

## Emergence of Predatory Publishing in Library and Information Science: Issues and Implications for Scholarship among Academic Librarians in Nigeria

### Kütüphanecilik ve Enformasyon Biliminde Sahte Yayıncılığın Ortaya Çıkışı: Nijerya'daki Akademik Kütüphaneciler İçin Bilimsel Araştırma İle İlgili Önemli Konular ve Olası Sonuçlar

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#### Abstract

*Predatory publishing is an emerging but worrisome trend among academics including librarians in Nigeria. This paper examines crucial issues and implications of predatory publishing among Nigerian academic librarians. It outlines the characteristics of predatory publishers and journals and their subtle means of enticing unsuspecting authors. The paper discusses the intricate dimensions of predatory publishing and its effects on research and scholarship among librarians. It notes that predatory publishing has devastating effects on the future of research and scholarship. The paper concludes with strategies for intervention and a call on relevant authorities in Nigeria to take proactive steps to curb predatory publishing among faculties especially academic librarians.*

**Keywords:** *Predatory Publishers, predatory journals, academic libraries, Nigeria, librarians scholarship, research*

#### Öz

*Nijerya'da kütüphaneciler de dâhil olmak üzere akademisyenler arasında yükselen ve aynı zamanda endişe veren bir akım sahte yayıncılıktır. Bu makale Nijeryalı akademisyen kütüphanecilerinin sahte yayıncılıkla ilgili önemli sorunlarını ve bu yayıncılığın etkilerini incelemektedir. Çalışma, sahte yayıncıların ve dergilerinin özelliklerini ana hatları ile tespit ederek kuşku duymayan yazarları baştan çıkarmak için kullandıkları hilekar yolları ortaya koymaktadır. Bu araştırmaya ile sahte yayıncılığın çapraşık boyutları ve bunların araştırmalar ve akademisyenlik üstündeki etkisi de incelenmektedir. Araştırmada sahte yayıncılığın araştırma ve akademisyenliğin geleceği ile ilgili yıkıcı etkileri olacağına dikkat çekilmektedir. Bu tür yayıncılık faaliyetlerine müdahale etmek için stratejiler önerilmekte ve aynı zamanda fakültelerde özellikle akademisyen kütüphaneciler arasında sahte yayıncılığın engellenmesi hususunda gerekli önlemleri almaları için Nijerya'daki ilgili makamlara bir çağrı da bulunarak araştırma son bulmaktadır.*

**Anahtar sözcükler:** *Sahte yayıncılar, sahte dergiler, akademik kütüphaneler, Nijerya, akademisyen kütüphaneciler, araştırma*

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## Introduction

Research and publishing are the hallmarks of the academia. Academic Staff, especially in higher institutions of learning are rated not just by their teaching activities, but by their research and publishing output over a period of time. Institutions including international organizations base their evaluations for reward and recognition of academics on research and publishing output (Chang, 2015). Academic institutions are rated and ranked by the research and publication outputs of their faculties. Consequently, academic institutions emphasize research and publishing as requirements for members of faculty. Salaam and Onifade (2009) observed that the same requirements apply to academic librarians in Nigerian Universities, who are accorded faculty status as well as faculties who teach and do research in library schools (also called LIS Faculty). This is further supported by Ocholla, Ocholla and Oyancha (2013) who posited that librarians publish for career related rewards like promotion, recognition, visibility and acceptability in their institutions and among peers. Most importantly, challenges around the practice of the profession are better addressed through discoveries made from systematic research. Also, knowledge is created and improved upon through research and publishing.

Over the years, Nigerian academic librarians have contributed to scientific knowledge of the profession, with their research outputs appearing in reputable research outlets (Ogbomo, 2010). These outlets include books, local and international journals, conference papers and proceedings, technical reports and others. Arguably, the most patronized outlets by researchers including librarians are journals. Publishing in reputable journals requires the development of requisite research and editorial skills, understanding of publishing ethics and professionalism. Unfortunately, this trend is being threatened by the emergence of predatory publishing. The term 'predatory publishing' was coined by Jeffrey Beall, a librarian in University of Colorado, Denver in 2010.

Predatory publishing is a business model that involves exploiting authors by charging publication fees without providing necessary preview, review and editorial service required for scholarly works before publication. It has no interest in scholarship and its motivation is monetary gains. The system takes advantage of authors/researchers who need to publish their works within the shortest time possible in order to meet deadlines for promotions or other rewards. It thrives on the premises of timely publication and open access for easy citations; some journals that are involved in this practice could publish author (s)' works within one to four weeks of submission. The resultant consequence is that such works may not go through plagiarism test, scholarly review, copyediting and proof reading before publication. This practice, if continued, carries grave consequences for scholarship, research and the future of the profession. Interestingly, predatory publishing does not exist only in library and information science, it has also become a disturbing phenomenon in almost all fields of study (Beall, 2009).

For about six years, Beall (2017) compiled an annual volume of predatory journals and publishers. Though some scholars have queried the compilations, it is alarming to note the rising increase of predatory journals and publishers. Straumsheim (2015) noted that from 53000 articles published in predatory journals in 2010, the figure had increased to 420,000 in 2014, published by about 8000 predatory journals. Identifying and classifying predatory journals by their fields of study or subject areas is difficult as most of them individually accept and publish articles in all fields of knowledge. The entire concept of predatory publishing is inimical to the posterity of research and scholarship. There is a need to correct this trend especially in developing countries like Nigeria, where there is little awareness of the threat posed by predatory publishing. This informs the rationale for emphasis on the implications of predatory publishing on scholarship of academic librarians in Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

The concept and threat of predatory publishing has become a global phenomenon. Shen and Björk (2015) observed that there have been a steady increase in the number of predatory journals in the last five years. They further alluded that majority of contributing authors to predatory journals were from Asia (especially India) and Africa. In a regional distribution of sampled 262 corresponding authors, the first three ranked countries of authorship were India (35%), Nigeria (8%) and U.S.A (6%). Unfortunately, two prominent predatory publishers mentioned in the predatory list originated from Nigeria. Shen and Björk's study further revealed that Nigerian authors use predatory journals to publish their papers 1.5 percent more than they use reputable journals. Okonedo (2015) in her study on scholarly publications among Nigerian academic librarians noted that annual publication output among librarians was on the increase; however a good number of these works are published in predatory journals. Omobowale, Akanle, Adeniran and Adegboyega (2014) posited that many of the authors including librarians in Nigeria were not tricked into publishing in predatory journals. They took advantage of the 'opportunities' provided by the journals. These 'opportunities' include no rejection of submitted paper, quick publication process, and open access amongst others. Shen and Björk opined that there is nothing wrong with publishing in open access, except that predatory publishers have taken advantage of it to achieve their monetary objectives. However, what is clear is that authors who publish in predatory journals may not be fully abreast with the threat posed to scholarship by these journals.

The effects of predatory publishing on scholarship in any field of study could be catastrophic with immediate and future consequences. The publishing model is 'predatory' because the motivation is not to provide a platform for the promotion and preservation of research and scholarship. On the contrary, the objective of predatory publishers is to take advantage of open access model for their own monetary gains (Beall, 2010). Shen and Björk (2015) reported that predatory publishers took in about \$75 million in 2014 alone; so predatory publishing is a multi-million dollar business.

With no regard for quality research and scholarship, the long term effect of predatory publishing is the eradication of scholarship among the academia and a sharp contrast between the academic system and industries who depend on scholarly research for production of quality products. Beall (2009) further warned that what is most worrisome is that any of these predatory publishers could disappear overnight and with it could go all previously published research, resulting in colossal loss of knowledge. Natarajan and Nair (2016) opined that every product of research deserve a thorough unbiased peer review, editorial corrections and a credible platform to present it – in a publication outlet with impeccable credentials. Predatory publishing also encourages other academic fraudulent practices like plagiarism. Professor Baker of the American University of Nigeria in Ukaogo (2016) summarized the effects of predatory publishing to include corruption of open-access model, increase in the occurrence of research misconduct, and promotion of bogus research or pseudo-science. Working to reduce predatory publishing would begin with understanding its characteristics and nature, with a view to helping unsuspecting authors identify them easily.

## Characteristics and Nature of Predatory Publishing

Identifying predatory journals could be difficult especially for unsuspecting authors. Beall (2010)'s study of predatory publishing and the subsequent annual listings of predatory publishers and journals have been very useful. Though, the list which was compiled and released annually for six years, has been criticized by some scholars and librarians, it remains arguably the most comprehensive list of predatory publishers and journals. Perhaps, the strongest point of criticism of Beall's list is the inclusion of genuine reputable journals on a few occasions and the non-inclusion of some predatory journals. However, Beall, the originator of the list made provisions for corrections and update during the six years period. He consistently advised editors of listed journals who have strong reasons / queries to make necessary justifications and request for their exclusion from the list.

Bohannon (2013) and Beall (2010) identified certain characteristics consistent with predatory journals. They include:

- Quick acceptance of research papers and articles with little or no peer review
- No known or established strategy for quality control and standards
- Notification to authors about article processing fees only after the papers have been accepted
- Aggressive sending of emails to prospective authors soliciting for submission of articles.
- Publication of multiple articles covering various unrelated subject areas in a single journal.

- Listing of scholars and academics as members of editorial boards without permission
- Listing of non-existent or fake academics/scholars on the list of editorial board members
- Cloning of websites and mimicking the names of established and highly rated journals.
- False claims about names and qualifications of editor and location address of journal
- Misuse of International Standard Serials Number (ISSN)
- False claim of impact factors and indexing
- Appointments and engagements of Editors with no requisite qualifications for the position

Outlets for predatory publishing are categorized into four – predatory publishers, standalone journals, misleading metrics and hijacked journals. Predatory publishers are organizations that publish multiple predatory journals covering various subject areas including library and information science. Standalone journals are journals with no known publisher name and address. They publish papers from various fields of knowledge, with no given area of specialization. The misleading metrics list is made up of fake indexing bodies and companies who calculate and publish counterfeit impact factors (and other ranking metrics) which are then awarded to predatory journals; the journals use these fake metrics on their websites and spam emails to trick authors into publishing with them, on the premise that the impact factors are legitimate. The last category of predatory publishers is hijacked journals. This is made up of journals that steal the identity of already established journals; they bear the same name with authentic and very erudite journals. The only difference most times is that the predators operate with counterfeit websites (the website may have the same features as the original).

For institutional ethical reasons, no predatory publisher or journal is mentioned in this paper. Many of the predatory publications originate from Asia (especially India and Bangladesh) and some parts of Africa including Nigeria (Straumsheim, 2015). Though they sometimes display contact addresses in Europe and United States of America on their websites, they often request authors to make payments for article processing fees through international money transfer agents to addresses in Asia and Africa.

Predatory publishing by its nature and operation is fraudulent. Researchers and scholars are highly regarded in society; they should not associate with fraud in any form. Library and information practitioners, professionals and researchers are custodians of knowledge; they are meant to preserve knowledge and not to destroy it. Therefore, librarians cannot afford to be part of predatory publishing.

## Scholarship and Predatory Publishing among Academic Librarians in Nigeria

Academic libraries and academic librarianship as a career path began in Nigeria in 1948 when the University College, Ibadan was established. Over the years, academic libraries have greatly increased as Government, corporate bodies and individuals have established numerous higher institutions of learning – Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education. Presently, there are one hundred and forty-two Universities in Nigeria (Nigerian Universities, 2016). These institutions have libraries which are operated by librarians. However, it was in the 1990s that librarians in these institutions were accorded academic status (Lawal, 2002). Consequently, before the 1990s, librarians in academic libraries were not compelled to do research and publish papers like other academic staff in the faculties or colleges. Expectedly, just a few librarians were involved in publishing papers and it was for leisure and academic prestige. It was mostly librarians who were teaching in library schools that were involved in scholarly writings; and as at then, there were only five accredited and recognized library schools in the country – University of Ibadan library school, Ahmadu Bello University Library School, Zaria, University of Nigeria Library School, Nsukka, Bayero University Library School, Kano and University of Maiduguri Library School. From this historical background, it is clear that scholarly writings among Nigerian academic librarians is relatively new compared to academics in other fields of study. In addition, research productivity among librarians is an emerging phenomenon.

Research productivity is viewed as the number of academic papers published by an individual within a given period of time. Okonedo (2015) opined that research publications include research findings and other theoretical papers published in scholarly outlets like journals, conference proceedings, books or chapters in books. Academic writings also involve carrying out editorial duties, obtaining patents and licenses, writing monographs, and engaging in public debate and commentaries. Librarians' workload as information professionals sometimes puts them at a disadvantage regarding the time available for them to do research and publish papers. Tsafe, Aminu and Mohammed (2016) observed that though publication output among academic librarians in Nigeria was on the increase, it is still very low compared with the output of their counterparts in developed countries of Europe and North America. In a study of the research output of librarians in northern Nigeria between year 2000 and 2012, Tsafe et al. (2016) reported that the total number of publications published within the period (12 years) by 165 librarians used for the study was 373; 257 of the publications were published in journals. A further breakdown of the figure shows an annual output of 31 publications produced by 165 librarians. Okonedo (2015) carried out a study on the research output of academic librarians in Southwest Nigeria between 2009 and 2014, a period of five years. The study revealed that a total of 726 papers were published in learned journals within the period by 166 librarians used for the study; this

is an average of 145 papers published annually by 166 librarians. These figures reveal that some academic librarians do not publish any paper in a whole year.

However, more worrisome is that out of the few papers published by librarians, a good number are published in predatory journals. The studies carried out by Okonedo (2015) and Tsafe et al. (2016) revealed that academic librarians prefer to publish in journals. These include local and international journals. The term 'local journal' refer to journals published within Nigeria and most times are not available online. International journals are journals published outside the country and are available online. Many Nigerian Universities rate international journals higher than local ones. This accounts for why Nigerian scholars, including librarians prefer to publish in international journals. Unfortunately, a number of the journals termed 'international' are predatory journals. Omobowale et al. (2014) posited that it is the desire to publish in international journals that has made many Nigerian scholars including librarians fall prey to predatory journals. Publishing in rated international journals takes a lot of work and time; predatory journals appear to be the easy way out.

## **Implications of Predatory Publishing on Scholarship and Research**

As earlier noted, predatory publishing among scholars and researchers in any field of study has both short and long term consequences. Librarians are viewed as custodians of knowledge; their involvement in predatory publishing is not only destructive to library and information science as a field of study, it is also inimical to the practice of librarianship. Some of the consequences of predatory publishing especially to scholarship are outlined below.

### **Contamination of Literature and Research Process**

Current research is built on previous knowledge and findings. But when previous or existing knowledge is inaccurate and misleading, current and future research based on such knowledge is corrupted. Publications in most predatory journals are not properly peer reviewed by experts; consequently, findings contained in such publications may be inaccurate as they were not verified by qualified editors and reviewers. Thus, researchers who may want to build their researches around findings in predatory publications may be unknowingly promoting falsehood.

For Nigerian Librarians, contamination of research process carries grave consequence. Academic writings and publishing among librarians is relatively young and still at a developmental stage in Nigeria. Therefore, predatory publishing would contaminate foundation knowledge needed to build future research. Nigerian Academic librarians are to carry out necessary research that would proffer solutions to challenges of libraries in the country. But when findings from such research are inaccurate, existing and future challenges of libraries would remain unresolved.

### **Loss of Valuable Knowledge and Research Findings**

Unsuspecting authors sometimes submit their papers for publication in predatory journals. Some of these papers may carry valuable theoretical knowledge and valid empirical findings. The major disadvantage of this is that predatory journals stand a high risk of extinction. When a journal goes extinct, valid theoretical and empirical knowledge may be lost, especially when the content of the journal was only available on the internet. Most predatory journals are only available online and are established mainly to make profit. Predatory publishers are quick to stop their publications if the 'business' is no longer profitable. They have no concern for the posterity of knowledge and research findings. For scholarly writings and researches among Nigerian academic librarians which is still at a developmental stage, loss of previous research findings would be very detrimental.

### **Loss of Authors' Credibility**

Quality research and theoretical papers published in standard and recognized journals give credibility to authors especially young writers who are yet to make a mark in their fields of study. But when authors publish in predatory journals, their credibility come under scrutiny. Highly ranked journals especially those with impact factors from recognized indexing bodies, boost the credibility of authors. Such authors are viewed as brilliant, hardworking and real contributors to their fields of knowledge. On the contrary, authors who publish in predatory journals are regarded as lazy professionals and academics. Nigerian academic librarians are relatively young in the academia, they must not be seen to be compromising their integrity. Lack of credibility impedes the career growth of faculties and academics.

### **Low or Zero Rankings for Authors' Institutions**

Internationally and locally, Universities take pride in their global rankings. These rankings are important because they guide students' choice of Universities. Global rankings also determine an Institutions' ability to get and access grants and funds from donor agencies and industries. The two most recognized and celebrated ranking bodies for Universities globally are the Times Higher Education World University Rankings and the QS World University Rankings. Though there are other ranking bodies, these two are the most recognized. Part of the indicators used by these bodies include (but not limited to) publications and publication outlets of faculties of Universities. Only publications in journals, conference proceedings and books indexed by recognized indexing agencies are used for the rankings. SCOPUS and Web of Science are the most recognized indexing agencies for rankings of journals and publications in both QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education World University Rankings.

Expectedly, predatory publishers and journals in library and information science are not indexed in SCOPUS and Web of Science (Beall, 2010). This implies that academic



librarians who publish in predatory journals are directly or indirectly impeding the global rankings of their institutions. Unfortunately, only one Nigerian University (University of Ibadan) is ranked among the top 800 Universities in the world by the 2016 Times Higher Education World University Rankings (The World University Ranking, 2016). This ranking is very low. However, the most disturbing is the fact that the other Universities were not listed at all. Nigerian scholars (including academic librarians) must take up the responsibility of improving the global rankings of their Institutions by publishing in reputable journals, conference proceedings and books. Librarians' patronage of predatory journals would do their institutions no good with regard to global rankings.

### **Destruction of Scholarship and Academic Culture**

Research, scholarly writings, editing and peer review mechanism in academic publications are established academic cultures. Scholars and faculties are the custodians of these cultures. Predatory publishing ignores peer review mechanism in the research and publication process. It therefore erodes academic culture and ultimately destroys scholarship. This systemic destruction of academic culture and scholarship is gradual but steady. Predatory publishing threatens the future of academic scholarship. For young writers like Nigerian academic librarians, predatory publishing may deny them the opportunity to experience real research and rigorous peer review systems that bring out the best in scholars.

### **Promotion of Plagiarism**

The other threat posed by predatory publishing is plagiarism. Plagiarism is the fraudulent act of appropriating another author's thoughts, expression, and publication as one's own work, with no due acknowledgement of the original source. Predatory publishers do not carry out plagiarism check on papers submitted to them. Consequently, other authors' works maybe freely plagiarized. Some authors take advantage of predatory journals to practice self-plagiarism. Self-plagiarism involves authors' re-use of previous published works without due acknowledgement and proper citation of the original work. One of the privileges of authors is due acknowledgement expressed by proper citation of their published works. Plagiarism denies authors this privilege.

### **Strategies for Intervention and Suggestions**

The following strategies and suggestions are recommended for curbing predatory publishing.

#### **Provision of Adequate Awareness**

Any strategy adopted to curb predatory publishing must first begin with awareness of its existence and consequences. There are two categories of authors who publish

in predatory journals. There are those who are unaware of the existence of predatory journals and so fall prey to them; and there are authors who are aware of the existence of predatory journals and publish in them in order to get their papers published as quickly as possible, perpetuate plagiarism and other academic fraudulent practices or escape from the rigorous process of publishing in standard journals. These latter category should be referred to as 'predatory authors'. The first category of authors needs orientation on the existence of predatory journals and how to identify them. Many authors in this category are upcoming writers and scholars who are either totally unaware of predatory publishing or perhaps cannot accurately identify predatory outlets. 'Predatory authors' need awareness on the consequences of predatory publishing. Perhaps, an awareness of the consequences of their actions on scholarship and research in their field of study as well as their Institutions could help to deter them from the fraudulent practice.

However, the pertinent question that should be resolved is about who should be responsible for the creation of awareness of predatory publishing in an academic environment. While academic departments may play a part in the awareness campaign against predatory publishing, academic libraries and librarians should lead the awareness campaign. Libraries and librarians are the custodians of knowledge; they should lead any campaign that is geared towards promoting scholarship and the posterity of knowledge and research. They could take advantage of faculty and staff library orientation periods to create awareness on predatory publishing. Most academic libraries usually carry out periodic orientation and information literacy programs for faculty and staff; awareness campaigns against predatory publishing could be included in such programs. An expert or a competent librarian should facilitate the programs. Faculties should be introduced to the list of predatory publishers, standalone journals, misleading metrics and hijacked journals (Beall, 2010). Faculties should also be encouraged to consult a designated librarian for clarifications on suspected predatory journals. Academic librarians should be part of the awareness programs.

Individual institutions should organize periodic seminars and workshops on the consequences of predatory publishing. This will help academic staff to be abreast with latest developments in predatory publishing as well as new antics employed by predatory publishers. It is important to note that American University of Nigeria, Yola and Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria have already embarked on awareness campaigns and seminars to discourage faculties from publishing in predatory outlets. Other Universities should emulate these worthy examples.

### **Formulation of Institutional Policies on Predatory Publishing**

Policies are guidelines and frameworks that among other things portray the stand point of institutions on various issues. Individual institutions should formulate and adopt policies addressing issues of predatory publishing. While the institutions may

not adhere strictly with Beall (2010)'s ideas and criteria for determining predatory publishers, institutional policies should recognize the warning signs of predatory publishing and address issues bordering on predatory and exploitative behaviors of publishing outlets. Copies of the policies should be made available to all faculties. In addition, such policies should reward academic excellence and honesty.

In this regard, the National Universities Commission, the Government agency responsible for regulating and accrediting Universities in Nigeria, should compel all Universities in the country to formulate policies on predatory publishing.

### **Provision and Implementation of Sanctions on Culprits**

Punitive measures are vital in dealing with fraud and crimes in society. Predatory publishing appear to thrive more in countries where such academic frauds are not queried and punished. For instance, incidences of predatory publishing is relatively lower in the United States of America (U.S.A) because U.S Government agencies and regulatory bodies query and implement sanctions against erring publishers. For instance, the United States National Institute of Health queried OMICS publishing group for false claims of affiliation in 2013 (Kaiser, 2013). In August 2016, the U.S Federal Trade Commission filed a suit against OMICS publishing group for deceptive publishing practices (Federal Trade Commission, 2016). These actions especially by government agencies will go a long way in reducing the activities of predatory publishers in the country. Unfortunately, no punitive action has been taken against predatory publishers and their collaborators in Nigeria. It is therefore not surprising that predatory publishing thrives in the country.

There are various regulatory bodies that could help to check the activities of predatory publishers in Nigeria. The first is the National Universities Commission. By law, the National Universities Commission (NUC) regulates the policies and activities of all Universities and their faculties in Nigeria. The NUC could mandate the Governing Councils and Managements of individual Universities to prohibit predatory publishing by faculties in their institutions. Institutions who do not obey such directives could be sanctioned appropriately by the NUC. Predatory publishers are in business because authors patronize them. Consequently, if authors are prohibited from predatory publishing, predatory publishers would run out of business. Institutions like Universities should not recognize and accept predatory publications for the promotion and reward of faculties. This will discourage faculties from publishing in predatory outlets. For academic librarians, aside from measures by the NUC and Universities, the Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN) could also play a role in dealing with predatory publishing. LRCN is a Federal Government agency that is responsible for the registration of librarians and library schools in Nigeria. It also accredits and regulates the activities of Library schools. It has powers to sanction erring librarians in the country. In the fight against predatory publishing, LRCN could de-register and revoke the certificate of registration of librarians who patronize predatory publishers and journals.

## Conclusion

The role of research and scholarship in knowledge creation and expansion, as well as in societal existence and development cannot be over emphasized. Institutions of learning exist for the purposes of research and scholarship. When the process of research and scholarly publication is compromised and corrupted, the existence of academics, the future of knowledge, institutions of learning and society are threatened. Though this paper addressed issues of predatory publishing among academic librarians in Nigeria, it also serves as a wakeup call on all stakeholders in the country to take necessary steps to curb predatory publishing and save the future of research and scholarship in the country. Academic librarians should serve as examples of intellectual honesty among their academic colleagues. Nigerian academic librarians should take the lead in the campaign against predatory publishing. They should not patronize predatory publishers and should discourage others from doing so. By so doing, they will help to preserve the posterity of research and scholarly writing in the country.

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