



Research Article

The Perception of Patients on Healthcare Information and social media in Suburban Primary Healthcare Centres, Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

Primary healthcare is an essential part of the 1978 Global Health for All, the year 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the 2016 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Internet, especially social media, now appeals to city people searching for well-being experts for border-free help and advice on healthcare information. This study examined the awareness, adoption and usage of social media to search for health-associated information by patients of suburban primary healthcare centres. The overall objective of this study was to investigate the perceived benefits of using social media to seek health-associated information. Adopting the quantitative methodology, this study used the survey design for a cross-sectional examination of 221 patients from three selected primary health care centres at Yaba, a major suburban area in Lagos, Nigeria. Results indicated that most patients in suburban primary healthcare centres in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria, subscribed to more than one social media account, with the majority clustering around Facebook. A weekly search for healthcare information on the common cold (flu), tiredness and hypertension showed that the respondents were active on social media. However, the high risk of misinformation was identified as a major drawback of using social media to seek information on healthcare on the Internet. The study concluded that the use of social media for healthcare information by patients of suburban primary healthcare centres is increasing. Therefore, stakeholders need to examine this development for a purposeful repositioning of healthcare information dissemination, especially in suburban centres.

Keywords: Healthcare, social media, Health Information, Primary Healthcare

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Introduction

Social media have become a convenient source for obtaining educational materials and information (Fernández-Luque & Bau, 2015; Grajales *et al.*, 2014). Social media refer to the applications of networking sites to create and exchange information through blogs and microblogs (i.e., Twitter), content communities (YouTube), and social networking (i.e., Facebook and LinkedIn). Social media and online resources have affected most aspects of our lives; many use them to guide healthcare decision-making. With the emergence of the Internet, the world, especially from the perspective of communication, has advanced (Aiyende, *et al.*, 2020). In past years, social media enabled the unrestricted sharing of information and knowledge distribution, including medical and healthcare information that patients could discover (Tan & Goonawardene, 2017).

The uses of social media are unlimited; some people use the mentioned platforms to receive medical consultations, while others use them to find information related to their conditions. Several studies have shown how technology has empowered individuals and changed their ways of seeking health-related information on the Internet (Salau, *et al.*, 2020; Greenhalgh, *et al.*, 2016; Laranjo *et al.*, 2015; Koster, *et al.*, 2015; Kear, Harrington, Bhattacharya, 2015; Greaves, *et al.*, 2013; Mackey, Liang & Strathdee (2013); Greene, *et al.*, 2011). Social media provide informal channels for disease reporting; it also plays a vital role in connecting patients with similar health conditions, enabling them to discuss mutual concerns and solutions all over the world with others (Adelua *et al.*, 2020). Patients take into consideration the comments of strangers when making medical decisions.

Today, many patients seek online advice from physicians they have never met. The advantage of an online medical consultation is that there are no geographic boundaries, as the patient can gain access to reputed physicians that are not usually available. Another advantage is the cost; online consultations are lower in price (Shepherd, Sanders, Doyle, Shaw, 2015; Albalawi & Sixsmith, 2014). However, this will not be suitable for many cases, where a physical examination is needed. While social media facilitate care and education, it could also create impending risks for patients and healthcare professionals. (James, *et*

al., 2020; Zhang, *et al.*, 2017; Sawesi, *et al.*, 2016; Smailhodzic, *et al.*, 2016; Song, *et al.*, 2016; Tonsaker, Bartlett & Trpkov 2014).

The distribution of poor-quality information can cause harm to patients and damage the professional image. Even though many as an influential factor in improving health and reducing costs saw patient engagement in social media, there is a considerably high risk of patients encountering misleading information (Tyrawski & DeAndrea, 2015). Extant literature shows that healthcare practitioners have reduced the potential harm caused by untrustworthy information retrieved from social media by sharing accurate knowledge and educating patients on reputable sites. (Fayemi, *et al.*, 2020; Campbell, *et al.*, 2016; Almaiman, *et al.*, 2015; Bahkali, *et al.*, 2015; Diviani, *et al.*, 2015); Coulson, 2013) Another risk is the inappropriate exchange of online information or advice for in-person visits to a healthcare provider. Thus, the use of social media among patients is changing traditional information-seeking behaviours. This study aims to assess the use of social media platforms for obtaining healthcare information and describing their perceptions, attitudes, and practices. (Nejo, *et al.*, 2020)

Statement of the Research Problem

Since the global target of "Health for All" was declared in 1978, primary health care (PHC) has been adopted universally and embraced as the path to achieving Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals. A primary healthcare programme is a grass-root approach designed to address critical community health challenges by offering preventive, restorative, and rehabilitative services (Hao & Gao 2017). Primary healthcare values underline the approach's great importance. These principles, which include essential health care, community involvement, equity, inter-sectoral collaboration and appropriate technology, are the driving force behind the efficiency of primary health care in the hope of achieving universal health coverage.

By implication, this means that primary health care aims to provide services to most people based on needs without geographical, social or financial barriers, through their involvement in health program planning, implementation and evaluation. The World Health Organization (1991) agreed that healthcare information

should be made available to the public in the mass channels they already learn and use, which means that the mass media can make a useful contribution to the dissemination of health messages to the general public. This situation raises the salient question of the benefits and use of social media platforms by health-seeking hospital patients in suburban primary healthcare centres. They should focus more on areas of public benefits such as more empowerment programs, educational programs and better community relations (Adelua *et al.*, 2020a; Adelua *et al.*, 2020b; James *et al.*, 2020d; Nwosu *et al.*, 2019; Adelua *et al.*, 2020c; Adelua *et al.*, 2020d; Aiyende *et al.*, 2020a; Aiyende *et al.*, 2020b; Fayemi *et al.*, 2020a; Fayemi *et al.*, 2020b; Fayemi *et al.*, 2020c; Fayemi *et al.*, 2020d; Olabanjo *et al.*, 2020b; Omokiti *et al.*, 2020a).

Research Objectives

- i. To evaluate the awareness of social media as reliable channels for seeking healthcare information by patients of three suburban primary healthcare centres in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.
- ii. To assess the adoption of social media as a reliable channel for seeking healthcare information by patients of three suburban primary healthcare centres in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.
- iii. To examine social media as reliable channels for seeking healthcare information by patients of three suburban primary healthcare centres in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.
- iv. To investigate the perceived benefits of social media as reliable channels for seeking healthcare information by patients of three suburban primary healthcare centres in Yaba, Lagos, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Social Media

Social media are part of our society, which influence social norms and ideology (Abdulaziz, 2014; Antheunis, Tates & Nieboer, 2013). Sharing information and content is now a common desire (Albalawi & Sixsmith, 2015). They have changed how many people interact, communicate and socialize. This scenario implies that the social media platform has become gradually more popular as the central

platform for small businesses worldwide. Adelua *et al.*, (2020a) proposed that the impact of social media platforms as an electronic marketplace for business has become a critical issue in the industry and the literature on entrepreneurship (Odiboh *et al.*, 2020a; Odiboh *et al.*, 2020b; Odiboh and Oladunjoye, 2019; Odiboh and Ajayi, 2019; Odiboh, Ezenagu and Okuobeya, 2019).

According to Fernández-Luque and Bau (2015), social media are used as an alternative business tool so that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can gain advantages such as engaging in a marketplace located far from their geographical area without necessitating physical presence. Nowadays, social media have been pervasive for businesses as tools for interacting directly with consumers, even reaching potential customers (Hao & Gao, 2017; Househ, Borycki & Kushniruk, 2014; Greaves, Pape & King, 2012).

Healthcare Information

Health information-seeking behaviour is now gradually gaining attention among the public worldwide, including in Nigeria (James *et al.*, 2020a; Ndubueze *et al.*, 2019; James *et al.*, 2020b; James *et al.*, 2020c; Ndubueze *et al.*, 2020; Nejo *et al.*, 2020a; Olabanjo *et al.*, 2019). Health information-seeking behaviour also differs between each individual depending on the health issues one faces. Health information-seeking behaviour is "finding and receiving messages or information to minimize the health status-related confusion and build trust in the health context". Healthcare information-pursuing action is, according to (Fayemi *et al.*, 2020b), a pursuit that involves obtaining information about medical treatments, alternative medicine, diet and physical activities. A systematic review revealed that studies investigating healthcare information seeking in Nigeria are still low. The study of health information-seeking is relevant in the context of Nigerian society. Awareness of health information-seeking behaviour is imperative to public health (Nwosu *et al.*, 2020a; Nejo *et al.*, 2020b; Olabanjo *et al.*, 2020a; Omokiti *et al.*, 2020b; Salau *et al.*, 2020a; Salau *et al.*, 2020b; Nwosu *et al.*, 2020b). But more importantly, it will impact people's ability to self-manage their health (James, *et al.*, 2020a). A recent study found that the Internet has become necessary for those who are health conscious and prefer to be more empowered to manage their health

through authentic healthcare information from the Internet (Nejo *et al.*, 2020b).

Social Media and Healthcare information

The adoption of the Internet has significantly changed the way healthcare information is considered. It is essential to understand the behavioural pattern of seeking health-related information on websites to identify their needs better. These highlight improvements are possible in the landscape of Internet healthcare information quality and availability (Aiyende *et al.*, 2020a).

Methodology

This study is a cross-sectional investigation conducted between December 2019 and January 2020 at Yaba, Lagos State, Nigeria. The ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethical Review Board at Covenant University and conducted according to the underlying principles. The inclusion criteria consisted of patients in the waiting rooms of the outpatient clinics and their perceptions of health-seeking information via social media. The participants were literate (could read and write) and used the Internet regularly (daily). Those who did not meet the inclusion criteria did not participate. A self-administered 4-section questionnaire was adopted from the literature to assess the use of social media by patients seeking health information.



Fig. 1: A map of the Yaba suburb of Lagos, Nigeria.

Source: Google

Two hundred and sixty respondents filled out a questionnaire based on the online sample size calculator Raosoft, and a 95 % confidence interval, which is an assumed 50 % prevalence of patients using social media for medical information. The self-administered questionnaire was developed in English and modified by the researcher(s) to fulfil this study's purpose and assure validity. Two experts reviewed the items in the questionnaire: a social media expert and a supervisor. For the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha of the survey for section B (perception) was 0.811, section C (awareness) was 0.792, and section D (usage) was 0.758.

The questionnaire consisted of 4 sections with a total of 20 questions measured by "yes", "no", and, "don't know" choices. Four questions were used in the third section to assess their awareness of healthcare information through social media. Likert scales (4- and 5-point) were the perceptions and usage questions. Patients of three primary healthcare centres answered the questions posed by the research instrument.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts: 1. The first part was concerned with demographic data including age, gender and education. 2. The second part of the questionnaire included the following items: a. They were using the Internet/social media for general health-related

reasons. b. Public sources to get oral health information. c. Use of social media to collect or share data about healthcare. d. Benefits of using social media to access healthcare information as the primary source. e. Perception of using social media to obtain health information. f. Most topics the respondents searched/viewed through social media are related to general healthcare. For the data analysis, frequency distribution shows the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Only 221 patients completed the questionnaire. Out of the total population of 260 patients found

at the hospices during the survey, 29% were males, and 71% were females. The ages of respondents ranged from 18 to 50 years with a mean age of 30.5 (33.5) years filled in the questionnaires. Approximately 81 (37.6%) of the respondents were single, while 125 (56%) were married and only 15 (7%) were others such as widows, divorced, separated, etc. Nearly 42% of the respondents had completed at least a university education (see Table 1). Regarding their profession/employment status, 114 (52%) respondents reported that they are employed; 82 (37%) were self-employed, and only 25 (11%) were employed. The demographic information summary of the participants is in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 221)

		Frequency	% (%)	Cum. Freq
Gender	Male	64	29	29
	Female	157	71	100
Total		221	100%	
Age	18-25 yrs.	47	21	21
	26-35 yrs.	86	39	60
	36-45 yrs.	62	28	88
	46 yrs and above	26	12	100
Total		221	100%	
Marital	Single	81	37	37
	Married	125	56	93
	Others	15	7	100
Total		221	100%	
Education	SSCE	47	21	21
	Diploma/NCE	82	37	58
	Bachelor's Degree	61	28	86
	Master's Degree	31	14	100
Total		221	100%	
Harvey Road Health Centre, Yaba		75	34	34
Aiyetoro Primary Health Centre, Yaba		81	37	71
Ebute-metta primary health centre, Yaba		65	29	100

Total		221	100%	
Profession	Unemployed	25	11	11
	Employed	114	52	63
	Self-Employed	82	37	100
Total		221	100%	

Table 2: Awareness of Social Media for Healthcare information sourcing (n = 221)

		Frequency	%	Cumulative Frequency
Do you have any social media accounts? (N= 260)	Yes	182	82	82
	No	39	18	100
Total		221	100%	
How many social media accounts do you have/operate? (N= 221)	Only One	67	30	30
	Only Two	109	49	79
	Only Three	28	13	92
	Four and above	17	8	100
Total		221	100%	
Most used applications for getting oral healthcare information (N= 221)	Facebook	62	28	28
	Twitter	48	22	50
	Instagram	42	19	69
	WhatsApp	31	14	83
	YouTube	18	8	91
	Snapchat	17	8	99
	Others	3	1	100
Total		221	100%	
Frequency of social media platforms for health-seeking information (N= 221)	Daily	45	20	20
	Weekly	91	41	61
	Bi-Weekly	33	15	76
	Monthly	22	10	86
	Quarterly	19	9	95
	Yearly	11	5	100
Total		221	100%	
	None	5	2	2

How many sources of medical web pages (Ada, Webteb, Medscape, WebMD, WHO, Ministry of Health, Food and Drug Administration, Daily Medical Info, and Others) are you familiar with?	One	65	29	31
	2-4	119	54	85
	Five and above	32	15	100
Total		221	100%	
Topics that respondents have searched/viewed through social media are related to oral health (N= 221)	Common cold (Flu)	51	23	23
	Surgeries	15	7	30
	Diabetes & Obese	24	11	41
	Implants (Bleeding)	34	15	56
	Tiredness/ Hypertension	40	18	74
	Infertility	22	10	84
	Communicable diseases	28	13	97
	Others	7	3	100
Total		221	100%	

Out of the total 260 respondents for this study, only 221 (85%) participants reported that they have social media account(s). Among the 221 participants, 154 (70%) used at least one type of social media for health-seeking information. The primary reason for seeking consultations on social media may probably be a result of time constraints to visit the physician's office. Facebook usage was predominant (28%), followed by Twitter (22%), Instagram (19%), and WhatsApp (14%). Approximately 28% (62/221) of the respondents used Facebook; among all social media platforms, Snapshot was the least utilized, implying that the respondents got health-related updates on Facebook and Twitter more often than on other social media platforms.

Considering the frequency of social media for health-seeking information, 45 (20%) respondents claimed that they search to get oral healthcare information on social media

platform(s) daily, followed by Weekly and Bi-weekly 124 (56%), Monthly 22 (10%), Quarterly 19 (9%), and Yearly 11 (5%). From a list of sources of medical web pages provided in our questionnaire (Ada, Webteb, Medscape, WebMD, WHO, Ministry of Health, Food and Drug Administration, Daily Medical Info, and Others), 216 respondents (98%) were familiar with at least one of them. Lastly, the table indicates the health-related topics that respondents have searched/viewed through social media.

The result shows that the predominant (23%) health-related issue is the common flu (cold, catarrh, fever, headache, congested nose and respiratory tract infection). Others are tiredness/hypertension (18%), infertility (10%), infectious diseases such as measles, chickenpox, Lassa fever, etc. (13%), implants (bleeding during pregnancy (15%), diabetes and obese (11%), surgeries (7%), and others constitute 3%.

Table 3: Perception of Healthcare information on Social Media (n = 221)

		Frequency	%	Cumulative Frequency
I like to seek medical information using search engines/social media platforms	Yes	153	69	69
	No	52	24	93
	Don't know	16	7	100
Total		221	100%	
Information on social media has improved my health status	Yes	158	71	71
	No	50	23	94
	Don't know	13	6	100
Total		221	100%	
The use of social media has made me have a specific reference for doctors/hospital	Yes	149	67	67
	No	58	27	94
	Don't know	14	6	100
Total		221	100%	
I have strong reliability on social media engines for health information	Yes	149	67	67
	No	47	21	88
	Don't know	25	12	100
Total		221	100%	
My beliefs about social media healthcare information have enhanced my awareness	Yes	155	70	70
	No	48	22	92
	Don't know	18	8	100
Total		221	100%	

Source: Field survey 2020

Participants' perception of healthcare information via social media shows in Table 3. Out of 221 participants, 153 (69%) respondents like to seek medical information using search engines/social media platforms. 71% of the participants believed that Information on social media had improved their health status. More so, 67% of the participants indicated that the use of social media has made them have a specific

reference for doctors/hospitals. Approximately 67% reported that they have strong reliability on social media engines for health information. Lastly, 74% claimed that their beliefs about social media for healthcare information had enhanced their awareness. By implication, participants often use social media for medical consultations, and more importantly, the online information provided by physicians is useful.

Table 4: Benefits of the Use of Social Media for Seeking Healthcare-Related Information

		Frequency	%	Cumulative frequency
Quick accessibility of health information	Yes	164	74	74
	No	43	20	94
	Don't know	14	6	100
Total		221	100%	
Reach a wide audience	Yes	142	64	64
	No	63	29	93
	Don't know	16	7	100
Total		221	100%	
Cost-effective option	Yes	146	66	66
	No	56	25	91
	Don't know	19	9	100
Total		221	100%	
Professionals' interaction	Yes	158	71	71
	No	46	21	92
	Don't know	17	8	8
Total		221	100%	

Table 4 provides a clear illustration of the advantages of using social media as a leading source for getting health-related information. The majority of the respondents (74%) stated that quick accessibility and easiness of getting information is the crucial reason for the success of social media. Among 221 respondents, 64% expressed their interest in using social media to communicate and reach a wider audience. 66%

of the respondents also affirmed that social media are a cost-effective option for patients. While 71% of the respondents also believed that social media could allow health-related professionals to interact with people and share information effortlessly. In conclusion, the level of online fitness-related information was satisfactory.

Table 5: Benefits of using Social Media to seek Healthcare information

		Frequency	%	Cumulative frequency
Information on social media increases my desire to communicate with a physician	Yes	153	69	69
	No	49	22	91
	Don't know	19	9	100
Total		221	100%	
Health-related messages receivable can be received via any social media platform (Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, etc.)	Yes	150	68	68
	No	51	23	91
	Don't know	20	9	1000
Total		221	100%	
There is a high risk of misinformation from social media platforms on Health-related messages	Yes	144	65	65
	No	55	25	90
	Don't know	22	10	100
Total		221	100%	
I prefer to share their medical conditions with the public through the social media platform(s)	Yes	142	64	64
	No	60	27	91
	Don't know	19	9	100
Total		221	100%	

Participants' awareness and attitude towards social media usage show up in Table 5. Among 221 respondents, 69% expressed that information on social media increases their desire to communicate with a physician, and 38% of the participants indicated that health-related messages are receivable via any social media

platform (Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and others). However, 65% of the respondents affirmed that there is a high risk of misinformation from social media platforms on health-related messages; while 64% prefer to share their medical conditions with the public through the Internet.

Table 6: Other Uses of Social Media for Health Information

		Frequency	%	Cumulative Frequency
Have you ever started medication/treatment on social media as advised/advertised, without asking your doctor?	Yes	152	69	69
	No	51	23	92
	Don't know	18	8	100
Total		221	100%	
	Yes	120	54	54
	No	65	30	84

Do you check with a doctor or other health care professional about the credibility of social media health information?	Don't know	36	16	100
Total		221	100%	
Do messages on social media platforms ever affect your decisions regarding yourself or the health care of your family?	Yes	128	58	58
	No	63	28	86
	Don't know	30	14	100
Total		221	100%	
Do you check the credibility of health-related information received online before sharing it with other people?	Yes	126	57	57
	No	67	30	87
	Don't know	28	13	100
Total		221	100%	

The participants' other uses of social media usage are presented in Table 6. The majority (69%) of the participants expressed that they start medications/treatment as advised/advertised on social media without asking their doctor. This result bolsters the danger of seeking unverified information on health-related issues via social media. Approximately 54% believe that they verify the credibility of healthcare information on social media with a doctor or other healthcare professionals. In contrast, only 58% claim that social media platform messages ever influence their decisions about themselves or the health care of their family. Ultimately, 57% of the respondents also indicated that before sharing it with other people, they would check the integrity of health information. The number of respondents who check the authenticity of health-related information obtained via social media is, by definition, slightly above average. This finding raises considerable concern.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

This study shows that healthcare information obtained from social media influences the health status of the majority of the participants. Participants of this study believe that the healthcare information available on social media has enhanced their awareness of their health conditions. This finding highlights a significant concern regarding health misinformation and alarming the urgent need for official healthcare social media channels. The results revealed an

important fact on the reliability of healthcare information sought by social media users. The safety of information exceeded half of the total number of participants. This striking figure guarantees that healthcare practitioners and policymakers, in addition to social media owners, can help reduce the potential harm of misleading or wrong information transmitted through social media by guiding patients to reputable sites.

It can be concluded based on the information above that social media hold considerable significant value because they allow new ways of accessing information and sharing it. In the current study, more than three-quarters of the participants stated that accessibility and easiness of getting information is the critical reason for the success of social media. This conclusion agrees with research conducted by Tan and Goonawardene (2017) and Song, *et al.*, (2016), which found that participants believed that online social networks could allow health promotion campaigns to share information more easily. Moreover, about half of the participants found communication with oral health professionals as one of the main advantages of using social networks for gaining oral health information. Many researchers, such as Househ, Borycki, & Kushniruk (2014) and Diviani, *et al.* (2015) affirmed that social media encourage social support, cooperation and participation of the stakeholders concerned and increase the interaction of individuals and allows users to participate directly. Also, the majority of the

respondents in the current study found communication difficulty as the main barrier to using social media for getting oral healthcare information followed by credibility and trustfulness which was the second most common barrier to the participants.

Healthcare professionals and policymakers raised concerns regarding the reliability of health-related information found on the Internet and how to make it practical for the public. There is a high risk of misinformation, as healthcare providers are unable to control internet content. However, our findings show that patients are willing to get their news from social media and search engines. Seeking health-related information from social media is both beneficial and disadvantageous, but at the same time results in challenges. Patients report both positive and negative effects. It is essential to identify these effects on healthcare authorities because the ratio of patients using social media for health-related purposes is evolving. Therefore, health professionals will have to deal with the disadvantages and create more awareness of the advantages of using social media to search for healthcare information in suburban centres.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this study shows that social media usage is widespread among patients in Lagos state. The majority used social media platforms to seek health information. The study participants are more likely to search for healthcare information on behalf of family members while a minority received one-to-one medical consultations. Awareness campaigns on the practical use of social media are needed to enhance the knowledge of patients in evaluating the quality of health information, together with proper guidance and education for practitioners. Developing clear policies and guidelines in addition to addressing information accuracy and reliability, perhaps via new technologies by respective governments, might reduce the risk of misleading information.

The results also conclude that social media platforms were useful in helping to make decisions relating to health, while only a few felt otherwise. Most findings from this study were also consistent with previous research work. The advent of social media platforms has transformed people's health information-seeking behaviour. It is hoped that this study's

findings will help researchers in terms of understanding factors that might influence people's health-related decision-making, particularly in Nigeria. The study findings will also become a significant contribution to health policymakers and health-related website content regulators. It is consistent with prior research, which discovered that online healthcare information seekers had rated themselves as good or very good in terms of general personal health. However, the frequency of social media use for health-related purposes was every week. This study concluded that health issues/topics sought may vary according to an individual's preferences. The findings of the previous research revealed that online health seekers had modified the way they take care of their health after having Internet searches and their health-related decision-making.

The results of this study will help guide healthcare practitioners on how to use social media to provide consultations and will also help in developing clear policies and guidelines to reduce misleading information risk. This study shows the need for active healthcare givers who have the right skills to interact with and educate the public using social media.

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