The Intercultural Communication Competence of International Students Using Social Media in China

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Abstract
Globalization and technology have significantly impacted the field of globalization. Complemented by the need to explore new opportunities, the need for education exploration in a foreign land has increased. China is among the most popular countries selected for further studies by international students. Numerous students from diverse cultures and backgrounds from across the globe move to China to pursue education. These students are believed to use social media and other forms of interaction to communicate with peers and their families back in their home country. With social media platforms being inseparable tools in the field of education, students seeking to acculturate and adapt to new cultures must build strong intercultural communicative competence to facilitate social integration and adaptation. Limited literature focuses on the intercultural communication competence of these international students using social media. Inadequate international communication competency, especially in China, can lead to communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. This paper investigates the intercultural communication competency of students using social media in China to identify factors contributing to or hindering students from effectively communicating and how to address such challenges. It adopts the content analysis methods from published literature and reliable sources to explore the gaps in the topic and recommend new strategies for improving international communication competency in the case of international students in Chinese institutions.

Keywords: intercultural communication competence, Acculturation, social media, social adaptation, Chinese Culture, and International students

I. INTRODUCTION (HEADING 1)
Technology advancement and the growth of E-commerce have significantly impacted education in the modern world. This growth and need for international skills in career portfolios have created a need to explore new opportunities and academic excellence by studying in foreign lands. China is among the most popular destinations for international students. According to the study published in the Journal of Studies of International Education, the number of international students moving to China has grown more than tenfold since 1995. The population grew from 36885 to 442,773, with most students coming from Asia by 2018, and this number continues to grow yearly (Redden). With a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds, Students in China often face communication barriers due to language differences which hinder their successful integration into Chinese society.

Extant literature shows that these international students opt to explore social media and other web-based platforms as an assisting tool for interaction with Peers and families back in their own country. With social media sites being the most common form of interaction for students to connect with friends and those at home, there is a great need for them to build intercultural communication competence to excel and fit with the Chinese institutions' expectations and expectations performance.

Inadequate or low intercultural communication competency in China can have demeaning and unintended negative effects that cause communication breakdowns and misunderstandings. Equally, according to Nseke (2018), social media choices are also limited since China restricts
some well-established and American-based platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, leaving space only for local social media platforms like WeChat, Weibo, and QQ (Redden). This further worsens the situation as students are expected to adapt to the Chinese Culture, including the country's approved social media platforms citing the need for researchers to develop proper approaches and strategies on how international students in China can sustainably adapt to the nation’s Culture and effectively communicate with the peers from other cultures across the globe. Social media is an inseparable tool for students seeking to acculturate with the Chinese institutions' way of life. However, this does not come without challenges, particularly in the Chinese environment. One common challenge affecting all the students is the choice and most effective form of communication they can collectively adopt to live comfortably in China. Local platforms in China emphasize group dynamics and collective identity, while Western platforms focus on self-expression and independence. The challenge of dealing with local platforms thus makes it imperative for students in this paper to identify factors that contribute to or hinder students from effectively communicating across cultures and also recommend ways through which students can learn and build competency in their international communication skills to navigate the challenges and fully acculturate for long-term education excellence.

Extant literature on Intercultural communication competency views it as the ability of individuals to interact and form positive relationships with people from other communities. In the international education realm, it refers to students being able to adapt, interact and build positive relationships with the natives and students from other areas of the world (IDUS – US). It is an intuitive process demanding a comprehensive understanding of cultural differences and mastering different communication styles that appreciate diversity and respect other people's cultures (Xiuwen & Razali, 2020). Therefore, students studying in China must identify possible barriers and build their communication competence through various means.

In the outline, this article provides an overview of intercultural communication competence (ICC) and showcases its importance in students' lives. It then highlights social media uses, particularly by international students in a foreign land, further exploring the barriers that hinder its effectiveness in establishing a social-media applied Intercultural communication competence. Finally, the paper will propose recommendations and measures which stakeholders can adopt to improve international communication competency for international students in Chinese institutions.

A. Background Information

China ranks among the top nations, and international students prefer further exploration of their academic careers. Numerous factors influence students' decisions to move to Chinese education institutions. The most common motivation factors are the reputation of Chinese schools, the economic factors and the preconceived low cost of living in China, and the generous scholarships offered in China to students from developing nations (Jiang et al., 2020). Another study linked the optimism of the growing Chinese hegemony in the international order and the potential for new economic cooperation between China and other countries (Akhtar et al., 2015). Students studying in Chinese society need more resilience and coping throughout their acculturation process as it is essential to build their intercultural communicative competence.

According to Xiuwen and Razali (2020), intercultural communicative competence is essential for students studying in overseas universities as it helps in the betterment of their academic achievement. Its importance and significance move beyond just achievements and allow students to participate in classwork with less pressure from a psychological and linguistic perspective. Students who experience barriers in their acculturation processes often develop negative attitudes and mental health problems. Equally, intercultural communication competence skills lead to a better understanding of content and coursework as students are able to consult with peers, lecturers, and advisors from the host country. Xiuwen and Razali (2020) use eight characteristics from Tseng and Newton's paper (2002) to classify an efficient international student. These entail a student who knows themselves and others, who build relationships, students seeking to expand their worldview, students who can ask for help, a student with the ability to develop social and cultural contacts, students who can build positive relationships with advisors and instructors, local language proficiency and also those who can let go or resolve conflicts or problems. All these dimensions describe the essence of ICC in the international education setting.
In the wake of technology, social media use is vastly embedded in the ICC concept. Numerous students in China use social media as a communication and learning tool. This paper seeks to evaluate how social media can be effectively adopted, to enhance its power in building strong ICC skills for students in Chinese institutions.

B. Problem Statement
According to Li (2015), international students in Chinese universities face numerous linguistic and cultural challenges. Due to inadequate knowledge and mastery of Chinese Culture and language, they interact less with the local people, leading to a shallow social-cultural understanding of China and its citizens. Over the years, Chinese schools have strived to offer preparatory language sources and orientation programs for entrant students, but these have had minimal fruits. With the rampant use of social media, students have sought to expand their circles with other international students causing a much deeper dilemma. Social media platforms have gained huge preference as communication channels globally (Jiang et al., 2020). Limited one-on-one dialogues with the local people drive students to use these platforms as the basic mean of cross-cultural communication. Numerous research has focused on Chinese students' integration into Western and Australian universities, but very few scholarly works focused on international students' integration within Chinese institutions (Nseke, 2018). There is thus a huge research gap on the topic of international students in Chinese institutions, particularly on the impact of social media use and how it impacts their intercultural communication competency and acculturation processes with the Chinese Culture and other peers' cultures. This necessitates more research on international students' patterns and cultural differences in using social media in China. According to Zhu and Krever (2016), there is also limited research on the factors contributing to or hindering effective intercultural communications in Chinese environments. Through this study, in-depth content analysis methods were used to examine various aspects of intercultural communication competence for the students using social media platforms in China and suggest the most effective ways and empowerment frameworks that can be used to promote communication competence among international students.

C. Originality
This study seeks to contribute to existing literature and create new insights into international communication competence, specifically for students in Chinese institutions. This research also targets to evaluate key challenges students face in integrating into Chinese society and their local social media profiles, thus recognizing the challenge and probable techniques they may adapt to cope and quickly integrate with the diversity. Major perspectives and concept definitions have been borrowed from existing research to build on this study's framework, methodology, and findings. The major objective of this paper is to explore and examine the theme of Intercultural communication competence (ICC), with a particular focus on international students in the Chinese institution and their choice of social media as a tool for communication and cultural integration. This will provide an in-depth understanding of the processes, means of use, challenges, benefits, and strategic approaches through which social media can enhance students' intercultural communication competence. Information and data for the research will be collected through content analysis methods. Thereafter, this publication will suggest potential strategic options students may adopt to advance their international communication competency and reap the benefits of their Chinese culture education. Also, it will assist in addressing the academic challenges and adaptation, socio-cultural adaptation, student readiness, and coping strategies. The article will give in-depth insight and knowledge to address the literature gap on knowledge on intercultural communication for educators, policymakers, and international students themselves.

D. Contribution To The Field And Profession Of Education
Education is important in any economy, and success comes when students are presented with conducive and supportive work environments. The findings of this research are of great importance as they will raise awareness of the challenges students face when interacting with peers from different cultures. Besides addressing the literature gap and limited scholarly work on this topic, the research will help educators, policymakers, and students formulate effective and evidence-based support policies and frameworks for student assistance, enabling students to balance their academic and social integration in the Chinese environment.
Equally, this research is important as it contributes to the field of education by recommending the most effective communication strategies in diversified and multi-culturally characterized environments. This can also inform institutions and educators to design interactive communication courses to build international students’ capacity and competence and prepare them with the experience to work and study in different cultural contexts. Overall, the paper will contribute to the field of research by providing powerful and strategic insights into the international communication competency of international students using social media in the Chinese environment.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Internet, Acculturation, And Communication Competence

The Internet is globally lauded due to its enormous capacity as a mass and interpersonal medium for communication. Internet and social media sites allow for the flow of information between individuals and masses at all levels, presenting a new chance for international students and immigrants to adopt social media tools and other web-based elements as a major form of communication in a foreign land. Kim et al. (2009) argued that the Internet provides smartphone-connected populations with invaluable platforms for cultural adaptation by allowing them to regain social capital or basic relational support. Effective technology use and coping mechanisms in new environments have been closely linked to a student's intercultural communication competence in the modern era (Chun, 2011). Intercultural communicative competence has in scholarly works been classified as a subfield of "communicative competence," meaning the ability of an individual or a student to change their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to acculturate through bonding and binding with other people’s cultures (Chen, 2022). Intercultural communication competency is an essential aspect of a globalized society, and technological advancements can be leveraged to help build students' confidence and competence. People need to learn ways to build relationships through transformative processes that inform their adaptive capacity, make flexible their perspectives, and effectively understand their host culture. International Cultural competence can be created through different approaches, such as participation in a cultural event, language classes, and cross-cultural dialogue with natives and local students.

The communicative competence concept is in history traced to the works of Hymes, who referred to it as the basic abilities speakers develop in their first language. This is reflected in his theory of communicative competence which reflected social interactions and communications of individuals within monolingual groups. Modern society's intercultural communicative competence doctrine builds around Hyme's concept of communicative competence combining linguistic, paralinguistic, extralinguistic, and sociolinguistic elements to form intercultural communication clearly (Bilge & Marino, 2018). Therefore, intercultural competence for international students must represent their abilities to master their host countries' language, Culture, and affective dimensions when communicating with the locals.

B. Definition Of Culture

According to López-Rocha and Vaile (2017), Culture refers to common values, behaviors, artifacts, beliefs, norms, and principles shared by a particular group of people. These beliefs shape individuals' attitudes, perceptions, behavior, and regulations in a society, thus impacting how they communicate and interact with others. In the context of intercultural communication competence and social media adoption, Culture is a critical concept explained by numerous theoretical frameworks.

Among the most used framework is Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory. The theory is a recognized framework that introduces different societal and cultural differences dimensions. These entail individualism, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, indulgence vs. restraint, and masculinity vs. femininity. According to theoretical arguments, all these aspects of Culture cause cultural differences between different societies or groups of people (Bilge & Marino, 2018). In relevance to this article, Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory helps to understand and analyze the cultural differences and elements impacted by social media use in the Chinese community. For example, power distance influences communication options and social media platform preferences for students in international students China. Equally, the doctrine of uncertainty avoidance helps establish the usefulness of rules of structures in Chinese Culture which may inform the patterns of social media use and communication for Chinese international students.
Similar to this theory, the concept of Culture in this article can be achieved using the communication Accommodation Theory, which argues that people must adjust and fit with the communication styles of the host culture to fit in the cultural norms of their interlocutors (Coperías Aguilar, 2002). This theory argues that for students to prevail and excel in the Chinese education system, the acculturation process is essential, which means adapting to the Chinese communication style, language use, and cultural context.

The international students are presented with the task and must live according to the Chinese ethos and Culture. Due to intercultural communication incompetency, most students' lives were confined within university settings. Cultural differences due to limited social media platforms and language create uneasiness among the students, further hindering the acculturation process (Jiang et al., 2020). For the Chinese universities case, adaptation is crucial for students as it also positively impacts their psychological wellbeing. Self-reflection and awareness of cultural biases and assumptions are essential to ethical associations. And students must explore available resources and training programs to navigate intercultural communication challenges effectively.

Xu (2022) argued that cultural differences and lifestyle changes in host countries often challenge students' acculturation process. Intercultural communication allows for the spread of information through different media platforms and among people from different social and cultural backgrounds and promotes common understanding among the users. Social media is globally applauded as a critical factor for successfully realizing the intended aims of intercultural communication and adaptation.

C. Intercultural Communication Competence In The Chinese Education Setting

López-Rocha and Vaile (2017) demonstrate the concept of Culture covering values, beliefs, practices, or customs shared by a particular group of people. The elements cover visible aspects such as food, clothes, and language, or intangible elements such as norms, beliefs, and values. China is known for its great cultural heritage and long history, which has significantly influenced its Culture, governance, and social practices (Li, 2015). The Chinese community is characterized by a strong emphasis on collectivism, family values, and respect for authority which presents a unique challenge to international students. Such cultural differences often lead to misunderstanding and communication barriers, limiting the international students' power, capacity, and speed to acculturate with the host government.

Acculturation processes are essential for students to settle and achieve their education goals in Chinese institutions. Therefore, students must develop intercultural communication competence to navigate such cultural differences and succeed academically. Coperías Aguilar (2002) argued that the Acculturation process precedes work or social excellence. The article defines acculturation as adapting to new cultures and learning the values and practices of the host society and those of fellow peers ailing from different parts of the world.

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) consists of various elements such as knowledge, empathy, skills, and attitudes that help students interact effectively and appropriately with people from diverse cultures. ICC is crucial for international students as it helps them fit into academic institutions and interact effectively with Chinese peers. One way social media may empower this is by offering platforms and processes through which students can practice and gain language proficiency skills, cultural knowledge, and communication skills. Social media also helps to enlarge the student's social circles in and outside the institution setting, further enhancing the knowledge, skills, empathy, respect, and positive attitudes, which a key to building relationships and resolving conflicts.

III. OBJECTIVES

Social media has become integral to society in the recent wake of science and technology. Its rampant application in educational institutions has led to scholarly concerns about how students can effectively use it for the acculturation and social adaptation processes. Chinese Culture is among the most complex settings. International students seeking to prevail in their academics must learn to adapt and explore the power of social media tools in their acculturation process. Chinese Culture is slightly different from the Western as a student pursuing Education in China must master their local language and way of living. Equally, Chinese laws have internet
restrictions on the famous and globally used social media platforms, leaving just a few options students can master and adopt. This study explores the concept of intercultural communication competence in the context of Chinese international students to recommend new ways through which students can explore social media to bypass cultural differences and language barriers when interacting and adapting to Chinese society or interacting with peers from other countries. Specifically, the article investigates existing barriers international students face while using social media and the strategies they may adopt to overcome these challenges, further enhancing intercultural communicative competence. The study will also add to the literature approaches for improving intercultural communication competence among international students pursuing academic excellence in a foreign land and how to achieve social success in the host country.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS
To accomplish the above objectives, this paper will answer the following research questions:
1. What is intercultural communication competence?
2. How do international students in China use social media to communicate with their peers?
3. To what extent does social media assist them in developing intercultural communication competence?
4. What challenges do they face throughout their acculturation process?
5. To what extent do international students perceive social media to help develop intercultural communication competence?
6. What available strategies can be applied to support social media-applied intercultural communication competence.

V. METHODOLOGY
This article's methodology adopted intense content analysis methods for data acquisition. The literature review was organized into two major approaches: a simple search for social media and its global association with intercultural communicative competence. The second inquiry method was an organized search in which the researcher obtained all helpful information on specific scopes such as Chinese acculturation, international students' data, and their choice of social media use.

A. Simple Search Inquiry Method
This research process sought to gather general information on the topic of intercultural communication competence. Important information gathered entailed summaries and brief theoretical aspects of intercultural communication competence, social media usage, concept definitions, cultural integration principles, and cultural integration, and basic mechanisms for coping and acculturation. The second inquiry method reviewed and excluded six articles during this stage.

B. Organized Literature Review Search
This method of inquiry followed a more complex process that entails vast and intuitive processes of planning, conceptualization, and specific information collection. The method verification and analysis used databases such as Google Scholar, Elsevier, ProQuest, and science direct. During this inquiry process, a sample of 30 papers was selected, evaluated, and tested by an in-depth reading of the abstracts, reviews, and introductions. However, 16 papers were established to be applicable for the usage in the article.

In general, the research process in this study focused on professional quality journals, articles, and texts, with the total number of sources N, being 22.

VI. FINDINGS
The analysis and literature review showed that technology and innovation have constantly impacted the field of education. There is a significant preference for Social media platforms among students in all foreign institutions. Social media plays a pivotal role in acculturation and social adaptation processes. According to Le Baron-Earle et al. (2009), social media use assists in developing intercultural communication competence among international students in China. The available social media platforms provide students with a medium for interaction with other students from other cultural backgrounds and also assist them in practicing the language skills of their host country.
The existing body of research and literature defines intercultural communication competence as students’ mastery of other cultures beyond just language proficiency. Competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with Chinese locals and other students from other nations with diverse knowledge, skills, attitudes, and cultural belonging. According to Jiang & Shypenka (2018), some major skills defining intercultural communication competence entail cultural awareness, empathy, flexibility, and adaptability.

A. Social Media Usage in China
Data from the reviewed literature shows that international students in China use social media in numerous ways. These entail communication, learning, entertainment, expression or visual interactions, video calls, research, and peer interactions (Ding, 2016). The most used social media platforms, including WeChat. This platform is commonly used in China, with minimal students using VPN networks to access internet-restricted platforms such as Facebook, Google, and Instagram. Usually, these platforms are used for communication, video calls, social networking, expression, and educational videos (Jiang & Shypenka, 2018). It can be argued that such actions and importance help develop intercultural communication competence. Through interactions, students enjoy the opportunities to practice language skills and learn about other people's cultural norms and customs. Social media is an important tool for students, especially in the Chinese school setting, since it also assists in keeping the students away from isolation and offers a medium for entertainment and growth.

B. Challenges Internation Students Face In The Acculturation Process
International students within Chinese universities often face numerous challenges in their efforts to acculturate with the Chinese way of life. These entail language barriers, cultural differences with specific expectations to adapt to Chinese customs and preferences, and the challenge of social isolation resulting from cultural and language barriers, which negatively impact their mental health and sometimes may lead to academic pressure.

Extant literature shows that language barriers greatly impact acculturation in the Chinese environment. Some scholars also argue that students often experience culture shock and sometimes discrimination which negatively impacts their psychological wellbeing. When the acculturation process encounters such barriers, it negatively impacts a student’s capacity and potential to develop intercultural communication competence.

Data from the reviewed sources depict social media as an important tool for aiding students' intercultural communication competence. As argued by O'Dowd, this is complemented by the use of the students' effectiveness, quality, content, and objective in their chosen platform. Most students describe social media as a convenient way to communicate and learn about peers' Cultures.

C. Strategies For Supporting Social Media-Applied Intercultural Communication Competence
Data from the survey shows that social media use builds intercultural communication competence for international students in China. Through platforms such as WeChat, students can interact and communicate with individuals from other backgrounds. However, a few challenges exist, such as inadequate knowledge of how to effectively and wisely use the platforms for the benefits of sustainable acculturation and academic excellence.

According to Liu and Lin (2016), several strategies can be applied to enhance social-media-applied intercultural communication competence. These may include intercultural training and resources, the building of intercultural awareness and sensitivity programs, and a supportive and inclusive social media environment. International students entering China to pursue their education goals must be prepared in advance and during their orientation programs to ensure they gain the knowledge and skills necessary to cope in their host environment. Promoting awareness and sensitivity will also ensure they can fully understand and appreciate other people's cultures, belonging, and norms (Gao & Hua, 2021). Some research showed that the acculturation process might also be negatively influenced by discrimination, and institutions in China and around the world strengthen the antidiscrimination policies based on any individual
identifying factors to create a welcoming and supportive space for all students to interact with their peers and understand the different cultures.

VII. DISCUSSION
From the vast amount of literature studies, intercultural communication competence is an important element of the globalized world, especially when it comes to the incidence of social media use in China. Li (2015) views it as the ability for one person to communicate properly without any subjective or objective bias to another person from a diverse cultural background. In their article, Hussain and Shen (2019) explain that social media facilitates intercultural communication competence by enabling students and users to communicate with peers, exchange information, and share experiences. Social media also presents an important platform for students to learn new information about their host countries’ cultures and customs. The most commonly available platforms students use include WeChat, Youku, Douban, and Sina Weibo. These are not globally available and are often programmed in the Chinese language. Though some have translation features, the internet restrictions for the most common platform used by international students present the most evident challenge to the student’s efforts to build intercultural communication competence in a Chinese environment.

International students in the Chinese environment are presented with a vital need to build strong intercultural communication to adapt effectively to Chinese Culture. Vast information gathered in this paper shows that students face numerous challenges in acculturating to the Chinese way of life. The major challenges include language barriers, cultural differences, and social isolation that comes with having to live confined lives around the university as they undergo language lessons and wait to fully acculturate to the host country’s way of life.

Most research focusing on the perceptions and feelings of the students in the Chinese setting show that they see social media tools as helpful platforms that assist their stay in the host countries. However, the effectiveness will depend on the nature and choice of the students using social media. Ding (2016) suggests proper guidelines and training for students on using social media for effective intercultural communication and learning.

VIII. CONCLUSION
A. General Implications
Social media plays a significant role in the acculturation process. This research reveals the Internet’s inseparable benefit to education coping and excellence. Students aiming to prevail and achieve excellence must therefore build their communication competence which incorporates understanding, empathizing, and communicating with peers from different cultural backgrounds. Social media channels in China aid communication, learning, entertainment, and also social-integration for students.

Data from reviewed literature shows a positive association between social media use and Intercultural communication competence, as students who constantly used social media platforms were proven to be more outspoken and integrated than others (Zhu Krever, 2016). They had much wider social circles, and friends, mostly acquired through online communication. Despite the Chinese Culture presenting innumerable challenges and barriers for the students’ acculturation process, social media played a critical role in overcoming these barriers, hence a need to empower and redefine the approach through strategic approaches. Social media helps build ICC, and thus institutions need to develop strategies to help students settle and develop a strong sense of belonging while in a foreign environment (Ding, 2016). These strategic approaches were established to provide language and cultural training, encourage cross-cultural communication and integration through cultural exchange events, and establish a supportive social media community for international students.

This paper on intercultural communication competence has numerous implications for stakeholders in higher education institutions, Chinese Government agencies, and international student service providers. The institutions in China must provide support and resources to help scholar beneficiaries and other international students develop intercultural competence. This could be achieved through cultural exchange events and language training models. The role of social media cannot be outweighed by its significance. The government needs to ease the ban on some social media platforms or implement policies that encourage social media platforms for cross-cultural communication (Xu, 2022). Finally, international student service providers must
incorporate social media training in their orientation programs to prepare students in advance before entering China.

B. Contribution and Relevance
Globally, the Internet and technology are revolutionizing the field of education and labor markets. The world is witnessing amazing opportunities where companies can recruit talents from any point and the globe and work remotely. This has only made the globe a small village demanding all students and employers to build professional-level intercultural communication competence. This article contributes to the existing body of literature on intercultural communication and the use of technology in cross-cultural communication. The discussions and findings provide insights into the challenges international students encounter throughout the acculturation processes and recommend ways social media can be adopted to overcome these challenges. The study findings shed light on the close association between international education, social media use, and cross-cultural communication, urging students to explore the benefits of social media in building interpersonal skills and understanding other people’s cultures and norms for overall career progression.

C. General Conclusions
This research on intercultural communication competence for international students using social media in the Chinese environment concludes that social media positively impacts students’ communicative competence development. The study established a positive association between effective social media use and international students’ acculturation in China. Throughout the literature review and analysis, various challenges international students face during acculturation have been identified. These entail language barriers, cultural differences, academic pressure, and isolation, negatively impacting their social integration opportunities and performance. The study proposed strategic approaches such as providing language and cultural training, antidiscrimination policies in the institutional setting, promoting cultural exchange events, and offering students a support social media community. The findings in this article have significant implications for all stakeholders, either at international higher education institutions, educators, or service providers who seek to empower and enhance the experiences of international students in China.

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