# EMBRACING
## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES
## DURING

# C VID-19

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**Chapter 6**

# THE MISINFORMATION ON COVID-19 NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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## INTRODUCTION

The main point for information is to provide idea for users as references. However, semantic attack can occur when users manipulate the originality of information and spread semantic information by various channel. This also happens for the misinformation about the novel coronavirus, ranging from conspiracy theories to unverified reports to malicious campaigns carried out by scammers and spread heavily over online. The term misinformation becomes essential for individuals' religionism since individuals' behaviour or attitude will be altered based on specific kind of information. In other words, the misinformation or fake news of coronavirus will definitely affect the preventive behaviour in curing the virus.

There are several explanations for misinformation. Firstly, misinformation can be explained as "false or inaccurate information, especially which is deliberately intended to deceive" that related to the level of truth (Kumar and Geethakumari, 2014). Besides, it also can be defined as "false reports of events, written and read on websites" (Vafeiadis et al., 2019). Furthermore, several past researches pointed that misinformation can discern as fabricated information that mimics news media content", "false information", as well as "news article that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers" (Lazer et al., 2018; Berthon and Pitt, 2018; Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Vafeiadis et al., 2019). However, misinformation can also be distinguished as "false and damaging information spread about the

organization, individual, product and brand" in crisis management terms since it aligns to hostile rumours (Vafeiadis et al., 2019; Coombs, 2007). Moreover, it can be differentiated into five variety for misinformation, namely: news satires, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, and advertising and propaganda (Tandoc et al., 2018). From an Islamic perspective, it is clear that fake news is prohibited and regarded as *haram* (sinful). The act of fake news and misinformation is criticized by the Prophet S.A.W in a hadith narrated by Huzaifah (RA), where the Prophet S.A.W said:

> *"The tale-bearer shall not enter Paradise." (Sahih Muslim, Hadith No. 105).*

Tale-bearer from this hadith refers to any claim or accusation made to humiliate, dishonour, disgrace or harm a person or a certain group that will lead to misfortune. Tale-bearer also includes writing fake news that are spread through mass media and so on. This is also in line with the statement of Allah SWT in the holy Quran:

> *"Satan only wants to cause between you, animosity and hatred." (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:91).*

> *"Indeed, those who came with falsehood are a group among you. Do not think it bad for you; rather it is good for you. For every person among them is what [punishment] he has earned from the sin, and he who took upon himself the greater portion thereof - for him is a great punishment. Why, when you heard it, did not the believing men and believing women think good of one another and say, "This is an obvious falsehood?" (Surah al-Nur, 24: 11-12).*
> *"Indeed, those who like that immorality should be spread [or publicized] among those who have believed will have a painful punishment in this world and the Hereafter. And Allah knows and you do not know." (Surah al-Nur, 24:19).*

The increasing number of social media users in Malaysia has proven that social media is the preferred platform that is being utilised not only by normal users but also by businesses that are interested in engaging their marketable activities. Specifically, in Malaysia, the increasing number of users has made social media able to channel a lot of benefits from marketing perspective. Despite the many benefits of social media for business and marketing perspective, the huge number of users compared to Malaysian population has led to speedy spreading the news or information. The sensational issues and misinformation tend to spread speedily. Table highlights total number of active mobile social media users in Asia Pacific from 2017-2019. Malaysia has remarked 24 million users in 2019 and expected to increase by end of the year 2020.

Table 6.1: Number of active mobile social media users in Asia Pacific from 2017 to 2019, by country (in million)

| Country | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|
| China | 896 | 911 | 1007 |
| India | 202 | 230 | 290 |
| Indonesia | 106 | 120 | 130 |
| Japan | 70 | 71 | 78 |
| Philippines | 57 | 62 | 72 |
| Vietnam | 47 | 50 | 58 |
| Thailand | 44 | 46 | 49 |
| South Korea | 42.75 | 43.04 | 43.66 |
| Pakistan | 29 | 32 | 36 |
| Bangladesh | 24 | 28 | 32 |
| Malaysia | 21 | 22 | 24 |
| Taiwan | 18 | 18 | 21 |
| Myanmar | 15 | 16 | 21 |

*Sources: Moore (2019)*

While the outbreak of COVID-19 remains, severe actions are being implemented throughout the world to grasp the threat of the disease to public health, the economy and life. Many countries, including Malaysia, are fronting the challenges in dealing with the spread of

misinformation or fake news via social media. Most people cannot differentiate between rumours and news which will lead to their action spreading the fake news.

## TRUST IN NEWS

News informs people around the globe and allow public engagement within democratic societies. Due to the engagement between news and democratic system, vast of research on both the credibility and trustworthiness of news has been carried out. Nowadays, development of the web is often overlapping the classifications and notions that is hard to untangle. In accordance with Kiousis (2001), many studies believe that trust and credibility is referring to the same meaning. Kohring and Matthes (2007) agreed that to form a united community, trust should be ultimately considered where it can be the main element together with informing the truth story, precision and impartially. Meanwhile, people perceive credibility of the news depending on the reputation of the organization itself. Lately, it has been proposed that the credibility of the network/platform of the correspondence affects the biased engagement of the viewer with the channel (Metzger et al., 2003). Consequently, particular viewers are focusing to press that they feel to be believable. Once individual viewer relies more on a selective communication medium for information searching, they are expected to amount the medium more credible than other media (Johnson and Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001). Despite the fact that trust in the news has been decreasing in many countries for quite some time, the rise in the amount of news available through the internet has resurrected anxieties on declining credibility and news value, and the potential harm to democracy that this might cause (e.g. Silverman 2015).

According to report by Statista (2019), 31% of adults in Malaysia trust the news/share information through media most of the time in February 2019. This can be seen that, almost half of the adults in Malaysia trust the credibility of the news shared by the media. As supported by Chung et al. (2012), who found that traditional

dimensions of credibility remain influential in all types of news, but for news offered by aggregator services, the presence of hypertext links, ranking, and limitless choices increased credibility.

The rapid development of social media has made this medium not only for accessing the news content but also become the main channel of the news (Vis, 2013). Thus, these changes, the skills on finding credible and reliable news are increasingly becoming vital, along with trust likely to form the choice people opt to use. In terms of how trust might shape how users steer this environment, Ladd (2011) claimed that those mistrust the news media tend to search for further information from opinionated sources, leading to a polarization of local sentiment that can be damaging to society.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PLATFORM IN SPREADING MISINFORMATION/FAKE NEWS

In Malaysia, the report said that social media is considered the main source of news, overtaking television, radio or print news in terms of reach among internet users (The Malaysian Time 2019). This proves that Malaysian people rely on social media in searching the news. Social media is the internet-based application channel that allow individuals to create and exchange information content and the core of social media that allow users to make communication and share information (Chen et al., 2015). Indeed, social media has great prospective role for information seeking and remarkable social change (Shah, 2012). However, misinformation is unrestrained on social media simultaneously (Mintz, 2012). Social media can also help unfold high quality and negatives messages and shed some mild on a precise theme or issue. Sharing information is less difficult than ever, as properly as discovering it. However, it is not surprised that social media has additionally been taken over by pretend news, myths or conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Typically, misinformation frequently utilized by governments and brands as a promotional tool to influence public judgement and

consumers (Berthon and Pitt, 2018; Lazer et al., 2018). Several past studies remarkable about occurrence of crisis-related misinformation sharing on social media such as misinformation about Ebola (Bessi et al., 2014; Oyeyemi, Gabarron, and Wynn, 2014). Unfortunately, misinformation can be related to daily life advice form and it repeatedly over a long period on social media. As a result, false information often goes viral after being debunked compared to correct information in social media (Friggeri et al., 2014; Oyeyemi et al., 2014).

Characteristics of social media become the advantages channel to spread misinformation. First of all, a lack of quality control mechanisms in social media towards information compare to traditional media (Chen et al., 2015). Furthermore, social media application able to circulate information including false information among users within effortlessly by clicking "share" button (Chen et al., 2015). In fact, misinformation on social media is capable to reach large auditions resulting confusion and anxiety among the public especially the current issues COVID-19. In summation, misinformation sharing in this study is defined as false information about COVID-19 be share from individual in social media. Moreover, to restraint the spread of misinformation about COVID-19, it is principle to apprehend the motivation driving the sharing of misinformation on social media. Due to the openness of the Web and proliferation of modern communication systems have resulted in the difficulty to determine who and what to trust online. The easily accessible and variety of information have also facilitated the manipulation and dissemination of unreliable information by irresponsible users which may eventually disrupt the safety and harmony of a society. There have been many instances, whereby the dissemination of unreliable information tarnishes individuals and organizations or causes public panic. Therefore, to safeguard the safety and harmony of a nation, public users need to be able to differentiate between the good information from the bad ones. In this case, verifying the perceived trustworthiness of information is one of the ways for users to differentiate between the good information from the bad ones.

Limited research still provides factors that motivate social media users to share information especially the topic related to COVID-19. Nevertheless, there are several past studies to identify the factors to motivate individuals towards social media usage (Chen et al., 2015). Although past studies investigate factors to usage of social media in various purposes, but potential motivational factors that provided from past studies still can provide significant insights such as study from Harridge-March Dunne et al., (2010) and Kim et al., (2010) regarding photo sharing in social media. Furthermore, motivation usage of social media to share news and mobile gaming information were investigated (Lee and Ma, 2012; Lee et al., 2010). Moreover, a study from Oh and Syn (2015) identifying factors motivate users to information share by comparing various social media platform. Similarly, these studies suggested the uses and gratifications (U&G) approach to identify individuals' motivation on social media usage (Chen et al., 2015; Lee and Ma, 2012, Park et al., 2009; Shao, 2009) and it found out noteworthy.

## FAKE NEWS OF CONORAVIRUS OUTBREAK IN MALAYSIA ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In Malaysia, fake news about COVID-19 outbreak, spurious antidotes and conspiracy theories were quickly spread on social media, contaminating the internet with a harmful dozen of disinformation. Fake news of the COVID-19 can be divided into 5 categories which are misinformation about MCO, misinformation about cure, misinformation about corona itself, misinformation about government incentive and misinformation about prevention. In one popular, but wholly false warning, a message circulated through WhatsApp's group regarding the MCO. The claim is often attributed to a friend or relative who "works for the government". As a result of uncontrollable of the fake news spread over the social networking sites (e.g. Social media, WhatsApp, blog etc), the Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) has advised the public not to be misled with the aid of rumours or faux

local news on social media on the novel coronavirus (2019-nCov). The use of WhatsApp and other apps to spread the bogus information is mainly concerned and difficult to control. The risks of misinformation can be enormously high, the terrible example happen in Iran should be treated as a very useful lesson learnt, where hundreds of people died after drinking industrial or bootleg alcohol following fake reports that it could cure COVID-19. When people do not have any experience or knowledge of a health risk, for instance, throughout an infectious disorder outbreak, they are more inclined to matter on mass media to learn about the dangers. In this case, verifying the perceived trustworthiness of information is one of the methods for users to differentiate between the accurate information from the terrible ones. Figure 6.1 shows examples of fake news on coronavirus.

Indeed, the misinformation particularly on COVID-19 can have major impacts because people make decision based on the information they received. People form an idea about other people or situation by obtaining information. According to Oh et al., (2015) the media can influence public perceptions of risk issue, especially on the pandemic disease. Chong and Choy (2018) added that the risk information is formed on how people view it, and this affects the people risk's perception. The first impact on spreading fake news is they create fear and anger. Researchers have acknowledged that scared people have tendency to perceive greater risk because they have ability to sense and do not enough control over their conditions (Lerner et al., 2003; Lerner and Keltner, 2000, 2001). In contrast, angry individuals tend to be optimistic towards a possible risk because they can control the situation (Lerner et al., 2003). One study by Ofoghi et al., (2016) found that during Ebola outbreak, people expressed their anger and fear through consistent post out in
social media. As a result of this, it creates an intense emotional response.

Another worrying fake news regarding COVID-19 is about potential cures. Many unethical sellers selling a product which they claimed can cure the virus. And even worse, the Corona test-kit which the seller claim people can test whether they have positive/negative Corona or not at home. Not just that, many sellers take advantage

of this pandemic by selling an unacceptable price for face mask and hand sanitiser. These two hot products are mostly sold out even the price beyond the price market. Instead of demand on face mask, the world is shocked by having a flood of 'new' brand of sanitiser in the market. The seller keeps fooling the customer by promoting the product is good than other existing product like Dettol etc.



Source: Ministry of Malaysia Health Portal
Figure 6.1: Examples of fake news

## IMPACT OF MISINFORMATION OF CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK ON ECONOMY

The social media aspects are not only achieving the objectives of spreading the news; the economy has also felt the impact of speculations and misrepresentation of COVID-19 pandemic. Considering how financial markets work, with investors building their judgments on whether to trade or not on information, information available must be trustworthy, reliable and accurate (Hirst, 2017). Some news seems so implausible that they must be fake, but they often impair with real and trust element to create doubt in reader minds and it can give an impact on the economy as well (Roozenbeek and Van Der Linden, 2019).

Fake news articles can directly cause a company's share price to tumble. The damage has already been severe and has reached into a surprising array of sectors. The markets responded negatively to the sharp uptick in coronavirus cases worldwide, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) falling more than 1,000 points in February 2020. The news claimed that the company had lost assets and sales fell sharply. This led to reputational damage and a fall in the company's stock price (Ma et al., 2019).

Even though it is hard to predict the future especially on the stock market, recent study by Carlsson-Szlezak et al., (2020) indicate that there is a direct relationship between the stock market and major health issues such in COVID-19 pandemic. According to Orlik et al., (2020), the fiscal effect could include downturns in the U.S., euro-area and Japan, the lengthiest expansion on record in China, and a total of USD2.7 trillion in lost output. This is equivalent to the entire GDP of the U.K. If it is added to fake news about the company's losses, fake investors perception and other asymmetric information, the amount of the losses will increase and more than USD2.7 trillion.

## Economic cost of 'fake news,' in billions
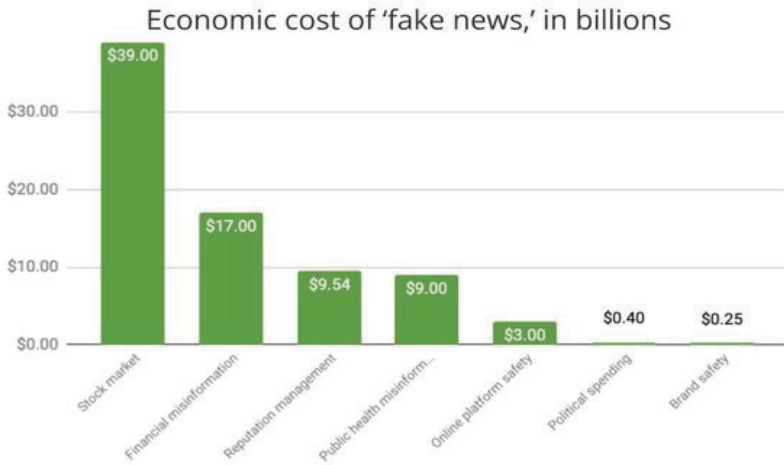


Source: CHEQ. Method = economic analysis conducted by the University of Baltimore.

Figure 6.2: Economic Cost of 'Fake News' in Billions

Based on Figure 6.2, a study by CHEQ AI Technologies Ltd with the University of Baltimore (Sullivan, 2019), which concluded that the outbreak of online fake news now costs the global economy USD78 billion annually. The report, which analyses the direct economic cost from distrust news, also reporting the impact of fake news towards the loss of stock market which estimated market value about USD39 billion a year, followed by financial misinformation value of about USD17 billion, reputation management (USD9.54 billion), public health misinformation (USD9 billion), online platform safety (USD3 billion), political spending (USD0.4 billion) and brand lose about USD235 million annually from unknowingly running ads alongside fake news. The spread of misinformation and fake news among the world's top global risks as reported in the World Economic Forum Analysis in 2 years back.

# IMPACT OF MISINFORMATION OF CORONOVARIS ON EXPENSES/FINANCIAL

In dealing with the outbreak of COVID-19 consumers face an incredibly challenging financial environment. Hence, the government has introduced the "Pakej Ransangan Ekonomi Prihatin Rakyat" (PRIHATIN) launched by the Prime Minister of Malaysia on 27th March 2020. PRIHATIN is expected to give a positive impact on the national economy and financial systems. Through the PRIHATIN package, people can breathe a sigh of relief with the implementation of the "Bantuan Sara Hidup" (BSH) as called financial moratorium. The financial moratorium is introduced to ease the economic burden of the people as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. The RM250 billion PRIHATIN package benefits everyone. RM128 billion or 51.2 per cent was channelled to protect the welfare of the people. In this regard, the benefits gained should be used as much as possible to modify the family economy and personal finances. This PRIHATIN package is a gift from a government dedicated to the needy.

While facing the COVID-19 outbreak, consumers are advised not to make a panic buying. Panic buying is the excessive purchase which does not only cause others to miss out on their essentials products but also hurts the suppliers to produce more products to cater to the market demand (Rui Zheng et al., 2020). Having the wrong information especially on MCO, people rush to the malls to do panic buying as a preparation of lockdown. They buy all the foods without noticing the expired date (eg. bread) and shelves are empty. Having this kind of behaviour, it is indirectly affecting the financial of the family and a lot of food waste is being dumped into the dustbin. Worrying on this issue, Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyidin Yasin convinced citizen that the stock of controlled goods, food and basic goods are sufficient from time to time and even during 'lockdown' or inbound and outbound restrictions, consumers can still go out and buy only 'essential' items at mall. The order has been given to the head of the family to carry out the duty for the purchase during the MCO period. Moreover, panic purchases expose consumers to market

manipulation. This could cause the market price to be unstable due to the manipulation of manufacturers that produced consumer goods (Bordo and Haubrich, 2017).

In addition, consumers need have a priority on the need over the spending by managing their financial planning effectively. This can be done by taking steps to understand the importance of expenditure and also able to distinguish between wants and needs (Carpena et al., 2019). The head of the household should have a good financial plan in managing their expenditure list. A good spending practices should be implemented to ensure that financial resources are not wasted. Some economic theories say that human wants are infinite. However, the financial capabilities are limited (Daniel et al., 2014). Therefore, good household financial planning should be in line with existing sources of income. The expenditure incurred in excess of the source of income affordability puts the household economy in a deficit or financial inadequacy. This can be overcome by implementing "reasonable" financial decisions before any expense is incurred.

Financial reasoning involves a financial planning framework with objective purchases. The objective purchase is to consider the benefits of the purchase made as well as the short-term and long-term impact of the expenses involved (Lusardi and Mitchell, 2014). List below is steps in managing the financial during the Covid19 pandemic outbreak:

1. First, determine the purpose of the purchase and expenditure. The goal of a purchase and expenditure must be set in advance to prevent leakage in the source of the specified financial allocation. The goal of buying a product can be either long term or short term.

2. Second, list all the goods and necessities that one wants to buy. The listing should be based on the priority and importance as well as the uses of the purchased item. Examples are purchases for personal or household use. This needs to be carefully planned and listed before spending to avoid wasting financial resources.

3. Third, provide a financial budget for all items listed for purchase. At this stage, adjustments to the financial budget should be made to determine the most important items to buy. Elements of wants will need to be set aside in the preparation of financial budgets.
4. Fourth, filter the items listed by examining the availability and adequacy of financial resources. There may be a few things that need to be removed from the purchase list in order to lead to more important and timely purchases. Filtering the buying list is important to ensure that purchases made are prudent and beneficial to all household members.
5. Fifthly, during the purchase, the head of the household must adhere to the list of manufactured goods as well as the specified financial allocation. Purchases are only made on pre-determined items based on budget. This is important to ensure that the planned financial efficiency is realized properly. In the event of receiving expenditure receipt, the expenditure must be recorded so that financial and cash flows can be controlled to plan for future expenses.
6. Finally, once all the planned expenses have been realized, the spending track method must be implemented. The expense tracking is a measure of the effectiveness of expenditure made to ensure that the goods purchased provides the proper value for each spending. This is important to assure there is no waste on the goods purchased, as well as a guide to planning financially for household needs (McGregor et al., 2009).

In conclusion, household financial planning is important under any circumstances. This is especially imperative during the COVID-19 outbreak that the country and all of us are facing today. It is hoped that good financial planning practices in the households will help to stabilize the family economy, maintain harmonization in the market and most importantly prevent households from facing financial deficit issues.

## THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Even though the number of cases is relatively small but it is quite alarming pertaining to misinformation of fake news in Malaysia. Table 6.2 illustrates the number of cases and the status of cases reported by MCMC. In terms of enforcement, MCMC as government agency, play their role to monitor and investigate all the activities involving internet misuse including misinformation in social media through the provision of Section 233 of the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Act 1998.

Table 6.2: The number of fake news regarding COVID-19 that reported by MCMC in Malaysia on 26 May 2020

| Status of cases | Figure |
| --- | --- |
| Under investigation | 179 |
| Discharge from court | 30 |
| Warning given | 11 |
| Pleaded guilty | 18 |
| **Total** | 238 |

*Sources: Tan and S.Bedi (2020)*

Misinformation of COVID-19 in social media has affected people in Malaysia such as panic buying at earliest phase of MCO among society in Malaysia. It is a challenge not just for government but all of us in helping the government to overcome this issue. One of the strategic weapons to fight against this misinformation is by educating and raising awareness among the public. The public need to be informed the risk of spreading the fake news especially via social media. The campaign launch by government to check whether the news is valid or fake need to be inculcated in Malaysian culture as a habit and practice. Other parties like university need to play their role and its responsibility in helping the government agency to educate the public. People need to be encouraged by applying critical judgement to any information they come across social media. This approach is vital to

enduring efforts in dealing with misinformation in the age of social media and messaging apps, as the reality of these platforms demands for greater digital literacy. Continuous effort from all parties is needed in overcoming the misinformation in social media. Simple practices should be promoted, such as checking whether the information come from a valid source and legitimate website or social media. If one is not sure about the information after doing necessary checking, then do not share. Everybody should play their role in practising this.

Based on to above statement, it is worth to emphasize that everybody should avoid any form of fake news and misinformation. Fake news or called as slander (fitnah) in Islam is asleep as being mentioned by the Prophet SAW:

*"Fitnah is asleep. Allah SWT curse those who wake it up" (Narrated by al-Rafi'e in al-Amali, 2/83).*

In countering fake news, one should remember Allah and always worship to Him. Therefore, it is constantly encouraged to pray to God to avoid slander (fitnah), among them:

*There is no god but Allah, the Great, the Tolerant, there is no god but Allah, the Lord of the Magnificent Throne There is no god but Allah, the Lord of the Heaven and the earth, the Lord of the Edifying Throne." (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith No.: 6345 and Sahih Muslim, Hadith No.: 2730).*

*"O Changer of the hearts, make my heart firm upon Your religion." [Imam Ahmad (Hadith No.: 12107), Sunan al-Tirmizi (Hadith No.: 2140), al-Baihaqi in Syu'ab al-Iman (Hadith No.: 757) and al-Tabarani in al-Du'a (Hadith No.: 1261)].*

*"O Allah, we make Thee our shield against them, and take refuge in Thee from their evils." (Sunan Abi Dawud, Hadith No.: 1537).*

*"O Allah! Thy mercy is what I hope for. Do not abandon me to myself for an instant, but put all my affairs in good order for me. There is no god but Thou." (Sunan Abi Dawud, Hadith No.: 5090).*

*"O Allah! Indeed, I ask of You, the doing of good deeds, avoiding the evil deeds, and loving the poor. And when you have willed Fitnah for your slave, then take me to You, without making me suffer from Fitnah." (Jami' al-Tirmidhi, Hadith No.: 3233).*

*"O Allah, You are my `A ud and You are my Helper, and by You do I fight." (Jami` at-Tirmidhi, Hadith No.: 3584).*

This article will end with the following supplication from al-Quran:

*"Our Lord, make us not [objects of] trial for the wrongdoing people. And save us by Your mercy from the disbelieving people." (Surah Yunus, 5: 85-86).*

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