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Information Needs and Information Seeking Behaviour of Farmers in Baruten Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study was undertaken to investigate the information needs and information seeking behavior of farmers in Baruten Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study used questionnaire as the data collection instrument while simple statistics – frequency table and percentages were used for analyzing the data. 300 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to respondents across 10 communities (Ilesa-Baruba, Okuta, Yashikira, Sinawu, Kosubosu, Gure, Boriya, Kuburufu, Gwanara And Chikanda) making a total of 300 respondents. while 272 copies representing 91% were returned and found useful for the study. Findings from the study revealed that the greatest information need of farmers in Baruten Local Government was information on credit facilities which had a mean value of 3.61. this was followed by information on new farming methodologies and marketing of farm produce which had mean value of 3.59 respectively. When seeking for information, the respondents preferred to seek out information from the professional associations. The greatest challenge faced by the respondents when seeking for information was language barrier and financial challenges which had mean values of 3.84 and 3.74 respectively. Finally, appropriate recommendations such as provision of information resources in the local language an increase in the number of extension workers, as well as the provision of good internet facilities were suggested to solve the challenges highlighted by the study.

Keywords: Information, Information Needs, Information seeking behavior, farmers, Baruten Local Government

INTRODUCTION

In the current world, information has been regarded as a vital ingredient for promoting growth and for enhancing life-long learning. Its value has been deemed priceless and essential for national development. Ekoja (2010) pointed out the fact that information is not only essential for individual growth but a necessity for social advancement and expansion. Similarly, Kehinde (2016) et. al noted that information is an important tool in realizing any objective or goal. As such, the description of the current age as an information age is no coincidence considering the role of information in bringing about progress in the society (Kacharo, 2020). It is also an important component of growth and development in every discipline (Tipathi, et al, 2015). Ere (2017) also observed that information is a powerful tool for empowerment and eliminates ignorance

In the agricultural sector, information is a valuable tool as it helps farming communities to make the right decisions (Acheampong et al., 2017). It is an important component in the adoption of family farming practices and it is the building block for effective extension services delivery (Demet-Soylu et al., 2016). Thus, farmers need information to sustain and diversify their production and make well-informed decisions (Kayumova, 2017).

Additionally, information is a fundamental element in any agricultural activity and must be available and accessible to all farmers in order to bring the desired outcomes. Thuo & Njoroge (2018) noted that access to information has a great influence on the practices of farmers. It also helps to bridge the gap and deficiencies in relation to the knowledge of certain practices especially the marketing of farm produce (Owolade & Kayode, 2012). The quality of an agricutlrual informaton can however be measured based on three factors which are timeliness, accuracy, and relevance (Riaz et al, 2022).

According to Momoh and Folorunsho (2017), the adoption of information and communication technology (ICT) in every human activity and enterprise has increased the amount of information available on a given concept leading to information overload. This has led to the concept of information explosion which is the unprecedented growth of printed materials and resources on a subject area as well as the inability to manage information effectively and efficiently. The quest to solve this challenge conceived the concept of studying the information needs and information seeking behaviour of people across different fields and societal strata.

In defining these dual concepts, Ekoja (2010) described information needs as the information, which information seekers require to conduct their businesses and live their daily lives. For Kuhlthau (1993), information need is the vague awareness of something missing and usually culminating in locating information that will contribute to understanding and meaning.

On the other hand, Information seeking behavior are the activities a person involves in to get information from different sources (Deribe, 2011). Igwe (2012) further defined the concept as the approach used by an individual to gather and source for information for personal use, knowledge updating and development. Information needs are diverse, constantly changing and not amenable to generalization (Kehinde, 2016). That is, the needs of a particular person or group may be different from another. Thus, information needs could be social, economic, political or educational.

Historically, information needs as a concept was invented by Robert S. Taylor, an American information journalist. In his study which had the topic "the process of asking questions". Taylor started by describing four distinct levels of information needs which are:

- The conscious and unconscious need for information not existing in the remembered experience of the investigator.
- The conscious mental description of an ill-defined area of in decision,
- The formal/rational statement of the question,
- The question as presented to the information system.

As a matter of fact, information needs and information seeking behavior has no limitation as it is for all for all groups of individuals and people including farmers which is the focus of this research study. Farmers are basically those who engage in the planting, harvesting and marketing of crop produce and also the rearing of animals. Both type of agricultural practices could be for

consumption or for sale. That is, farming can be at the subsistence or mechanized level. For crop farmers, grain crops such as rice, millet sorghum are planted. Some others focus on cash crops such as cocoa, coffee and rubber etc. For animal farmers, cows, goats and poultry birds are the major produce.

Since farmers are also part of a society's component, they require information to satisfy their needs especially considering their contributions to the economy and the impact of agriculture in providing food, increasing a country's internally generated revenue, and providing raw materials for industrial purposes. (Mgbenka and Mbah, 2016). Justifying this claim, Mahindarathne & Qingfei (2018) and the Food and Agricultural Organization (2014) both noted that information especially for agricultural purposes is an essential element in any agricultural activity. As such, its timeliness, availability and accessibility to farmers is crucial to bringing about the desired result. Kacharo (2020) noted that the profession of farming is one whose survival depends largely on the availability of information. When farmers whose role are indispensable in national development do not have access to current information, there would be low economic output which may result into forced migration from the rural area to the urban in the search for sustainable means of livelihood, (Oyeniyi and Olofinsawe, 2015).

It is against the backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the information needs and information seeking behavior of farmers using Baruten Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria as a case study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite their indispensable role in enhancing national development and economic prosperity, farmers encounter a major challenge in accessing information relating to modern farming techniques, pest control methods, and market trends. This lack of access to essential information not only hinders their ability to make informed decisions but also results into to low output and economic losses. By identifying the information gaps of farmers, and exploring the medium which they seek for information and the challenges associated with their information seeking process, the study will provide policy makers, agricultural stakeholders and socio-developmental experts with the knowledge of effective measures to bridge these information gaps and support the sustainable development of the agricultural sector.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the information needs of the respondents in the study setting?
2. What is the information seeking behavior of the respondents in the study setting?
3. What are the challenges faced by the respondents in the process of seeking for information?
4. What are the strategies to solve the identified challenges?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Information

According to Ajiboye and Tella (2007), information is data that has undergone different stages of processing to the extent of being able to satisfy users demands, needs and desire. Bitagi (2013) defined the concept as news which a user receives for the first time and which can serve as a prompt to take action. The KOC university Library glossary (2014) conceptualized the term as data presented in a manner that is understandable and comprehensible. This consequently gives meaning to the user of such information.

From the above definitions, it is evident that anything that would be regarded as information must be able to add to knowledge, ideas, skills and experiences which will prompt a user to take action or react to a situation. That is, information can have both positive and negative influences on an individual. A user in this case, can be a single individual, a group of people, an organization or a nation. The purpose for which information is used could range from political, economic, industrial, social etc.

Information Needs

Information needs has been generally defined as the type of information a user requires to meet a particular goal or objective. However, Momoh and Folorunsho (2017) were of the opinion that information needs could be better defined if the concept of needs is better understood. As a result, needs can be generally defined as things one cannot do without and which most times are essential for sustenance. Aninweze (2004) defined needs as an imbalance between the present/current situation and the and the ideal situation.

From this, information needs are the specific information demands or requirements an individual or group of people desire to meet an objective. The awareness of these information needs will be the factor that will propel the individual or group to seek avenues to satisfy the need. Thus, for every information need, there is a corresponding avenue to satisfy the need. Needs are also specific to an individual as a person's information needs may be different from another, (Momoh and Folorunsho, 2017).

According to Igwe (2012), information needs could be categorized into the following

1. Economic information needs
2. Social and entertainment (arts) information needs.
3. Agricultural, geographical and environmental information needs.
4. Medical and health information needs.
5. Scientific and technological information needs
6. Religious and cultural information needs.
7. Legal and human rights information needs.
8. International and global information needs.
9. Educational/academic information needs.
10. Political information needs
11. Job opportunities and business information needs.

Information Seeking Behaviour

For Emmanuel (2012), information-seeking behavior is the entire process an individual or group of people goes about seeking information that will meet their needs.

Gebru et. al (2017) defined the concept as the avenues that individuals express their information needs, seek, appraise and utilize information. Uhegbu (2007) explained that information seeking behaviour deals with the manner an information user conducts his/herself or acts when searching for information or receiving it. He further submitted that information seeking behavior also deals with both verbal and non-verbal gestures.

MODELS OF INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR

While there are several models of information seeking such as the Belkin Anomalous State of Knowledge, Wilson and Krieklas model, the Spink model, Eisenberg And Berkowitz's Big Six Skills model and the Ellis model, this study would adopt the Eisenberg And Berkowitz's Big Six Skills model.

Eisenberg And Berkowitz's Big Six Skills Model of Information Seeking

The big six skills model was proposed by Eisenberg and Berkowitz. The model represents a basic methodology to information problem solving using six logical procedures. With each search process, the order of the model changes. Nonetheless, each stage is essential to facilitate a smooth resolution of the information challenge. The steps in the big six skills model are:

- Task definition,
- Information seeking strategies,
- Locating and access,
- Use of information,
- Synthesis
- Evaluation.

Adopting The Big Six Skills Model To The Study

1. **Task Definition**: The farmer and his colleagues would need to have a through definition of the problem. That is, they would need to have an understanding of their particular information needs. Knowing these needs would assist in knowing the appropriate information resource to use in satisfying the information need. The information resource could be primary, secondary or tertiary.
2. **Information Seeking Strategies**: Once the farmer has known what his or her information needs are, he or she must decide the relevant information sources to solve the task or meet the need. For instance, both the radio and the television are media resources. However, while a radio is associated with the sense of hearing, the television is associated with both the sense of hearing and sight. Both would therefore be performing different functions with respect to meeting an information need.
3. **Locating and Access**: This has to do with the utilization and implementation of the information seeking strategy. That is, using the information resource or strategy to access information.

4. **Use of Information**: Once the user which in this case is a farmer has found the information he or she requires, they can then employ their skills to utilize the information. The usage of an information is a function of the farmer's decision. The farmer can decide to use the information to obtain credit facilities to increase farm productivity or to market his farm produce.
5. **Synthesis**: this is applying the information that has been obtained to perform a particular task. Here, the farmer can modify the information that has been acquired to suit his particular preferences, needs and environment.
6. **Evaluation**: this is the final stage where the entire information seeking process is appraised. In the context of this study, the farmer will perform an analysis to figure out if the information he or she has acquired was able to meet the information needs.

JUSTIFICATION FOR USING THE EISENBERG AND BERKOWITZ'S BIG SIX SKILLS

The Eisenberg and Berkowitz's Big Six Skills model was chosen for this study due to its comprehensive and structured approach to information literacy. This model provides a clear and structured approach for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing information, making it accessible to individuals with varying literacy levels. Its practical focus ensures that the information gathered can be directly applied to improve agricultural practices, which is crucial for farmers.

Moreover, the model's adaptability allows it to be tailored to the specific needs of the rural setting, addressing diverse information requirements based on different criteria which include years of farming experience, educational background etc. By fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills, the Big Six Skills Model helps farmers make informed decisions and adapt to changing conditions. Additionally, it promotes lifelong learning, encouraging continuous information seeking and evaluation, which is important for adapting to the changing agricultural conditions and enhancing productivity of farmers. The model contributes to the growth and development of the agricultural sector by equipping farmers with the tools to make informed, sustainable decisions towards developing the agricultural sector in the local government.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Emmanuel (2012) in her study found out that the rural farmers needed information on farm inputs, credit facilities, marketing strategies. The farmers obtained information from professional unions and associations. The study further recommended the provision of agricultural extension programs in local languages to facilitate easy understanding and the establishment of community library services.

Babu et al (2012) observed that farmers needed information on pest and disease management and credit facilities. The preferred method of obtaining information was through interpersonal contacts and through the use of mobile phones particularly short message service (SMS).

Similarly, Fallys (2013) found that radio was most used medium among the farmers as a means of locating information. The findings of Adebayo and Oladele (2013) showed that farmers used extension agents and family members as the preferred means to obtain information.

Kavithaa et al (2014) in their research concluded that dairy farmers also had different information needs. However, they preferred utilizing extension agents as the medium of obtaining information by dairy farmers.

Mahapatra (2016) in his study concluded that farmers in Odisha, a local community in India, has information needs revolving around disease and pest management climate and weather conditions and post-harvest management technologies. Akande and Adewojo (2016) investigated the information needs and information seeking behavior of farmers in Laduba community, Kwara State, Nigeria. Their study revealed that the information needs of farmers was majorly on accessing grant facilities, marketing of their farm produce and prevention of pest and diseases. Challenges encountered when seeking for information was on the high level of illiteracy which made reading information resources written in English language difficult as well as epileptic power supply. The study recommended the provision of affordable telecommunication facilities for effective information access through mobile phones.

Brhane et al (2017) also conducted a study which revealed that farmers of Tanqa Abergelle, Wereda, central zone of Tigray, Ethiopia resorted to obtaining information from their colleagues, professional associations. The associated challenges they encountered when seeking for information include infrastructural shortage and the lack of ICT.

Using a multi-stage sampling procedure from 320 farmers, Kacharo (2020) conducted a study on the information needs and seeking behavior of farmers in southern Ethiopia. multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to obtain a sample of 320 farmers. The findings from the study showed that the farmers needed information majorly on crop production technologies, diseases and pests, climatic conditions as well as marketing processes. Development agents were also the preferred means of obtaining information.

Rahman et al (2020) in their study opined that farmers require information on pest management, credit facilities and improved seedlings. Low level of literacy, poor ICT infrastructural facilities were the challenges the farmers faced when seeking for information.

Shuaib et. al (2020) assessed the information needs of smallholder farmers in Ilorin West Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. Their study found that the information needs of the respondent was on improved crop variety to boost productivity. Radio was the most preferred means of obtaining information compared to extension workers which was the least preferred. Language barrier was the significant challenge experienced when seeking for information.

Haumba and Kadu (2021) in their study which explored the information seeking behavior patterns of family farmers in rural Uganda submitted that their respondents require information on weather and climatic conditions, modern agricultural practices. They also resorted to getting information from colleagues, and the media (radio and television).

In their study, Riaz et al (2022) noted that the information needs of farmers in Punjab, Pakistan was mainly on weather and climatic conditions as well as market situations. The media was also used by the farmers to obtain information.

It is evident that previous related studies have been carried out in this area of information needs and information seeking behavior of farmers in various locations. However, from the researcher's best of knowledge and literature, no research has been carried out on the information needs and seeking behavior of crop farmers in the study setting.

Furthermore, most of the literature consulted did not outline some important challenges particularly those bordering around the inaccessibility of information resources in local languages as way to satisfy the information needs of farmers. Previous studies were also stratified. While some focused on animal farmers, others focused on crop farmers. This could not have provided a broader and general view of both groups. This study therefore seeks to fill the identified knowledge gaps.

STUDY SETTING

According to Mohammed (2018) et al and Kwara State Government (2020), Bartuten Local Government Area was carved out of Kaiama Local Government Area of Kwara State and was established on the 27th of August 1991 as a result of the need to bring government nearer to the people especially at the grassroot. The Local Government which begins at Ilesa-Baruba and ends at Chikanda is situated in the Northern Senatorial District of Kwara State and shares border with the Republic of Benin as well as Oyo State, Nigeria. Kosubosu town serves as the administrative headquarters of the local government. The 2006 Nigerian national census, pegs the local government's population as 209,459 while it has a landmass covering 9,749km^2.

Baatonum is the predominant language spoken in the local government. Other languages include Hausa, Yoruba and Fulani. The local government has four districts which are Yashikira, Okuta, Gwanara and Ilesa-Baruba. Each district is headed by an Emir. Each district has different communities that has a local head. Each local head reports to the Emir who serves as the local head as well as the custodian of indigenous practices and customs.

By tradition, occupants of the Baruten local government area are farmers with a few working in the state civil service to complement their farming practices. The Gani and Dokoru are the major festivals observed in the local government.

METHODOLOGY

The study targeted farmers in Baruten Local Government, Kwara State, Nigeria. In order to obtain valid and reliable information for this study, a structured questionnaire titled information needs and information seeking behavior of farmers in Baruten Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria, was used as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire had five sections containing 28 questions. The first section which had five questions was designed to elicit the demographic information of the respondents, the second which had seven questions was to know the information needs of the respondents.

While the third section which had five questions was meant to know the medium the respondents obtained information, the fourth section which had six questions was meant to know the challenges faced by the respondents when seeking for information. The last section which had five questions was designed to obtain information on the best ways to solve the identified challenges.

Ten major communities in Baruten Local Government were selected for this research study. These communities which are spread across the four districts in the local government. were purposively selected for the study due to the fact that they engaged more in agricultural practices compared to the other communities. This was based on the information gathered from the farmers' association in the local government.

To collect the data from the respondents, the researchers visited the community and met with the Chairman of the farmers' association in the local government to seek for approval. Following this, the Chairman provided a list of 30 active members in each community to be used as respondents. This gave a total of 300 respondents for the study. The researchers agreed on a date to meet all respondents in each community. The Chairman also provided two indigenes who understood the local languages to assist the researchers in interpretation to speed up the process of data collection. Data from each community was collected on different days and the whole process lasted two weeks. Data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software application. Out of the 300 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 272 copies representing 91% were returned and found useful for the study.

S/N	COMMUNITY	DISTRICT
1.	Ilesa-Baruba	
2.	Sinawu	Ilesa-Baruba
3	Okuta	Okuta
4.	Boriya	
5.	Yashikira	
6.	Kosubusu	Yashikira
7.	Gure	
8.	Kuburufu	
9.	Chikanda	
10.	Gwanara	Gwanara

DATA PRESENTATION

Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	175	64%

Female	97	36%
Total	272	100%

Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 35 years	68	25%
36 – 50 years	151	56%
Above 50 years	53	19%
Total	272	100

Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
No formal education	117	43%
First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC)	93	34%
Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE)	43	16%
Tertiary education	19	7%
Total	272	100

Distribution of Respondents by years of farming experience

Years of Farming Experience	Frequency	Percentage
0 – 5 years	51	19%
6 – 10 years	48	18%
Above 10 years	173	64%
Total	272	100

Distribution of Respondents by Rate of Information Seeking

Rate	Frequency	Percentage
Frequently	170	63%
Sometimes	93	34%
Never	9	3%
Total	272	100

S/N	Purposes	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean
6.	On government policies	159 56%	98 36.0%	10 4%	5 2%	272 100%	3.51
7	On health and safety practices	158 58.1%	105 38.6%	3 1.1%	6 2.2%	272 100%	3.53
8	On weather and climatic conditions	143 53%	125 46%	1 0%	3 1%	272 100%	3.50
9	On credit facilities (grants and loans)	172 63%	96 35%	1 0%	3 1%	272 100%	3.61
10	On management practices (budgeting, human resource control)	83 31%	186 68%	0	3 1%	272 100%	3.28
11	On new farming methodologies	164 60%	106 39%	0	2 1%	272 100%	3.59
12	storage and marketing of farm produce	168 62%	99 36%	2 1%	3 1%	272 100%	3.59
S/N	**Medium of obtaining information**	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**	**Total**	**Mean**
13.	From the internet and the media	12 4%	15 6%	143 53%	102 38%	272 100%	1.77
14.	By visiting the community	31 11%	45 17%	40 15%	156	272	1.82

	library and information center				57 %	10 0%	
15.	From the professional associations I belong to	161 59 %	27 10 %	75 28 %	9 3 %	272 100%	3.25
16.	From colleagues, friends and relatives	71 26 %	155 57 %	33 12 %	13 5 %	272 100%	3.04
17.	From extension workers	32 12 %	30 11 %	142 52 %	68 25 %	272 100%	2.10
S/N	**Challenges**	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**	**Total**	**Mean**
18	Epileptic Power supply	149 55 %	107 39 %	104 %	62 %	272 100%	3.47
19.	Language barrier	242 89 %	22 8%	31 %	52 %	272 100%	3.84
20	Poor internet connectivity	32 12 %	164 60 %	36 13 %	40 15 %	272 100%	2.69
21	Shortage of extension workers	155 57 %	110 40 %	52 %	21 %	272 100%	3.54
22	Outdated information resources in the library	141 52 %	121 44 %	41 %	62 %	272 100%	3.46
23	Financial challenges	216 79 %	45 17 %	73 %	41 %	272 100%	3.74
S/N	**Solutions**	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**	**Total**	**Mean**
24.	Increase in the number	200	72	0	0	272	3.74

	of extension workers	74 %	26 %			10 0%	
25.	Improvement of Internet and Deployment of mobile technology usage services	189 69 %	83 31 %	0	0	272 100%	3.69
26	Upgrade of electric power facilities to facilitate improved electricity	175 64 %	97 36 %	0	0	27 2 10 0%	3.64
27	Provision of updated information resources especially in the local language	242 89 %	22 8%	3 1 %	5 2 %	272 100%	3.84
28	Provision of government support to reduce financial burden	229 84 %	27 10 %	9 3 %	7 3 %	272 100%	3.76

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

RQ 1: What are the information needs of the respondents in the study setting?

The findings of this study show that the highest information needs of crop farmers need was on credit facilities (grants and loans) with a mean of 3.61 This was followed by information on marketing of farm produce and new farming methodologies which had mean values of 3.59. The least information need was on management practices which had a mean value of 3.28. Lwoga (2009), Akande and Adewojo (2016) and Rahman et al (2020) affirmed this fact that farmers in their study settings needed information on credit facilities and effective marketing of their farm produce.

RQ 2: What is the information seeking behavior of the respondents in the study setting?

Based on this study, farmers in Baruten Local Government obtain information from the professional unions they belonged to (3.25) and from colleagues and friends (3.04). This is in contrast with the findings of Ango et al. (2013), Olajide (2015) and Nwobodo et al (2022) who collectively submitted that farmers accessed information through the radio.

RQ 3: What are the challenges faced by the respondents in the process of seeking for information?

The challenges faced by crop farmers in Baruten Local Government Area include language barrier with a mean value of 3.84. This was followed by financial challenges and shortage of extension workers which had mean values of 3.74 and 3.54. Yusuf et. al. (2020), Uzuegba and Naga (2017) and Daudu et al. (2009) observed that farmers in Nigeria were faced with the challenge of assimilation since most information materials were not written in the local language. They also highlighted the challenge of finance when seeking information.

RQ 4 What are the strategies to solve the identified challenges?

The provision of updated information resources especially in the local languages with a mean value of 3.84 was put forward as a suggestion. This was followed by the provision of support systems (3.76) to ease financial the burden of respondents and the increase in the number of extension workers (3.74). This is in consonance with the findings of Emmanuel (2012) who also recommended the increase in the number of agricultural extension services and the provision of information resources in local languages to facilitate easy understating.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the information needs and information seeking behavior of farmers in Baruten Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. From the findings of this study, it is observable that farmers in the study setting have different information needs ranging from the knowledge of credit facilities down to marketing strategies. The respondents preferred to seek from the professional associations they belonged to and also from friends and colleagues.

Similarly, language barrier and shortage of extension workers were the major challenges faced by the respondents when seeking information. As a result of this, the study recommends the following:

- There should be an increase in the number of extension workers particularly those who understand the culture of the community.
- Provision of relevant, current and factual information resources which are readily available and accessible especially in the local language for farmers. This will allow for easy comprehension
- Provision of government support to reduce financial burden on the respondents.
- Establishment of community library and information services to complement the activities of the extension workers.

- Training of farmers on the use of mobile internet technologies for easy information retrieval.

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