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Challenging Times of COVID-19 Pandemic: Social Media Infodemic

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Abstract

During challenging times of COVID-19 individuals were frequently sharing huge volume of information through Social Media without any validation of information. This may indicate that social media users had lack of clarity about COVID-19 pandemic, whether information was factual or accurate. In the COVID-19 pandemic, investigator posed various probe related with COVID-19 information such as information trust on COVID-19 related news or posting on Social Media, or are individuals' reliant on social media for COVID-19 pandemic information, how they do retort to false news and misinformation and did they ever shared any information related with COVID-19 on any social media platforms. The current study finds that majority of individuals indeed relied on Facebook and Twitter concerning the COVID-19pandemic information. Moreover, the study revealed that vast majority of respondents indicated that they strongly believed information was not accurate in nature and few souls had faith on the information related with COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas, this research also indicates that during challenging time of COVID-19 pandemic, respondents strongly believed that traditional media platforms played more powerful role disseminating the accurate COVID-19 information. While this investigates also showed that respondents still employ social media as main resource of COVID-19 and users were still relaying on information which were being shared by individuals on social media platforms. The respondents strongly suggest that there showed be strong mechanism or regulation should be in place to eliminate the menace

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of fake news and disinformation on social media platforms. The current study's respondents believed there should be mechanism to deploy gatekeeping tools on stopping fake news so that individuals may not share inaccurate information social media platforms without validation.

Keywords: Social media, Infodemic, Misinformation, COVID-19 Pandemic, Youth, Effects

Introduction

Social media has taken center stage in terms of fast medium to share information around the world. The debate on pros and cons of social media are never endings, whether its benefit for reaching large audience in within seconds or cons like mental health challenging it created for younger who are addictive to social media.

In this cutting-edge technology century has certainly changed the individual's information or media content consumption in terms of online communication modes. The novel digital media like social media has been source of health information for individual person and offering intersect to observe read their worries, privates or health, wellbeing or illness. As individual folks are now sharing their daily health related postings with inquiry or experience as these information sharing can garner great research insights related with health challenges of individual.

Information on digital internet platforms like Twitter has been utilized recent year to develop health models and create irresistible sickness episodes, an area known as infodemology commonly known as infotainment (Mavragani A., 2020, Baines et al., 2021). At the initial stage of COVID-19 pandemic, World Health Organization's (WHO) the Director-General, Tedros Adanom Ghebreyesus, declared that they are not only facing challenges of pandemic but rather challenges of Infodemic is biggest threat to derail managing the pandemic effectively.

The Infodemic neologism brought new dimension and WHO was require to overcome the utilization of COVID-19 term, knowing that any misadventures in the current time, may not be forgiven or forgotten. Particularly social media is very challenging platforms of where conspiracy theory can take no time to spread like wildfire while genuine information will be buried by barrage of Infodemic information (Cinelli et al., 2020, Van Der Linden et al., 2020).

During COVID-19 pandemic, citizens were under great distress, so WHO warned that "infodemic" on pandemic with fakes news were presented as real world and backed up by half cooked data or some casual remarks of any organization will sure generate absurd information for public to make decision (Cinelli et al., 2020). Thus, resultantly it will severely compromise the decision making of power public on health or COVID-19 based on "infoodemic". The information bombardment on COVID-19, as most of information were not trustworthy but they spread like wildfire

and consequently generating hardship for the health managers to decide key issue related with COVID-19 pandemic management. The term "infodemiology" in 2002 has been attributed to renowned scholar Günther Eisenbach (Eysenbach G., 2011, Patwa et al., 2021). The terminology of "infodemiology" has been as "examination of the determinants and spread of clinical records and deception". This operationalization of term has generated insight for wellbeing experts, patients or health managers to organize the data on web.

The term "infodemic" can be further best explained, a large volume of information about an issue and which is usually unreliable, spread like wildfire in virtual world or in physical world consequently solving issue is very challenging. As this explanation indicates that infodemic creates very challenging environment for health managers or individuals at risk and can jeopardize the wellbeing of an individual. Furthermore, the infodemic can also effects on health experts or health managers casting doubt on their minds about pandemic, which may affect their decision making on pandemic decision.

Significance of the Study

This study is important for students, Social Media Users in phrases of knowing related to the new aspects of social media Infodemic and Misinformation. Findings of the study will help not only individuals but social media content developers, digital advertising and promotion agencies to bring content wise improvements. Academia and Universities are also the intended beneficiaries of tis study in terms of addition to mass media research. Alsothe research study will unveil the facts to users who blindly trust social Media Information without any authentications. Current study will be n addition to the research on social media misinformation.

Objectives of the Study

The Objectives of the study are as following:

1. To determine the use of social media to obtain Information about COVID-19 Pandemic.

2. To Asses the reliability and trust on social media to access information about COVID-19 Pandemic.

Literature Review

With advance of digitization of society as well advancement in the internet technology has rapidly changing communication modes of individuals in our society and has now greater reliance on social media for information. These social media platforms can provide information at rapid pace which humanity has not witnessed before, however, as like any other technology the information can dangerous and may contain fake, false, disinformation and may deliberately mislead the its receiver. Thus, individuals at greater risk of his health due these challenges of infodemic of health-related message as it was observed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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The WHO noted that SARS-CoV-2 infection pandemic was also serious threat for individuals (WHO, 2020).

Whereas, COVID-19 pandemic, it was observed that infection was spreading, however disinformation risk was also high as individual organizations or governments data were considered not reliable thus, disinformation was on rife.

Consequently, WHO, was very concerned with disinformation, as organization WHO developed academic term "Infodemic" with emphasis on taking on disinformation on digital media or social media. The truth must be informed to public as today there is greater penetration of social media in the society and citizens now more relay on social media than tradition media for information needs. It was evident during COVID-19 pandemic or any emergency, citizens heavy relied social media for health information.

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and others provide opportunity its consumer to upload variety of content, mostly without checks, as it may include fake information, lies, gossip, disinformation or unverified information. The sheer scale of organized disinformation spread through social media was simply extraordinary.

Often relevant health management organizational communicate the elements of threat to health of individual or specially dreaded elements of diseases during health emergencies, as it was also evident the infodemic during COVID-19 . The WHO also considered that plague of infodemic on health information is very serious challenge for humanity and as human individual have now multiple news information of traditional and nontraditional news resources, however, challenges from communication gap has evolved to infodemic as discriminate the valid and reliable information may be very challenging for common citiziens (Hao and Basu., 2020, Melki, J. et al., 2021).

There were hardly reliable information available online platforms as it was witnessed during COVID-19 pandemic, particularly region like Sindh province of Pakistan. Therefore, the present research investigates how individuals in Sindh province of Pakistan received information on COVID-19 pandemic and how much individuals trust and relay on online digital platforms related with COVID-19.

Methodology

The research of quantitative methods offer objective assessments and deploy rigors and robust statistical or numerical analysis of data collected through survey mainly deploying questionnaires instruments or by analyzing the secondary data by employing computational techniques.

The strength of quantitative research is offer external validity on the sampled

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:		
Male	112	56.0
Female	88	44.0
Total	200	100.0
Age:		
18-25	170	85.0
26-30	15	7.5
31-40	15	7.5
Total	200	100.0
Education:		
Intermediate	50	25.0
BA,BS	129	64.5
M.A and Above	21	10.5
Total	200	100.0
Profession:		
Student	161	80.5
Unemployed	3	1.5
Job	36	18.0
Total	200	100.0
Income:		
10 Thousand- 30 Thousand	35	17.5
30 Thousand- 50 thousand	13	6.5
Above	16	8.0
No	136	68.0

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Total	200	100.0
Experience:		
No experience	142	71.0
1-5 years	18	9.0
6-10 years	40	20.0
Total	200	100.0

respondents on the population of study or providing understanding of phenomenon in question (Babbie, Earl R., 2010). Therefore, present study also used quantitative methods since its appropriate methods for currents as this study used Descriptive Survey Research Design.

The non-probability sampling offers various type of technique and convenience sampling is one of its popular technique where the research has liberty to select sample respondents who are easily accessible and available. Thus, convenience sampling, offer the research on the accessibility of sampled with sampled research framework (Babbie, Earl R., 2010). The present study also find convenient sampling technique was suitable for current, so therefore, study also deployed convenient sampling technique.

Population

The universe of current study consists of the individuals living in Qasimabad, which is density populated administrative Taluka of Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan.

Sample

The research collected total 200 respondents sampled from the Taluka Qasimabad, Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan.

Sample Size

The data was collected through survey methods to investigate opinions of respondents about Social Media platforms Infodemic during COVID pandemic in Sindh, Pakistan.The principle objective of current research was to determine the usage of social media for obtaining the COVID-19 pandemic information. A number of 200 citizens were selected from Hyderabad for data collection.

Data Collection

Data was collected through close ended questionnaire from 200 hundred

respondents.

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed through latest version of Special Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate valid and reliable results.

Data Tabulation and Analysis

The present research opted for standard and relevant demographic profiling of respondents and consequently collected information of Age, Education Level, occupation, revenue stream of respondents along with experience.

The total 200 respondents were part of this study and whereas gender wise total 112 were male participants while 88 were female respondents as exhibited in the Table 1. Most participants of the current investigation were in the age bracket group of 18-25 years (85%), while very meager 7.5% participants were of 26-30 age bracket group and remaining 7.5% were in the age group of 31-40 years.

The participants of this study also revealed various level of their education. The majority respondents were highly literate as 64.5% had B.A/BS degree beside 10.5% had M.A and above education. While 25% respondents had intermediate qualification.

The participants were also probed about their occupation and it was revealed that large number of this study were students (80.5%), however, 1.5% were presently not employed and 18% had various jobs occupation.

In connection to occupation participants were also probed about level of their income. As indicated above that majority of respondents were students so consequently following information revealed the income level. Study revealed that only handful of participants this research had income of 10 Thousand- 30 Thousand (17.5%), whereas 6.5% participants had income in between 30 Thousand to 50 Thousand while only 8% had thirty thousand monthly income. Since this study had majority respondents were students so these 68% participants revealed zero income of their own and are dependent on parents for expenditure.

The data exhibited in Table 1, majority had no part time or full jobs, thus 71% participants noted down that they no work experience of any nature. Whereas, only 9% of participants had 1-5 years of work experience while on 10% participants had 6-10 years of work experience.

Table 1, is presented with detail inside of demographic profile of respondents' result.

Social Media participation

The study showed that 200 respondents had participation on the social media as they had accounts on these digital platforms, while most of 81% participants are regular user of social media, however, 19% participants are occasional user of social media (as exhibited in Table 2) and it is quite evident almost total participants were

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users of social media (Feiling et al., 2021).

Table 2: Social Media Participation

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Account on Social Media		
Yes	200	100.0
No		
Usage Social Media		
Yes	162	81.0
Sometimes	38	19.0
Total	200	100.0

Pattern of Usage of Various Social Media platforms

The research also targeted social media users' preference of current study. Thus, study in connection probe user about preference of digital media platforms for news and information in the COVID-19 pandemic (Himelein-Wachowiak et al., 2021). While research offered multiple choice of their preferred digital media in the instrument so these number may depict discrepancy or overlapping.

The research discovered that 81.5% participants preferred Facebook to use, while 68% respondents like to use Instagram, moreover, twitter users were 56.5% and 75% are users of YouTube for news and information during pandemic COVID-19. The details are exhibited in following Table 3. AQ

Table 3: Various Preferred Social Media Usage

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	163	81.5
Instagram	136	68.0
Twitter	113	56.5
YouTube	150	75.0

Sharing of COVID-19 pandemic Information.

The participants were probed on information sharing with friends on social media platforms related with COVID-19 pandemic. The participants of this study were probed about opinion on posting on social media of COVID-19 information and news rattled the citizens with distress and dread. Moreover, respondents were also probed about most effective information category on social media generating the most fearful impact on its users. The results indicated that 39% participants of the study did shared COVID-19 pandemic affiliated information with friends on social media, whereas 17.5% offered not share information on this issue, while 37% did share occasionally, however 6.5% never shared as exhibited in Table 4.

In continue with the research objective, the participants were probed about most effective media category (e.g. text, pictures and graphic) of information impressed them through social media positing rather rattled them.

The participants; opinion on the above mentioned probed of effective media category were as 12.5% opted for text, while 17.5% find pictures are more effective while majority 66.5% declared videos are most potent category on social media to generate dread element on its users (Scheutez et al., 2021, Cinelli et al., 2020).

The participants were further probed on the surges of news affiliated with COVID-19 pandemic posted on social media spread fear and panic among masses. The 34% respondents positively agreed that social media posts do generate fear and panic among masses while 19% disagree with this notion whereas 42.5% respondents said occasionally. Besides, only 4% respondents were strongly disagreed that social media has any negative impact on users. It is evident that majority of participants do agree that social media does generate dread image of COVID-19 among citizens (exhibited in Table 4).

Table 4: Social Media Posting and Sharing Information

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
SocialMedia Sharing of COVID-19related informationwith friends		
Yes	78	39.0
No	35	17.5
Some time	74	37.0
Never	13	6.5
Total	200	100.0

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Category of information on Social Media with the most impact		
Text	25	12.5
Pictures	35	17.5
Videos	133	66.5
Graphics	7	3.5
Total	200	100.0
Social Media posting: News related to covid-19 on has spread fear and panic among the public		
Yes	69	34.5
No	38	19.0
Sometimes	85	42.5
Never	8	4.0
Total	200	100.0

Content Satisfactory on Social Media

The content satisfaction is prime goal of al media whether traditional or nontraditional media. Therefore, present did probe on content satisfaction of users on social media allied with COVID-19 and beside they were also probed trust on these materials available on social media. Furthermore, respondents were explored with ever available information on social media must be implored or not.

The results as indicated in Table 5, pointed out that 24.5% respondents agreed that content available on social media does satisfy information needs of users. Whereas, 26% disagreed and 2.5% strongly opposed with notion of users' satisfaction

with online content of social media related with COVID-19. While 47% of respondents agreed that social media content related with COVID-19 occasionally satisfied them.

The respondents were explored level of trust on social media content or information. The results exhibited that only 21% trust on social media content, while majority 63.5% only occasionally has faith on content of social media whereas 12.5% do not have faith on content beside 3% has strong distrust on social media content (Drouin M. et at., 2020).

This research also looking dynamics of social media ever available information bombardment and how does users see this phenomenon of ever-present information available through social media. The respondent opinion on this phenomenon was that, 42.5% do aspire for 24 hours available and have issue with it, while 38.5% are hesitant with occasionally like this phenomenon. Besides, 15.5% respondents are not comfortable with the phenomenon and 3.5% hardliners are strongly disliked with this phenomenon and never want this available to them in every second. Findings are exhibited I the below Table 5.

Table 5: Social Media Page Content Satisfactory

Variable	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Content on social media pages, groups, and accounts related to covid-19: Satisfaction of users		
Yes	49	24.5
No	52	26.0
Sometimes	94	47.0
Never	5	2.5
Total	200	100.0
Trust on News and information on social media sites		
Yes	42	21.0
No	25	12.5
Sometimes	127	63.5

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Never	6	3.0
Total	200	100.0
Phenomenon of 24 hours information available on the social media to us.		
Yes	85	42.5
No	31	15.5
Sometimes	77	38.5
Never	7	3.5
Total	200	100.0

Trust and reliance on Covid-19 Pandemic Information available on Social Media

In this category, respondents were probed about their reliance on social media and trust level. They were further probed on their role of publishing fake news or spreading disinformation related with COVID-19 on social media. Besides, respondents were also explored for their opinion on fakes news spreading social medial on covid-19 pandemic.

The Table 6 shows the results that 31.5% respondents have faith and have reliance on Twitter for news and information about COVID-19 pandemic. While 37% respondents have trust and reliance on Facebook, whereas 11% participants reliance and trust on Instagram. Furthermore, 20.5% respondents have faith and reliance on YouTube (Chhachhar et al., 2022).

It was also revealed that 33% respondent have contributed information and news associated with COVID-19 on social media during the pandemic, whereas 19% contributed occasionally while 41.5% did not posted and 6% respondents stated never in life.

The 57% participants blamed that fake news was spread through social media associated with covid-19 pandemic, but 30.5% mentioned occasionally social media is involved in the spreading fake news related with social media. While 11.5% respondents does not agree with notion that social media was spreading fake news associated with COVID-19 and only 1% strongly disagree with notion as exhibited in Table 5.

Cross tabulation of Gender wise usage of Social Media

The cross-tabulation Data as exhibit in the Table 6 shows 92 male respondents were regular users of social media whereas 70 women participants were regular users of social media regularly. However, 20 male participants were occasional users of Social Media and 38 women were also occasional user of social media

Table 6: Gender Wise Social Media usage cross tabulation

	Social Media usage gender wise		
	Yes	Sometimes	**Total**
What is your gender?			
Male	92	20	112
Female	70	18	88
Total:	**162**	**38**	**200**

Age wise Social Media Usage cross tabulation

The age wise social media usage responses were grouped and as exhibited in the Table 7. The findings disclose that most of users of social media falls in the age group of 18-25 years, whereas age group of 26-30 and 31-40 are less enthusiastic user of social media (Marco-Franco et at., 2021, Ceron et al., 2021).

Table 07: Age wise social media uses cross tabulation

	Age wise use of Social Media among respondents		**Total**
Age Group	Yes	Sometimes	
18-25 years	134	36	170
26-30 years	14	1	15
31-40 years	14	1	15
Total	162	38	200

Education wise social media usage cross tabulation

The Table 8 highlighted social media usages with education level. The 129 respondents have BA, BS level of education and from this level of education holder were regular user of social media. While, in this group 20 used social media

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occasionally. The 50 respondents hold intermedia qualification and from this category 33 are regular follower of social media whereas 17 were occasional users. The last highest qualification category respondents of MA and above were only 21 respondents and 20 respondents were regular followers of social media while one was occasional users of social media.

Table 8: Education Level Wise Social Media usage cross tabulation

	Education Level Wise usage of Social Media		**Total**
	Yes	Sometimes	
What is your education?			
Intermediate	33	17	50
BA, BS	109	20	129
MA and above	20	1	21
Total	162	38	200

Covid-19 related information sharing on Social Media cross tabulation:

Covid-19 related information sharing on Social Media, has been grouped in the Table 9. Findings indicated that 70 participants shared Covid-19 related information with friends on Social Media, moreover, 56 respondents shared occasionally, but 25 respondents not shared and 11 respondents never shared anything.

Table 9: Covid-19 related information sharing on Social Media cross tabulation

	Sharing of Covid-19 related information on Social Media		**Total**
	Yes	Sometimes	

Covid-19 related information sharing with friends on Social Media	Yes	70	8	78
	No	25	10	35
	Sometimes	56	18	74
	Never	11	2	13
Total		162	38	200

Posting of more Covid-19 news on Social Media spreading fear and panic cross tabulation

Postings of more news related to covid-19 on social media were observed to spread fear and panic among the public and has been grouped in the Table 10. Findings shows that 60 participants were regular users of Social Media, likewise 69 respondents were occasional users of social media. Nevertheless, 29 regular respondents disagree that social media created panic while 4 strongly disagreed with notion.

Table 10: Posting of more Covid-19 news on Social Media spread fear and panic cross tabulation

		Publishing more Covid-19 news on social media spread fear and panic		**Total**
		Yes	Sometimes	
Posting more news related to covid-19 on social media has spread fear and panic among the public	Yes	60	9	69
	No	29	9	38
	Sometimes	69	16	85
	Never	4	4	8
Total		162	38	200

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The user's perspective on most impactful media tool of information on generating fear on social media

Table 11 exhibited overall mean values related with the Social Media users and most impactful media category of information on creating panic on social media. The results indicated Mean 2.61 with the STD .748. Results shown above, social media users clearly agreed that video category of information has had the most impactful on generating panic on social media.

Table 11: Video category of information has had the most impact on creating panic on social media

Variable	Mean	STD
Social Media use	1.380	.786
Category of information has had the most impact on creating panic on social media	2.61	.748

The COVID-19 was first reported in the December 2019, in the Wuhan, a Chinese City. Within three months, COVID-19 spread on whole world. By September 2020, more than 25 million cases confirmed contracted the COVID-19 infection (Roser et al., 2020).

The World Health Organization (WHO) first announced this infectious as COVID-19 to the world and classified as dangerous for human population, thus WHO announced it as pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). An important global form World Economic Forum in its report of Global Risk had predict likelihood of pandemic threating whole population on earth since human race is now ever so contacted. Therefore, any new infectious diseases could be easily converted into pandemic with globalization as COVID-19 pandemic is prime example (Quattrociocchi, , 2017). The initial response was lockdown of population of COVID-19 infectious suspected or non-suspected to contain the infection of COVID. However, prolong lockdown had many consequences on individuals' citizens, whether economic hardship or mental challenges as citizens were forced to use online forms for information and entertainment resource.

Since Wuhan city first reported COVID-19 infectious and as number risen of infection, Chinese authority slapped strict lockdown imposition, any individuals violating the lockdown imposition faced the punishment of imprisonment (Xiang, Zhang and Kuwahara, 2020). However, individual's only available resource of

communication, information and entertainment was internet and individual heavily used the internet in the lockdown (Kiraly et al., 2020).

Online or internet-based forms did offered humanity greater integration into virtual world for information and entertainment online framework (Charm H, et al., 2016).

Muwahed (2021), stated that COVID-19 reported infectious numbers were spreading quicker than real infection on the digital platforms causing panic among the population across the globe. The digital media platform can used be a positive toll to spread awareness of public good messages in the society (Gough A. et al., 2017).

The Cellan-Jones mentioned that in 2020 internet-based communication, information and entertainment usages increased rapidly and individual used these digitals forms get update about COVID-19, however, traditional media platform also informed the public as major chunk of population still used these traditional media platform for information resource as trusted source. As COVID-19 reported around the world, China and other countries started blocking border to contain the infections so individual relied on digital media platforms to communicate each other or for information on COVID-19. However, with disappointment on social media platform rife of disinformation rather infodemic, led to call upon traditional media to take the center stage and provide public with accurate information on COVID-19 infection(Gesser et al., 2016).

The irony was that in the COVID-19 pandemic, every citizen consider himself/herself as health experts and thus sharing or positing information on Social Media about COVID-19 pandemic (El-Terk, 2020).

The world was rife of rumors, fake news, disinformation on COVID-19 in this social media era, the example of conspiracy theorist spreading COVID-19 infection escaping from lab hypothesis was also first originated from social media forms (Mian and Khan, 2020).

5. Conclusion

The present study designed to find out Social Media Infodemic in the challenging period of pandemic COVID. The research found out that young men are most ardent user of social media. The current research has also determined that majority of COVID-19 news diffuse through social media were spreading dreaded elements of news instead of awareness instruction for general public to follow. The research made important discovery that surge volume of information of COVID on social media platforms generated unnecessary fear. Moreover, the study also reveals that multimedia content particularly video was most effect on social media platforms. However, the present investigation also noted that respondents had strong apprehension about COVID-19 information dissemination through social media and they strongly believe information were not valid or reliable as most were fake news.

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Furthermore, the study also noted that now large number of citizens rely on social media platform for news and information in comparison with other traditional media. The majority of respondents of study also observed that as globally COVID-19 virus numbers were rising during pandemic so was Infodemic phenomenon among masses. The present research respondents suggested strong regulation is need of the hour to check on fake news, unreliable and disinformation.

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