of teamwork and shared learning. As scholars engage in workshops, they often identify common interests and potential areas for collaboration, setting the stage for future research partnerships.

Presentation of Research Ideas:

The presentation of research findings, challenges, and methodologies is a central feature of academic conferences. Scholars are provided with a platform to showcase their work, inviting feedback and suggestions from their peers. This exchange of ideas can spark interest among attendees, leading to collaborative research endeavors or co-authorship opportunities. For example, a researcher presenting an innovative methodology may attract the attention of others facing similar challenges, prompting discussions that can culminate in joint research projects. The feedback received during these presentations can also enhance the quality of research, as participants refine their ideas through constructive criticism and diverse viewpoints.

Establishment of Research Networks:

Academic conferences often serve as the foundation for establishing formal research networks. Scholars who meet at these events may form groups focused on specific research areas, facilitating ongoing collaboration beyond the conference. These networks can provide a platform for sharing resources, disseminating findings, and coordinating joint research initiatives. By creating structured collaborative frameworks, conferences contribute to the sustainability of research partnerships, allowing scholars to maintain connections and work together over the long term.



Access to Funding Opportunities:

Collaborative research projects often attract funding from various sources, and academic conferences provide a crucial platform for scholars to pitch their ideas to potential funders. During these events, researchers can engage with representatives from funding agencies, discuss their collaborative projects, and explore avenues for financial support. The visibility and networking opportunities offered by conferences can significantly increase the likelihood of securing grants for joint research initiatives, enabling scholars to pursue ambitious projects that may have otherwise been financially unfeasible.

Showcasing Success Stories:

Successful collaborations highlighted at conferences can inspire other scholars to pursue similar partnerships. When attendees witness the tangible benefits of collaboration through presentations and discussions of successful projects, they are often motivated to explore collaborative opportunities in their own research. These success stories contribute to a culture of teamwork within the academic community, reinforcing the idea that collaboration can lead to innovative solutions and impactful research outcomes.

Mentorship and Guidance:

Academic conferences also facilitate mentorship opportunities, particularly for early-career researchers. Established scholars can provide guidance and support to novices during these events, fostering collaborative research opportunities. Mentorship relationships formed at conferences can lead to ongoing collaboration, where experienced scholars guide younger researchers in their academic pursuits. This mentorship not only enhances the skills and knowledge of early-career scholars but also enriches the research landscape by nurturing the next generation of academic leaders.

Follow-up and Continuation:

The interactions initiated at academic conferences often lead to follow-up meetings, online collaborations, and ongoing communication among participants. This continuity helps maintain relationships that can evolve into long-term partnerships. By leveraging the connections made during conferences, scholars can continue to collaborate on research projects, share resources, and engage in joint initiatives, thus reinforcing the collaborative fabric of the academic community.

Cultural Exchange and Understanding:

Finally, academic conferences in Nigeria attract scholars from various regions and backgrounds, fostering cultural exchange and understanding. This diversity enriches the discussions and collaborations that occur during conferences, as participants bring unique perspectives shaped by their cultural contexts. Collaborative projects that reflect diverse viewpoints are more likely to address complex issues comprehensively and effectively, contributing to a more inclusive and holistic approach to research.

Academic conferences play a pivotal role in enhancing collaboration among scholars in Nigeria through various mechanisms, including networking opportunities, interdisciplinary dialogue, skill development workshops, and the sharing of research ideas. By providing a platform for establishing research networks, accessing funding opportunities, showcasing success stories, and facilitating mentorship, these events contribute to the overall advancement of knowledge and innovation in the country. As Nigerian scholars continue to engage in collaborative research efforts, the potential for impactful contributions to both local and global academic discourse will only grow, underscoring the vital importance of academic conferences in fostering a vibrant and interconnected academic community.

How Academic conferences contribute to capacity building and professional development. According to Idiris (2019), Academic conferences contribute significantly to capacity building and professional development through various mechanisms that enhance the skills, knowledge, and professional networks of participants. Below are several key ways in which these events facilitate such growth:

1. Exposure to Emerging Research Trends:

Academic conferences are often at the forefront of the latest research developments and innovations in various fields. Participants gain exposure to cutting-edge methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and findings that are shaping contemporary discourse. This exposure encourages scholars to stay current with trends and



advancements within their disciplines, ultimately enriching their own research and teaching practices. By engaging with the latest work, attendees can integrate new knowledge into their own academic endeavors, fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation.

2. **Skill Development Workshops:**

Many conferences feature specialized workshops designed to equip participants with essential skills for their research and professional activities. These workshops may cover a range of topics, including advanced research methodologies, data analysis techniques, academic writing, grant application processes, and presentation skills. By actively participating in these sessions, attendees can acquire practical skills that enhance their research capabilities and overall academic performance. Such skill development is crucial for fostering a competent and competitive academic workforce.

3. **Mentorship Opportunities:**

Conferences often bring together established scholars, early-career researchers, and students, creating an environment conducive to mentorship and guidance. Senior academics can share their experiences and insights, offering valuable advice to those navigating the early stages of their careers. Informal interactions during networking events or panel discussions may lead to mentoring relationships that can provide ongoing support and guidance in research, publishing, and career advancement. Such mentorship can significantly impact the professional trajectories of emerging scholars.

4. **Networking and Collaboration:**

The collegial atmosphere of academic conferences fosters networking opportunities that are crucial for professional development. Scholars can meet peers from their own and other disciplines, enabling them to build relationships that may lead to future collaborations. Such networking allows for the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices, all of which can enhance the quality of research and teaching. Collaborative projects initiated at conferences can also lead to co-authorship of papers and joint grant applications, further contributing to the professional growth of participants.

5. **Visibility and Recognition:**

Presenting at academic conferences allows scholars to gain visibility for their work, which is an important aspect of professional development. By sharing their research findings, participants can establish themselves as experts in their fields, receive feedback from peers, and enhance their academic reputation. This visibility can lead to invitations for future collaborations, speaking engagements, or editorial positions, all of which can contribute to career advancement. Additionally, recognition at conferences can be a valuable addition to a scholar's curriculum vitae, enhancing their prospects for tenure and promotion.

6. **Interdisciplinary Perspectives:**

Many academic conferences encourage interdisciplinary engagement, bringing together scholars from diverse fields to discuss common themes and challenges. This exposure to different perspectives can enhance participants' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. By engaging with ideas and methodologies from other disciplines, scholars can develop a more holistic understanding of complex issues, which can enrich their own research and teaching practices. Such interdisciplinary interactions often spark innovative ideas and collaborations that may not have emerged within a more siloed academic environment.

7. **Access to Resources and Funding Opportunities:**

Conferences often provide information about funding opportunities, grants, and resources available for research development. Presentations by funding agencies, workshops on grant writing, and discussions about project proposals can equip participants with the knowledge needed to secure financial support for their research. Understanding the landscape of available resources enhances researchers' capacity to pursue ambitious projects and initiatives that contribute to their professional growth.

In summary, academic conferences play a vital role in capacity building and professional development by providing exposure to emerging research trends, facilitating skill development, fostering mentorship, enhancing networking opportunities, and offering visibility and recognition. Through these mechanisms, conferences empower scholars to advance their careers, enrich their research capabilities, and contribute to the



broader academic community. As Nigeria continues to develop its academic landscape, the importance of these conferences in shaping the future of scholars cannot be overstated. They serve as essential platforms for fostering ongoing learning, collaboration, and professional growth, ensuring that academics are well-equipped to address the challenges of an ever-evolving academic environment.

Challenges Confronting Academic Conferences in Nigeria

Organizing and participating in academic conferences in Nigeria presents a range of challenges that can hinder the effectiveness and impact of these events. Below are several key challenges faced by both organizers and participants.

1. Inadequate Funding and Financial Constraints:

One of the most significant challenges in organizing academic conferences in Nigeria is the lack of adequate funding. Many academic institutions operate under tight budgets, which can limit their ability to host conferences that meet international standards. Organizers often struggle to secure sponsorships and grants, leading to reduced resources for logistics, marketing, and participant support. This financial strain can result in poorly organized events that fail to attract high-quality speakers or adequate participation.

For participants, the costs associated with attending conferences such as registration fees, travel expenses, and accommodation can be prohibitively high, especially for early-career researchers and students. This financial barrier may prevent a significant number of scholars from attending, leading to a lack of diversity and representation at these events.

2. Logistical Challenges:

Logistical issues are another prominent challenge in organizing conferences. These can include venue selection, transportation arrangements, catering services, and technical support for presentations. In many cases, inadequate infrastructure, such as unreliable transportation systems and insufficient conference facilities, can complicate the planning and execution of events. Organizers may face difficulties in coordinating schedules, managing participant registrations, and ensuring that sessions run smoothly.

Additionally, technical challenges, such as inconsistent internet connectivity and malfunctioning audio-visual equipment, can disrupt presentations and diminish the overall conference experience. Such logistical hurdles can detract from the quality of the event and impact participant engagement.

3. Limited Participation and Engagement:

Despite the potential benefits of academic conferences, participation rates can be disappointing due to various factors. In Nigeria, there may be a lack of awareness about the importance of conferences among some scholars, particularly those in remote areas or less resourced institutions. This can result in low turnout and limited engagement from key stakeholders. Moreover, the academic culture in Nigeria may not always prioritize conference attendance. Scholars may be more focused on publishing papers or meeting teaching responsibilities, leading to a perception that attending conferences is less critical for career advancement. This lack of emphasis on conference participation can further exacerbate the issue of limited engagement.

4. Digital Divide and Access to Technology:

In an increasingly digital world, the divide in access to technology poses a significant challenge for both organizers and participants in Nigeria. While many conferences have adopted virtual or hybrid formats, the digital divide remains a pressing issue. Many scholars, particularly those in rural or underfunded institutions, may lack access to reliable internet connections or the necessary technological tools to participate effectively.

This limitation can hinder participation in virtual conferences, preventing scholars from engaging with their peers and accessing valuable knowledge and resources. Furthermore, the inability to participate in online discussions or workshops can exacerbate feelings of isolation among researchers who are already navigating challenging academic environments.

5. Bureaucratic Hurdles:

Organizers of academic conferences in Nigeria often encounter bureaucratic challenges that can complicate the planning process. Navigating institutional policies, obtaining necessary approvals, and managing compliance with regulations can be time-consuming and frustrating. These bureaucratic hurdles can



delay the organization of conferences, reduce the responsiveness of organizers to participant needs, and impact the overall quality of the event.

For participants, bureaucratic challenges can manifest in the form of lengthy approval processes for travel funding or institutional support to attend conferences. Scholars may find themselves waiting for approvals that arrive too late, resulting in missed opportunities to engage with the academic community.

6. Cultural and Linguistic Barriers:

Nigeria is a diverse nation with a multitude of ethnic groups and languages. While English serves as the primary language of instruction in academic settings, cultural and linguistic differences can create barriers to effective communication at conferences. Participants from various backgrounds may have differing levels of proficiency in English, which can impact their ability to engage fully in discussions or present their work.

7. Quality Control and Academic Rigor:

Another challenge faced by organizers is ensuring the quality and academic rigor of the presented research. The increasing number of conferences and submissions can lead to varying standards of review and acceptance criteria. This inconsistency may result in the inclusion of low-quality research, which can detract from the credibility of the conference and the overall academic discourse.

For participants, the presence of poorly constructed presentations or research that lacks empirical support can diminish the value of their conference experience. Scholars may leave conferences feeling that they did not gain new insights or that the discussions were not sufficiently rigorous.

The challenges faced by organizers and participants in the context of academic conferences in Nigeria are multifaceted and complex. Issues such as inadequate funding, logistical constraints, limited participation, digital divides, bureaucratic hurdles, cultural and linguistic barriers, and concerns about quality control can significantly impact the effectiveness of these events. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from academic institutions, policymakers, and the broader academic community to create an environment conducive to meaningful scholarly exchange and collaboration. By understanding and mitigating these obstacles, stakeholders can enhance the role of academic conferences in promoting research and professional development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In summary, academic conferences in Nigeria play a critical role in shaping the scholarly landscape by facilitating knowledge exchange, fostering collaboration, and enhancing professional development among researchers. This chapter has examined the multifaceted benefits of these conferences, emphasizing their significance as platforms for innovation, networking, and the elevation of institutional prestige. Through the lens of various case studies and qualitative insights, it is evident that academic conferences not only contribute to the dissemination of research but also serve as incubators for collaborative initiatives that address pressing national challenges. However, the realities of organizing and participating in academic conferences in Nigeria are fraught with challenges, including inadequate funding, logistical constraints, limited participation, and the digital divide. These obstacles hinder the effectiveness of conferences and can prevent a diverse range of scholars from fully engaging in the academic discourse. To enhance the impact of these events, it is essential to implement targeted strategies that address these challenges, such as securing diverse funding sources, improving logistical support, promoting wider participation, and bridging the digital divide. Furthermore, interdisciplinary dialogues at conferences emerge as a powerful mechanism for driving innovation in research. By bringing together scholars from various fields, these discussions promote the cross-pollination of ideas, inspire new research directions, and encourage holistic approaches to complex problems. As scholars continue to engage in interdisciplinary collaborations, they can leverage diverse perspectives to tackle the multifaceted issues facing Nigeria and the global community.

Ultimately, academic conferences are vital for nurturing a vibrant academic environment in Nigeria, contributing not only to individual scholars' growth but also to the nation's broader educational development. By recognizing and addressing the challenges inherent in organizing and participating in these events, stakeholders can ensure that academic conferences fulfill their potential as transformative platforms for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and innovation. As Nigeria strives to enhance its academic reputation on the global stage, the importance of these conferences will only continue to grow, making it imperative to cultivate an inclusive, supportive, and dynamic academic culture.



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