



Social Media as Source of Oral Health Information-Seeking among Adult Residents of Jos-South Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: The widespread use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, X, etc, has revolutionised how people access health information. In Nigeria, where oral health issues are prevalent, understanding how adults seek oral health info is crucial. Despite social media's growing influence, there's a dearth of research on its role in oral health information-seeking in typical Nigeria setting such as Jos-South Local Government Area, Plateau State.

Objectives: The study aims to explore how adults in Jos-South local government area of Plateau state use social media to accesses information on oral health.

Methods: Quantitative and qualitative research approaches were employed. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews method. A total of 300 respondents were used for the quantitative part of the study, while 20 interviews were conducted. The study made use of the narrative format for qualitative data presentation, while quantitative data were presented on mean deviation tables using measuring scales of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Strongly Disagree and Disagree.

Result: The study revealed that social media platforms were instrumental in disseminating oral health education to adult residents in Jos-South Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. Respondents reported acquiring valuable knowledge on proper oral hygiene practices, including brushing techniques, sugar consumption reduction, and identifying appropriate healthcare seeking behaviours. However, the study also highlighted concerns regarding the credibility and reliability of oral health information on social media. Notably, issues of half-truths and misinformation were prevalent, raising concerns about the potential negative impacts of relying solely on social media for oral health education, particularly if used as a substitute for professional guidance. These findings underscore the need for verifying oral health information obtained from social media and highlight opportunities for targeted interventions to improve health literacy and ensure accurate information dissemination.



Conclusion: The study underscores the growing role of social media in enhancing oral health education and care, particularly in improving dental practice and patient outcomes. However, the findings highlight a pressing concern regarding the trustworthiness of oral health information disseminated through these platforms. As social media continues to evolve as a key source of health information, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of oral health content remains a critical challenge that warrants attention from healthcare professionals and policymakers.

Unique Contribution: This study enriches the existing literature on social media in health practice by providing context-specific insights into oral health information-seeking behaviors among adults in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. By exploring the intersection of social media and oral health in a Nigerian context, this research addresses a critical knowledge gap and offers valuable perspectives for healthcare providers, policymakers, and researchers seeking to leverage social media for health promotion and education in similar settings.

Key Recommendation: Oral health practitioners and patients are advised to utilise social media as a supplementary resource for oral health information, while maintaining professional dental consultations as the primary source of guidance. Patients should be encouraged to verify online information through credible sources and consult dentists for personalised advice, ensuring informed decision-making and optimal oral health outcomes.

Keywords: Dental health, social networking sites, messages, individuals

INTRODUCTION

The use of social media in all aspects of human life, health education inclusive, has continued to expand (Jain et al, 2024; Nwonyi et al., 2024). Social networking platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, X, and the likes, have become important tools for health information seeking across the globe (Mohammed et al, 2021; Nwafor et al., 2022). Spallek et al (2015) contend that in medical practice, social media has become useful to patients because they make use of it to learn about disease symptoms before consulting health professionals. The integration of social media communication channels in health-related issues has brought a new dimension to health practice due to its easy to access and interactive characteristics (Ohara, 2023). Social networking sites have the potency to improve access to health information, facilitate health message distribution between medical practitioners and their patients (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021; Wogu et al., 2019). This implies social media platforms serve as important health education tools in both rural communities and urban centres.

In oral health, Antala and Kariya (2025) aver that social media offers oral health prevention and treatment information in the form of video and written contents; and it is convenient and easily accessible to people who seek oral health information. Bhola and Hellyer (2016) corroborate that presently, social media offers unique opportunities to both patients and dentists; through social media, those with teeth problems can consult their dentist, oral information can easily be accessed on social media.

In the United States of America, available data indicate that about 34% Americans seek oral health education from social media platforms (Risas Dental and Braces, 2026). Hashtags such as *#Dentist* with over 2.4 billion views and *#Teethwhitening* with more than 300, 000 circulations through posts and reposts, suggests the importance of social media in dental education in



America (Risas Dental and Braces, 2026). Similar information is available in Philippine, as Acosta et al (2024) confirm in a study that over 67.5% of Philippines use the social media and other digital platforms for oral health purposes. On the African continent, the application of social media for oral health enlightenment continues to increase. Statistics from a study by Snyman and Visser (2014) indicate that despite some issues associated with the application of social media in health-related matters, 50.2% of the population in South Africa use social media to obtain oral health-related messages. Social media plays important role in oral health information dissemination among the Nigerian populace. For instance, in 2023, according to study by Adeyemi, Adekoya and Ayedun, social media has become an important tool among Orthodontists and Orthodontic practitioners.

Furthermore, while social media communication tools continue to provide better oral health education (time and how to brush, use of less sugar, where to seek medical help when having teeth provide, etc) concerns have been raised over half-truths, integrity of social media oral health messages, and potentially negative impacts if it used as a stand-in for professionals oral health enlightenment. Also, studies have been conducted on the application of social media for oral health purposes (Oveh et al, 2025; Adeyemi, Adekoya & Ayedun, 2023; Chen et al, 2022). However, the use of social media as a source for oral health information-seeking among adult residents of Jos-south, Plateau State, Nigeria has not been subjected to empirical investigation to ascertain its effectiveness and challenges. This is the focus of this research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Investigate the level of use of social media to source oral health information among adult residents of Jos-South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria

1. To explore the benefits of social media in oral health education.
2. To assess the issues with oral health information obtained on social media.
3. Investigate the level of use of social media to source oral health information among adult residents of Jos-South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria.

REVIEW OF CONCEPTS

Social Media

Social media is novel communication form with interactive characteristics. Martinez and Dwyer (2023) contend that social media refers to *Facebook, X, Instagram, WhatsApp* and the likes that enable the production and sharing of user-generated content. They further describe it as a set of Internet-based applications that build on the conceptual and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-created content. This idea is supported by Naeem and Ozuem (2021) and Nwafor et al., (2022), who state that social media encompasses a range of platforms such as *WhatsApp, X, TikTok*, etc, that facilitate the production and dissemination of user-generated content. To Mohammed (2021), as mentioned in Igbashangev et al. (2023), social media are online tools and resources that promote involvement, cooperation, and information exchange. This suggests that social media encompasses a wide range of mobile



and web-based applications that let users participate in online forums, contribute original material, and join online communities.

Oral Health

Oral health, according to World Health Organisation (2026), is the condition of the teeth, mouth and orofacial structures that allow people to carry out certain functions like eating, speaking, breathing etc, without pains, discomfort or embarrassment. It also the state of the gums, mouth, teeth and the other component of the mouth, which enables individuals to speak, eat, smile and express themselves without feeling pain, free from infections or diseases (Healthline Editorial Team, 2019). Thus, oral health deals with condition of the elements in the mouth such as teeth, tongue, gums, etc by preventing them from diseases such as decay of the teeth, oral cancer through proper brushing and flossing of the mouth.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Albari et al (2025) investigated the impact of social media on oral health education. The study focused on youth in Jordan. The study utilised the cross-sectional research design and obtained data from university students. The study established that most of the students found social media useful for oral health enlightenment due to social media accessibility and easy to use characteristics. The investigation further revealed that the challenge of using social media for oral health-related messages was difficulty in communicating with dentists. The study concluded that despite the identified challenges, social media were regarded as important platforms for oral health information by the students. This suggests that social media has a significant, double effect on oral health enlightenment, serving as both important platform for spreading oral health messages and a source of oral health information challenges, especially the spread of unverifiable oral health messages (Adeyemi et al, 2023).

Also, Shanghavi et al (2025) conducted a review on the role of social media on oral health promotion. Data from the study showed that social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Facebook, among others have become important, augmenting traditional ways of providing oral health information. The study also identified certain issues associated with oral health messages obtained from social media. One of which is credibility of such messages.

Similarly, Murariu et al (2025) explored the effect of digital platforms on enhancing oral hygiene knowledge. The study adopted the qualitative research approach. The study found that mobile tools like X, YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc, are valuable applications for enhancing adolescents' oral health. A study by Althuniya, Alsalhi and Elmoazen (2018) further affirmed that the most used social media platform for oral health information seeking by people in Qassim province, Saudi Arabia was X, followed by YouTube. The study equally revealed that social media has high impact on changing people's attitudes towards better oral health practice. In addition, Maharani et al (2021) concluded in a study that the advancement of Internet facility has brought a new dimension to oral health issues. The Internet tool has increased access to oral health messages.



The focus of Calderon et al (2023) study was on the application of social media as interventionist tool for improving oral health behaviours among adolescents. Experimental research strategy was adopted. Finding of the study indicated that there was increased daily brushing of teeth by the participants due to information they received from the social media. Another finding by Antala and Kariya (2025) established that social media in oral health education has demonstrated it high impacts, especially among children. Amir (2018) further noted in a study that social networking platforms, like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram, YouTube, among others, offer a number of important features that are capable of promoting oral health behaviours.

In the same vein, Adeyemi et al (2023) examined the pattern and effect of social media application as it relates to health. The study employed the cross sectional design and collected data from Orthodontists and Orthodontic resident doctors. The study revealed that the use of social media for health-related activities was high among the respondents, and there was an increased application of the various social networking sites by the respondents and patients health improvement. Likewise, Mir et al (2020) conducted a study on the impact of applying social media on dental management and cure, and concluded that social media has become a widely used tool for exchanging and obtaining oral health information.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The crux of the research is further explained using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), and Health Belief Model.

Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) was proposed by Venkatesh, Michael, Gordon, and Fred in 2003. The theory says that the real adoption and application or use of technology is predicated on the behavioural intention of the user. The supposed probability of using a technology is based on the direct effect of four key constructs, namely performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions that influence intention to use of new technology. However, of relevance to this study are the *performance expectations* and *social influence*. The *performance expectation* is defined as the degree to which an individual believes that using the system will help him or her attain gains in job performance, while *social influence* refers to the level at which an individual perceives that important others believe he or she should use the new system. This theory is thus considered significant in this study due to the fact people chose to use a communication technology like social media to access and disseminate oral health messages. In this case, dentists use different social media platforms to educate the public on different aspects of oral health.

Health Belief Model

The Health Belief Model (HBM) developed by Irwin Rosenstock in 1966 is a theoretical model that can be used to guide health promotion and disease control. It is to explain and predict individual changes in health behaviours (Carpenter, 2010). ‘The HBM focused on two aspects of individuals’ representations of health and health behaviour: threat perception and behavioural evaluation. Threat perception was construed as two key beliefs: perceived susceptibility to illness



or health problems, and anticipated severity of the consequences of illnesses. Behavioural evaluation also consisted of two distinct sets of beliefs: those concerning the benefits or efficacy of a recommended health behaviour, and those concerning the costs of, or barriers to, enacting the behaviour (Abraham & Sheeran, 2015 in Lucas, 2024). This means that people, according to the Model will take action to prevent illness if they regard themselves as susceptible to a condition (perceived susceptibility, if they believe it would have potentially serious consequences (perceived severity), if they believe that a particular course of action available to them would reduce the susceptibility or severity or lead to other positive outcomes (perceived benefits), and if they perceive few negative attributes related to the health action (perceived barriers) (Carpenter, 2010).

The Health Belief Model posits that messages will achieve optimal behaviour change if they successfully target perceived barriers, benefits, self-efficacy, and threats (Jones et al, 2015). The core concept of the original HBM according to Hochbaum, (1958 in Lucas, 2024), is that health behaviour is determined by personal beliefs or perceptions about a disease and the strategies existing to decrease its occurrence. Such strategies that determine the perception is the media. The action and inactions of the people towards health issues therefore is largely determined by a modifying factor such as the extent of information and quality of such made available by the media. In other words, the mass media (in this case, social media) can create awareness and knowledge about better oral health practices. Furthermore, information from social media can be pivotal to people who seek oral health messages. Therefore, this theory was considered important to this study.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative and quantitative research approaches with in-depth interviews and questionnaire used as the instruments of data collection. The utilisation of the mixed data collection methods was predicated on the arguments advanced by research experts such as (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) that mixed methods–provide rigour and enhance the validity of investigation outcomes and lead to more informed conclusions. Bjorklund (2021) further concurs that studies that adopt both qualitative and quantitative strategies yield deeper findings because the lapses of one method are bridged by the other technique.

The population of the study was adult residents of Jos-South Local Government (LAG) of Plateau State, Nigeria. There were no accurate data as to the total number of adults in this LGA. However, an estimated population of 154, 612 was used. A sample size of 300 was utilised for the quantitative aspect of the study using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table method of getting sample size. The study collected data from both 19 dental practitioners and 281 members of the public. The administration of the questionnaire made use of the availability sampling technique. Twenty (20) of the respondents randomly selected were used for the in-depth interview. The use of 20 interviewees was predicated on the arguments advanced by scholars such as Baker (2021) and Vasileiou (2018) cited in Lucas and Ubong (2022) that qualitative studies such as interviews are based on fewer samples because of saturation method.



Additionally, quantitative data were presented on mean deviation tables using measuring scales of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Strongly Disagree and Disagree. For the qualitative data presentation and analysis, narrative technique was adopted. The narrative method was found relevant because the technique entails interpreting the data that respondents have given while taking into cognizant the unique circumstances of every case and the experiences of each participant.

Data Presentation

The researchers distributed 300 copies of questionnaire and 277 were retrieved and found valid for analysis. Graphical representation of the response rate is shown in Figure 1. In addition, interviews were conducted and the responses presented after the quantitative data to add credence.

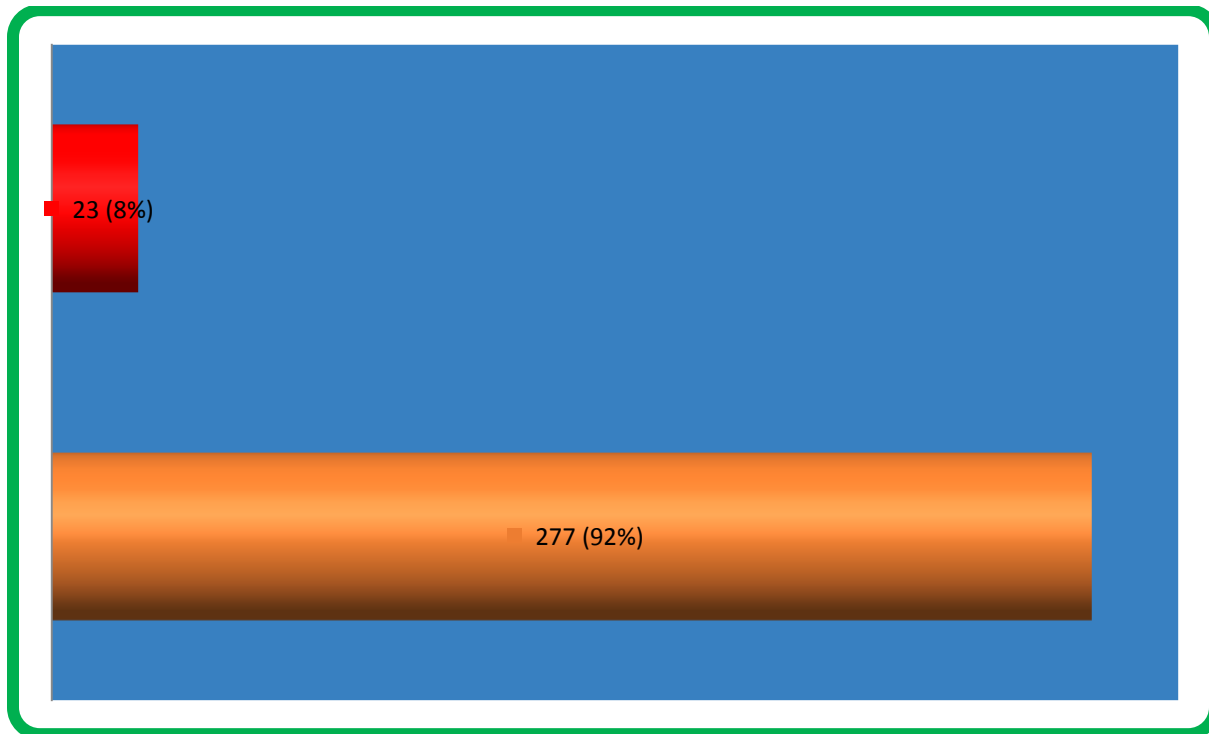


Figure 1: Analysis of Response Rate



Table 1: Responses on the Benefits of Social Media in Oral Health Education

Option	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
Social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, X, Instagram, TikTok, among others, offer convenient and engaging oral health content	209	62	6	0	0	277	4.7	Accepted
Oral health information on social media are free and easy to access	205	66	0	2	4	277	4.7	Accepted
Messages (videos and images) on social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok and Instagram are more effective compared to text for learning about oral health	199	78	0	0	0	277	4.7	Accepted
You use social media to easily find specific (interests) oral health information such as causes, treatment, symptoms, and prevention	224	53	0	0	0	277	4.8	Accepted
Social media presents opportunity to bypass the challenges associated with meeting oral health practitioners physically.	214	46	9	3	5	277	4.7	Accepted

The data in Table 1 suggest that social media communication tool has continued to play pivotal role in health-related issues. The use of social media for accessing and disseminating oral health messages continues to yield better result. Interview excerpts further highlight the significance of social media in oral health information sharing and enlightenment. One of the interviewees noted that “My YouTube and Facebook accounts have been useful. I use oral health videos from YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp to teach my kids how to brush their teeth and take care of their mouths. Social media is a good platform for oral health enlightenment”. Another one opined that “Social media is very important in oral health education. Information on it is easy to access. I usually use social media to counsel people on better oral health practice. If you check my YouTube and Facebook platforms, you will see a lot of oral health videos I posted there”. These new communication tools facilitate healthcare interactions and community engagement”. Similar view was further expressed by another participant “I used *Facebook, Twitter (now X), WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn*, and all other social media platforms very often for health matters. I use these platforms to engage with clients, prescribe oral care medications to my patients”. Another respondent corroborated that “I frequently make use of different social media



platforms such as *blog, X, Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube*, among others to enhance my oral health knowledge. They are good means for quick engagement with oral health experts”. Probing further, another respondent submitted that “Social media has presented a lot of benefits to me in terms of health. Getting oral health messages and assistance from dental professionals is fast and very economical through social media. Within a short time, you can be fed with volume of oral health messages. Via the social media, you can share your oral-related online and get experts views almost instantly”.

Table 1: Responses on the Issues Associated with the Use of Social Media in Oral Health Education

Option	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
Issues with the credibility of oral health information obtained on social media such as non-experts spreading oral health messages for financial gains	191	44	13	19	10	277	4.3	Accepted
There are a lot of misleading and harmful oral health messages on social media	165	101	7	0	4	277	4.5	Accepted
Ethical/privacy issues because dental professionals may breach patient confidentiality or promoting unprofessional oral health content	141	125	11	0	0	277	4.4	Accepted
Social media has lead to reduction in visit to dental care facilities and experts	103	107	27	18	22	277	3.9	Accepted
Confusion in oral health messages obtained due to information overload, that is finding difficult to know which information is factual	177	83	3	9	5	277	4.5	Accepted

It is inferred from the data in Table 2 that in spite of the importance of social media in oral health enlightenment, its use in oral health-related issues continues to encounter certain challenges, ranging from spread of misinformation to people not taking interest in visiting dentists. Adding credence to the quantitative data, one of the participants during interview posited that “Everybody seems to be a dental expert now due to the open characteristics of social media. A lot of people on social media do claim that they are dental practitioners. This is because so hard to really know who is a trained dentist and who is not”. Another asserted that “There are a lot of misleading dental-related medications that people create and disseminate on social media and claim that they are original. When people patronise such misleading claims, the fake dental



health products or medication prescribed by these untrained persons, they become harmful to either their gums, teeth, or the mouth”. One of the respondents further stated that “Many people today shy away from visiting dental health facilities. They prefer to seek for oral health information from the social media”.

DISCUSSION

Participants in the study noted many importance of the application of social media in oral health-related issues. These include increasing access to oral health messages both by dental practitioners and the public. The study further established that social media platforms provide oral health information in form of videos and images, making it more helpful compared to text information on oral health. This buttresses the fact that social media oral health information assists people in improving their dental hygiene as well as easily finds solutions to issues relating to oral health (see Table 1 and interview excerpts above).

In addition, social media platforms provide interactive avenues between the public and dental professionals. The respondents noted instances where they use their social media applications such as Facebook, X, Instagram, WhatsApp, and the likes, to ask questions relating to oral health posted on social media with a view to seeking clarifications from dental professionals. Social media was equally described as one of the easiest ways for dental clinics to engage with oral health patients and the public as a whole. They use to disseminate information about oral health, such as causes, treatment, prevention and symptoms (see Table 1 and interview excerpts above). These findings align with an earlier one by Mir et al (2020), which concluded that social media has become a widely used tool for exchanging and obtaining oral health information. Althuniya, Alsalihi and Elmoazen (2018) investigation also corroborates the results of this study. Their study pointed that social media has high impact on changing people’s attitudes towards better oral health practice.

The study’s results are also in consonant with the provisions of the Health Belief Model, which can be used to guide health promotion and disease, it is used to explain and predict individual changes in health behaviours. This implies that people will take action to prevent illness if they regard themselves as susceptible to a health condition. The findings here also justify the adoption of The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). This theory notes the important of the adoption and application of new communication channels such as social media in health information and education.

On the challenges of the use of social media in oral health-related matters, the study found that some oral health messages posted on social media lack credibility. They are misleading, harmful, issues concerning dental health practitioners breaching oral health seeking patient confidentiality or promotion unprofessional oral health content. The result further established that due to the open features of social media, some people now sit at home and seek oral health information from their social media platforms, rather than visiting dental care facilities and experts for proper advice. This has led to reduction in dental care facility visit by people. The finding also aligns with that spread of Adeyemi et al (2023), which states that there are a lot of unverifiable oral health messages on different social media platforms.



CONCLUSION

From the results of the study, it is concluded that social media remains an important tool in accessing and disseminating oral health messages. While the application of social media for this purpose continues to expand, especially in improving dental practice and care for dental patients, trust on oral health information spread on social media platforms remains a thing of concern.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Health professionals should continue to use social media platforms and conventional media channels to educate the people on how to differentiate between credible and unreliable oral health messages on social media.
2. Social media should be used by oral health seeking patients as a complementary source and not replacement for consulting dentists.
3. Dental health practitioners and health organisations as a whole should continue to take advantage of social media to create and disseminate engaging oral health content.

Ethical Clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

So and so conceived the study, including the design, so and so collated the data, and so and so handled the analysis and interpretation, while so and so the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

Citation

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