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Employment-related information-seeking behaviour of South Asian immigrant women in Finland

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Abstract

Introduction. This study examines the employment-related information-seeking behaviour of immigrant women, focusing on the challenges they encounter in accessing information and the consequences of these challenges. It contributes valuable insights into the information practices of immigrant women during their integration process, highlighting how information access - or the lack thereof - shapes their opportunities and experiences.

Method. The study is designed based on semi-structured interviews conducted with twelve immigrant women from South Asian countries living in Finland.

Analysis. Quantitative analysis was carried out on the data collected from interviews. The thematic analysis was undertaken and codes and themes were structured as per the data received in interviews.

Results. Immigrant women seek employment-related information from family, friends, and digital sources (LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Blogs, Websites). Information overload and the negative information experiences are the main challenges faced during the information seeking process which led to poor mental and physical well-being and less opportunities for integration.

Conclusions. This research highlights the need for more in-depth investigation related to information seeking behaviour of women immigrants during the job-seeking process. Also the importance of understanding how mental and physical health concerns during the job-seeking process influence immigrant women's overall integration into a new country.

Introduction

The continued flow of immigrants in various countries, including Finland, has made it necessary for host countries to better integrate newcomers into the society. Finland is facing challenges in integrating immigrants into the Finnish job market due to reasons such as, language requirements and discriminatory recruitment structures (Ahmad, 2011; Valtonen, 2001; YLE News, 2019). Immigrant women are more vulnerable to unemployment in Finland because of family and child-care responsibilities, less opportunities to learn language, gender-bias, lack of appropriate education and flaws in integration planning (Heikkilä, 2017). Unemployment leads to different problems for immigrants including, poor economic situation, loss of self-esteem, status loss, poor psychological health and less chances to integrate into the host society (Aycan and Berry, 1996). Immigrants look for employment-related information before and after arrival in a new country (Allard, 2015; Caidi et al., 2014; Khoir, 2016; Shuva, 2020). There are various sources that immigrants meet their employment-related information needs from such as, employment institutions, online discussion forums, social media and family and friends (Shuva, 2020; Retiz, 2007). Although there are some studies that report the employment-related information behaviour of immigrants (Mabi, 2020; Caidi et al, 2014, Shuva, 2022), there is a lack of research on employment-related information seeking, especially among immigrant women and in the Finnish context. Thus this study broadens the Library and Information Science (LIS) literature of immigrants' information seeking behaviour from the gender-specific point of view (i.e., women). This study examines employment-related information seeking behaviour of immigrant women in Finland, and more specifically their challenges in seeking employment-related information and the consequences of those challenges for immigrant women. This study is based on qualitative data from interviews with twelve immigrant women living in Finland.

Research Questions:

The main research questions of the study are:

1. Why and how do immigrant women seek employment-related information?
2. Do they face any challenges in seeking employment-related information? If so, what are they?
3. What are the consequences of those challenges for immigrant women?

The context of the study

Integration of Immigrants in Finland

The study is conducted with South Asian immigrant women in Finland who came to Finland through family ties, mainly with their husbands and children. The women are from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan and who have lived in Finland for three to five years. Due to the snowballing technique used for participant recruitment, the study was limited to individuals who were connected within existing networks. As a result, no volunteers from other South Asian countries, such as Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, emerged during the recruitment process. In 2022, immigration increased Finland's population by almost 35,000, and in 2023, by well over 50,000 (Statistics of Finland, 2023). According to Statistics of Finland, the number of South Asian immigrant women from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan have increased from 2019 till 2022. In 2019 the number of immigrant women was: Bangladesh (162), India (614), Nepal (196), and Pakistan (174), which is increased in 2022: Bangladesh (415), India (1,228), Nepal (349) and Pakistan (358) (Statistics of Finland, 2023). Finland aims for better integration of these immigrants into the society by providing them equal and non-discriminatory opportunities to grow in the country. Finnish integration policy is based on the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers which came into force in September 2011 (Integration Act, 2011; Kyntäjä, 2004). The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment is responsible for the preparation of issues related to integration in Finland (Koikkalainen, 2021). An integration plan is a personalised plan drawn up

for individual immigrants covering the measures and services to promote and support their opportunity to acquire a sufficient command of Finnish or Swedish and other knowledge and skills required in Finnish society and working life, and to promote and support their opportunity to participate in society (Koskela, 2014). An integration plan may involve basic education, vocational education, upper secondary education, studies leading to a higher education degree, continuing education or further training. The integration plan lasts for three years from applicants' initial entry in the Population Information System in Finland (Koikkalainen, 2021). The integration plan of an immigrant who came as a student is different from the plan for a spouse of an immigrant. The immigrant student has limited opportunities to learn language or work because of his/her full-time study rights, while the spouse of an immigrant is eligible to enrol for the full-time language learning and working opportunities (Masoud et al., 2021). All of the participants (spouses of immigrants) of this study have enrolled for an integration plan at their initial stage of arriving in Finland and have started learning the language. However, a better integration of immigrants is a challenge for the Finnish society and associations dealing with immigrants' issues.

Employment as the main integration concern in Finland

A major concern for immigrants to Finland is *employment*, as it affects the overall well-being of immigrants in the host society (Ahmad, 2011). According to the Ministry of Labor and Economy, unemployment among the population with a foreign background is higher than among people with a Finnish background (Nieminen, 2015; YLE News, 2022). The number of immigrant job seekers was 35,792 in January 2023 which is 14% of all unemployed job seekers in Finland. The number of unemployed immigrant job seekers increased by 16% (4920 persons) from the previous year 2022 (Kotoutuminen, 2023). Lack of language skills are considered the major reason for the high unemployment rate among the immigrant population in Finland (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, 2024). The unemployment rate of those who moved because of their family is higher than those who came to study or work in Finland. The length of stay in the country is indeed a significant factor related to employment, for example, the unemployment rate of those who have lived in Finland for more than ten years is lower than that of those who have lived here for 5-10 years (Larja and Sutela, 2015). Due to the high percentage of unemployment in the country, Finland is facing the challenge of *brain-drain* of highly skilled and educated immigrants who leave the country after getting their degrees and skills (Lehtovaara & Jyrkinen, 2021). According to the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, every year 15,000-20,000 people leave Finland - half of them are foreigners, who are not likely to return and are mostly in their prime working age and highly educated (Zaraf & Kantola, 2019).

Women immigrants are more vulnerable to unemployment challenges in Finland (Larja and Sutela, 2015). According to the European Migration Network (EMN), women from non-EU countries struggle to find employment in Finland and the employment rate among non-EU women was just 41% in 2021 while the rate among Finnish women was 72% that year (European Migration Network. Finnish Immigration Service, 2022). EMN mentioned difficulties women face in finding work in Finland include family and child care reasons, high language skills requirements, and an integration model that does not support early access to the labour market. The gendered labour market is also a factor because the employment rate of immigrant women is considerably lower than that of immigrant men in Finland. EMN further coded that 'The Finnish labour market includes various discriminatory structures, and even a high level of education does not necessarily guarantee success for migrant women when it comes to accessing working life' (European Migration Network. Finnish Immigration Service, 2022). Thus, it is clear that Finland is struggling with immigrants' integration into the labour market, especially the women immigrants and low employment hampers immigrant women's integration into Finnish society.

Conceptual framework

This paper utilizes the concept of everyday life information seeking (ELIS) by Savolainen (1995) to examine the employment-related information seeking behaviour of immigrant women in Finland (Savolainen, 1995). In the field of Library and Information Science (LIS), there are several theories and models that explain ELIS across different contexts, such as Dervin's *Sense-Making Theory* (Dervin, 1992), *Interest-Concern-Caring* (Wilson, 1977), *ELIS within Small World contexts* (Chatman, 1991), and the concept of *Information ground* (Fisher et al., 2004). However, this study specifically focuses on Savolainen's (1995) concept of ELIS, as it highlights the importance of problem-specific information seeking, where individuals seek information to address concrete, everyday challenges (Savolainen, 1995). For immigrant women, employment-related information is typically sought to address immediate, practical needs - such as finding job opportunities, understanding work regulations, or navigating cultural and language barriers in the workplace. Savolainen (1995) introduced ELIS as information seeking that is problem-specific and occurs within the context of everyday life situations (Savolainen, 2008). According to Savolainen, individuals engage in information-seeking behaviours to resolve specific problems or make decisions related to their daily lives. For immigrants, this often involves seeking information on topics such as employment, housing, education, and language acquisition (Shuva, 2020; Given et al., 2023). The concept of ELIS underscores the idea that information-seeking behaviour is shaped by situational and contextual factors, influenced by personal circumstances, social roles, and the cultural environment (Savolainen, 2005). By focusing on ELIS, this paper aims to explore the types of employment-related information sought by immigrant women, the ways in which they access this information, and the challenges they face in obtaining everyday life information related to employment matters.

Literature Review

Information seeking behaviour of immigrants

An information seeking behaviour is guided by one's knowledge of information sources and channels, their availability and usability and the structure of social networks (Aarnitaival, 2008). In the LIS field, there are several studies about immigrants' information seeking behaviour (Shuva, 2020; Caidi et al., 2014; Ahmadinia et al., 2022). In the case of immigrants, they usually tend to have problem-specific information seeking behaviour, for instance, seeking a job, health problems, looking for housing, education or learning a language (Caidi et al., 2010). Problem-specific information seeking is seeking information, for example, to carry out a task or to solve a problem (Savolainen, 1995). Information seeking behaviour of immigrants represents their endeavours to seek information related to the settlement issues in a new country - from different sources and channels (Caidi et al., 2010). These sources could be personal networks such as, family relations, friends, or ethnic communities (Fisher et al., 2004; Rodriguez-Mori, 2009; Shuva, 2018), service providers such as public libraries (Pilerot, 2018; Lloyd et al., 2013) and digital sources. Personal networks, including family and community groups, play a crucial role in helping immigrants access practical information and guidance on navigating daily challenges such as housing, employment, and healthcare (Shuva, 2021a). Public libraries can play a vital role in supporting immigrants by providing access to reliable information, resources, and community services that help them navigate legal, healthcare, educational, and employment challenges (Lee, 2024; Pilerot, 2018; Grossman et al., 2022).

Information seeking of immigrants through digital sources/social media

Information seeking through digital sources or social media refers to accessing information through online sources (i.e. any material you find on the internet) such as, websites, forums, blog posts, newspapers, articles, journals, books, movies, and channels (Nicholas et al., 2000). Digital sources is an umbrella term that includes all types of online platforms, tools, and resources accessed via the internet. This includes websites, blogs, e-commerce platforms, online databases, news sites, academic journals, and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn,

Instagram, TikTok, YouTube). When it comes to information seeking of immigrants through digital sources, social media plays a significant role in helping immigrants better integrate into the host society. There are few studies mentioning the importance of the internet and social media as important sources of information for immigrants (Erdem, 2018). For example, Khoir et al., (2015) mentioned that Asian immigrants used the internet for general and formal information needs (e.g. accommodation, transportation, local culture) in Australia. And social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn were the important information sources for immigrants. In another study by Monteiro (2022) it is evident that digital sources including Facebook, WhatsApp, Google map and LinkedIn are frequently used by new immigrants in Canada and Germany for their settlement and employment matters. It is noticed that immigrants use social media and other digital sources for seeking jobs, getting socialised and making networks for a sense of belonging in a new country (Fietkiewicz, 2017). Borkert et al. (2018) found that migrants utilize social media as a key tool in their migration journey, demonstrating social support and underscoring the need for a fundamental shift in how migration is studied in the digital era. Another study by Charmarkeh (2012) highlights how Somali refugees in France rely on social media for migration planning, navigating settlement challenges, and maintaining transnational connections. Similarly, Ihejirika and Krtalic (2021) explore how migrant communities in New Zealand use social media to facilitate migration, access essential information, and maintain connections with their home countries. The study highlights social media's role in providing vital resources, creating support networks, and helping migrants navigate settlement challenges, while also emphasising its impact on cultural adaptation and community engagement. Komito and Bates (2011) examine the information practices of migrants in Ireland, focusing on how they use social media to build networks and communities. The study highlights social media's role in facilitating communication, accessing support, and navigating migration challenges, as well as its importance in maintaining ties with home countries and aiding in the settlement process. Shuva (2021b) explores how Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada use the internet and social media for settlement, emphasizing their reliance on these platforms for accessing information, connecting with family, and forming community networks. The study highlights the role of digital tools in overcoming barriers such as language and isolation, and in supporting cultural adaptation and integration into Canadian society.

Few studies highlight the employment-related information seeking of immigrants in the past, prior to moving to Finland. However, according to Ahmad (2022), immigrants' social networks are considered important sources that helped them to connect with employment opportunities during their entire occupational career in Finland. In his study, participants relied on ethnic networks more than the public employment agencies in Finland. However, discrimination is highlighted as the main reason for low-prestige occupations for immigrants and also forcing them to structure ethnically dominated networks among them (Ahmad, 2022). Despite some studies in LIS reporting about the immigrants' information seeking behaviour, we do not know much about immigrant womens' employment-related information seeking during their integration process in a new country.

Previous studies have recognized the significant role of digital sources - particularly social media - in facilitating information-seeking behaviours among immigrants, covering areas like migration, settlement, and community building. However, this study focuses specifically on immigrant women and their employment-related information-seeking behaviours. While past research highlights how digital tools help immigrants navigate general life challenges, this study explores how these women use digital platforms to access employment information, the challenges they encounter in this specific context, and the consequences of these challenges for their integration into the workforce. By examining these aspects, this study aims to provide deeper insights into the intersection of gender, employment, and digital information-seeking in the immigrant experience, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the role of technology in their professional integration.

Challenges in accessing information for immigrants

Studies in LIS have shown that immigrants and refugees struggle in accessing the information they need to integrate better into host societies (Bronstein, 2019; Oduntan and Ruthven, 2021). They experience various information challenges such as language barrier, cultural differences, lack of social network, lack of information, lack of literacy skills and misinformation (Caidi et al., 2010; Ruokolainen and Widén, 2020; Lloyd et al., 2013). Women immigrants are more prone to face information challenges than their male counterparts (Nekesa and Odong, 2017). For example, in a study of Middle Eastern women refugees in Sweden, it is highlighted that information overload, difficulties in understanding new communication culture and lack of appropriate information sources are the major challenges for women (Author et al., 2022). Information overload is expressed as too much information from the service providers in the forms of long booklets from health centres, numerous letters from the unemployment office and many offers from language schools - causing stress and leading to wrong decisions for the participants (Author et al., 2022). In another study of immigrant and refugee women living in Finland and Sweden, it is evident that information overload on social media has an impact on information fatigue and consequently on the information avoidance behaviour (Author et al., 2021). Thus, information overload is evident as a significant challenge for immigrants and most of them do not have sufficient knowledge on how to avoid information overload in their everyday lives (Ndumu, 2020; Beretta et al., 2018). Information overload leads to the feeling of overburden, anxiety, and stress among immigrants (Ndumu, 2019; Author et al., 2022; Author et al., 2021; Chang et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2021).

Moreover, distrust of information and negative experiences from ethnic social networks is highlighted as a challenge for immigrants in the past few studies. For example, in a study by Shuva (2021a), it is mentioned that the informal network of friends, family and broader ethnic community may provide demotivating and discouraging information to new immigrants. Previous studies such as the work of Marshall et al. (2020) with young Polish women in the United Kingdom and Audunson et al. (2011) with immigrant women in Norway also show immigrants avoiding co-ethnic community networks because of distrust and negative experiences. Some participants of Allard and Caidi's (2018) study also reported not receiving career-related benefits from their social networks. The literature shows that immigrants rely on personal networks, public services, and digital platforms - especially social media - for problem-specific information seeking, including employment. However, immigrant women face unique challenges like information overload, language barriers, and unreliable sources. Despite this, little is known about their employment-related information-seeking behaviour. This study addresses that gap by exploring how immigrant women use digital sources to find employment information and the challenges they encounter

Methodology

A qualitative method of semi-structured interviews is adopted in this study. Due to the complexity of individual experiences, emotions, and social interactions - particularly in the context of migrants' lives - the interview technique is recommended to better understand the meanings, actions, and social contexts of research participants (Fossey et al., 2002). The interview guide is attached in the end of this paper (see Appendix).

Participants of the study

Twelve participants were interviewed for the study. The study participants are women immigrants, aged 25-36, from South Asian countries (Bangladesh 2; India 2; Nepal 2; Pakistan 6 participants), who have been living in Finland for a minimum of three to five years. This group of immigrant women is different than women coming alone via skilled immigration or getting immigration after their education in Finland. All of the participants came through the spousal route (i.e. they came either along with their husbands or they came to join their husbands after a few months) to Finland. Some of the participants have children who migrated along with them while some gave birth to children while being in Finland. All the participants have resident permits based on the spousal

permits and have the right to study and work. The participants are at different stages of the integration plan of Finland. The study population is diverse in terms of occupation and educational background. They all have a good educational background and good command of the English language in addition to their mother languages. Most of them started learning Finnish language by joining courses upon their arrival in Finland. The courses are offered by the Employment office (TE-office) for foreigners who wish to learn Finnish full-time.

	Fictitious names of participants	Age	Origin	Years in Finland	Educational background	Employment and language status
1	Zara	30	Pakistan	5 years	Master's in business and marketing management	Working freelancing part time+Looking for job in field+Knows basic Finnish
2	Laila	25	Pakistan	4 years	Master's in information technology	Working part time in restaurant kitchen + Doing 2nd master's in data management +Looking for job in field+Knows basic Finnish
3	Hamia	32	India	5 years	Master's in human resource and PhD in Management	Unemployed+looking for job in field+Completed Finnish language classes for average
4	Huma	27	Nepal	3 years	Master's in computer science	Unemployed+Looking for job in field+Attending Finnish language classes
5	Maha	29	Bangladesh	4.5 years	Master's in psychology	Unemployed+looking for job+ good level of Finnish language
6	Sara	32	Pakistan	5 years	Master's in environmental engineering and Masters in Management	Doing food delivery job+ looking for job in IT field+Learning Swedish and Finnish Language
7	Zameen	30	Nepal	3 years	Medical Degree	Unemployed+looking for job in medical field+Attending Finnish classes
8	Nazia	28	Pakistan	3.5 years	MBBS (Medical degree) and specialist in Gynaecology	Unemployed+looking for job in medical field+Attending Finnish classes
9	Jasmine	27	Pakistan	4 years	MBBS (general medical degree)	Unemployed+looking for job in medical field+Knows good Finnish (average)
10	Isha	34	India	3 years	PhD in Information Technology	Unemployed+ doing Masters+looking for job in IT+ learning Finnish
11	Imaan	36	Pakistan	3 years	PhD in Business and Marketing Management	Unemployed+Looking for job in Business+ Learning Finnish and Swedish language
12	Alia	25	Bangladesh	3.5 years	Bachelor's in arts (Political Science)	Unemployed+looking for job+ Learning Finnish

Table 1. Demographics and some details about participants

Ethical considerations

The study follows the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity which are similar to the general European Union Conduct. The author followed all research protocols when receiving approval from the Research Ethics Board at the Åbo Akademi University, Finland. The participants' original names and other identities are kept anonymous. Participation was completely voluntary. To maintain anonymity during follow-up interviews, participants were assigned unique codes instead of using their real names. These codes were used throughout the transcription and analysis process to ensure confidentiality. In the end, those codes were given fictitious names for the sake of publishing articles. Additionally, any identifying details were removed or generalized to protect participants' identities. The follow-up interviews were conducted without linking responses to personal information, ensuring that participants remained anonymous throughout the study. The participants were given all information about the study prior to the interviews and were asked to sign a consent form. The interview guide was consciously designed to ensure that questions about participants' culture, values, and backgrounds were approached with sensitivity and respect, avoiding any language that could be perceived as intrusive or offensive.

Data collection

The author conducted semi-structured interviews with volunteer immigrant women. In April 2023; in total, 20 immigrant women from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan were approached through convenience sampling, and 12 volunteered to participate. The interviews explored themes such as information sources for job-seeking and challenges in job-seeking. The convenience sampling is used because it was an efficient and simple way to access the participants. The author is personally part of the Pakistani Women's Association of the city which made it easier to access volunteers from Pakistan. The author had some personal connections with immigrant women from Bangladesh, India and Nepal from ex-working places which made it possible to access volunteers from these South Asian countries for interviews. The most valuable factors in getting access to the participants were cultural and language similarities and same gender. For example, the author herself is a woman immigrant to Finland, originally from Pakistan, knows the mother language (i.e. Urdu) of Pakistani women and also understand Hindi. Hindi is the official language of India and is widely spoken and understood by many Indians. While some people in Nepal understand Hindi due to linguistic similarities and media influence, their primary language is Nepali. The author acknowledges that her personal position has a potential influence on the research, but self-reflection has helped her to manage her positionality as an outsider.

The first round of interviews took place in April - June 2023 (average duration 1 hour) with all face-to-face interviews at the author's office, volunteers' home and cafes in Finland. The language of interviews was English because all the participants were comfortable communicating in English. In the second round, two follow up interviews were conducted in September 2023 because the author was not clear about certain questions asked in the first interviews and needed some more details. For example, challenges in using digital information sources for job-seeking. The follow up interviews were 30 minute long and were conducted face-to-face.

Data analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the author to ensure accuracy. The transcription process included careful listening and reviewing for completeness. Given the qualitative nature of this study, transferability was ensured by providing detailed descriptions of participants' experiences, allowing readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar contexts. The data analysis is conducted according to the six stages by Braun & Clarke (2006). 1) The first step was familiarising with data and making notes. 2) After that initial codes were generated to identify themes such as, codes related to the employment-related information seeking process and challenges in the information seeking process. 3) Then the codes were

combined into the potential themes, for example, family and friends, internet, social media were collected under the information sources theme. Similarly, all experiences related to challenges and difficulties during the information seeking process are collected under information challenges. Furthermore, all negative outcomes of information challenges were collected under the consequences theme. Some negative outcomes are stress, anxiety, overburden, muscle pain, weight gain. 4) Finally, the themes were carefully reviewed in relation to the entire data set and finalised themes. After reviewing the themes carefully, in the final stage, all themes were presented for the findings and Nvivo12 was used in the overall analysis process.

Findings

Employment as an important integration concern for the participants

The study finds that employment-related integration is important for the participants. All of the participants interviewed in this study have a good educational background such as Master's and PhDs in different disciplines, have good working experience in different fields (medical, Information Technology, academia, business management), and have very good command of the English language. And they need to survive in the new country. Therefore, they seek employment-related information as the primary thing upon arriving in Finland. Most of them have industry experience from their countries before coming to Finland and therefore, they want to continue working. Some of the participants mentioned that they want to support their spouses by working and earning sufficient for their families. Some related the sense of independence and self-confidence with employment.

For example, Imaan mentioned:

I want to look for work in Finland because I used to work as a medical doctor in Pakistan and it makes me feel I am independent and confident. I am free to plan my own things without depending on my husband and it's important for me'.

Like Imaan, also the other participants related the need for employment to self-awareness, freedom, and social acceptability. Maha mentioned that: "I have a good education, work experience, and speak English well, so finding a job in Finland is my main goal. I want to continue my career here, just like I did in my home country.'

Sources of employment-related information seeking

Primary sources: family, friends and co-ethnic community

The primary source of information seeking for jobs is the participants' family and friends. Most of the participants mentioned that their husbands helped them to refer to their colleagues and contacted ex-colleagues for helping their wives for their first job in Finland. In those cases, the husbands have been living in Finland for a few years before their wives. But in those cases, where both partners came to Finland together, the friends from their ethnic community are the main source of information regarding job opportunities. Such as, Alia mentioned: 'One of my friends from the Bangladeshi community referred me to a kitchen job in a cafe where she used to work'. This shows that word-of-mouth referrals from family members, friends, or co-ethnic networks played a significant role in helping participants access job opportunities that may not be widely advertised.

Moreover, community members who have been in Finland longer offered practical advice on finding a job, navigating local labour laws, or identifying industries where participants were more likely to be hired. This advice significantly reduced the time it took for some participants to find survival job. For example,

Sara already told me that I can quickly get a job in the cleaning sector for the first year of my being in Finland as compared to other sectors, so I straight away applied for a cleaning job and got it within two weeks. It saved my time. (Jasmine)

Secondary source: digital source/social media

The second main source of information for the participants is digital sources such as websites, blogs, and social media channels. The participants mentioned that they searched for jobs on companies' websites and by reading blogs about job-seeking in Finland on google. LinkedIn is mentioned as the significant platform for job seeking by all participants. One of the participants mentioned that

I found my first job in my field from LinkedIn and I recommend others to use LinkedIn, even though it is very confusing most of the time to find the relevant job on LinkedIn (Jasmine).

A few participants mentioned using social media platforms like LinkedIn to build their personal brand. They actively posted articles or shared their own experiences to position themselves as experts in their fields, hoping to get hired by the right company. LinkedIn is used to connect with ex-colleagues from their home country and also to network with new professionals in Finland. LinkedIn is also used for reading career-oriented blogs such as, Zara mentioned: 'I read different motivational blog posts about people's career stories on LinkedIn'. Moreover, Facebook is also mentioned by participants as a source of job seeking. They mentioned how it helps them to join different groups such as, *International jobseekers in Finland*, *International women in Finland*, *Immigrants in Finland*, *Jobs in English in Finland*. YouTube is also mentioned as an important source of information for job-seeking. According to the participants, they have subscribed to channels on YouTube such as, Youtubers from Bangladesh and Pakistan who are living in Finland and sharing their experiences of job-seeking, language learning and other matters in general.

The participants highlighted the role of YouTube in the employment-related information seeking process. They are subscribed to many YouTube channels for getting information about matters such as *How to get a job in Finland*, *How to make a good CV*, *Working life in Finland as a foreigner* and *Learn Finnish language for work in Finland*. Thus YouTube, has served as a valuable source for participants to learn about Finnish workplace culture. They have subscribed to channels that offer insights into professional etiquette, interview techniques, and expectations in Finnish work environments. One participant said, 'I found a YouTube video about how to behave in Finnish interviews, and it really helped me understand the cultural differences'.

Some participants also expressed frustration with the sheer volume of information they encounter on social media platforms. They mentioned that while these platforms offer abundant resources, the overwhelming quantity of job postings, motivational content, and advice from peers can lead to confusion and stress. This often resulted in difficulty in deciding which pieces of advice or information to act upon. According to participants, too many YouTube videos and motivational posts on LinkedIn cause an overwhelming situation, stress and feeling of uncertainty of where to start. They tend to lose focus and motivation by seeing an influx of information on these platforms.

Challenges in employment-related information seeking process

Negative perception about information

One of the main challenges that the participants mentioned is their *negative perception about certain information* during the information seeking process for employment. Participants used the term *negative information* to express various types of situations that occurred in the job-seeking process. The first type of negative information is associated with rejections from employers, job applications go unanswered, delays in responses from employers and no invitations to interviews. Most of the participants despair when job applications go unanswered or when more than a

hundred applications have already been sent, but there are no invitations to interviews. The participants mentioned that the one most common sentence they receive from employers: i.e. 'We have received a large number of qualified applicants, and even though you have a very interesting profile we will unfortunately not proceed with your application for this role'. Zara mentioned that the word *unfortunately* is a negative word that discourages her from applying for jobs in future. Similarly, Nazia mentioned that: 'I only see the specific word 'unfortunately' in the email I receive from my employer, and I do not read the rest of the email message and close it with a bad feeling'. Huma mentioned that: 'I applied for almost 100 job applications in six months but never got a single interview call which means they might not even look at my CV at all or my CV is not good'. In Huma's case, she clearly received a negative message from her experience of not receiving any interview calls from employers. Although the participants used the term negative information to describe their challenges, it was not the information itself that was inherently negative. Instead, participants perceived these experiences negatively, which led to feelings of discouragement, frustration, and disappointment.

The second type of negative information is also associated with the perceptions of participants. Such as, the perception associated with listening, reading, and watching other peoples' negative stories and experiences. The participants mentioned that they listen to negative experiences of other immigrants who came a few years earlier and are still struggling to find a job in Finland. For example, Laila mentioned:

I heard from my husband's friends that he did his Master's degree from University of Helsinki two years back and is still looking for a job in his field and he is doing food delivery these days which he is not happy with. It made me feel that if he did not get a job with a Finnish degree, how would I get a job with no Finnish degree? I have even less chances.

The participants also read some blogs and articles in newspapers such as, YLE News and Helsinki Times (Finnish local newspapers in English), talking about bad experiences of immigrants' employment situation in Finland, which demotivate them further from the Finnish job market. For example, Zara mentioned that she read three articles during last week and immediately their titles were so negative that she got stressed. The titles she mentioned were - *Migrants suffer lower pay, prejudice, discrimination in Finland* (YLE News), *Finland 'wasting' unemployed immigrant women's potential* (YLE News) and *Harder for immigrant women to find jobs in Finland than other Nordic countries* (Helsinki Times). Similarly, Alia shared her experience where she watched a YouTube video of an immigrant living in Finland. The Youtuber shared his migration journey from Pakistan to Finland and his struggles in Finland. He came to Finland to do his doctoral studies five years back and even after completing his studies, he is doing cleaning and food delivery jobs. His Finnish language skills are average. He blamed the hidden discrimination in the Finnish recruitment system such as, looking at a foreign surname and ignoring your CV immediately or making Finnish language an excuse of not offering a job to a foreigner. Alia felt negative about her situation, that if a PhD holder needs to do a cleaning and food delivery job in Finland, how will her Bachelor's study help her to get a good job in Finland. She might need to take admission in Masters and get further qualification first. Similarly, Imaan read many negative stories on Facebook groups, where her immigrant colleagues discuss the job situation in Finland, and she got hopeless from the Finnish job market. She said:

I only heard negative, negative and all negative stories around me. I can only see immigrants working in cleaning, food delivery, post-delivery, riding taxis and dish washing. I am working in cleaning just for now. But I want to work in my field of Business and Marketing in any good company as soon as possible. Otherwise, I think I may need to leave Finland and go somewhere else where English is the main language.

In some situations, other peoples' positive stories and experiences have played the role of negative information for the participants. For example, the motivational posts on LinkedIn about peoples' success has harmed self-confidence of the participants. Zara said:

I read a lot of motivational posts on LinkedIn about success, but they do not talk about the time, effort, and persistence behind it. They only show one face of the coin. It makes me feel that I am not doing enough compared to others or I am inadequate'.

Information overload

Information overload is mentioned as another main challenge that the participants faced during the employment-related information seeking process. Information overload is expressed in different forms by the participants. Firstly, it is noticed that participants are so desperate to get a job that they are not sure what they exactly want. They are open to various job categories at the same time that makes the situation overwhelming for them. For example, Zara mentioned:

I know that it is difficult to find job in my specialisation i.e. Marketing in Finland, therefore, I am open to other job categories such as, sales and marketing, business management, strategy management, human resource, accounts and finance'. Similarly, Laila mentioned, 'I do not know what I want. I just want a white-collar job in any company, does not matter which field. Originally my field is IT, but I am open to other fields as well.... I see so many jobs advertised every day that I get a headache from all those job posts. At some point, I just want to close my laptop and sleep.

Secondly, it is noticed that the participants are not particular about job-seeking in certain locations and are open to different cities such as, Helsinki, Turku, Tampere, Espoo. They are willing to travel to any location if they find a suitable job. This leads to information overload for the participants because they need to deal with so many job advertisements with no location filter into their job-searches. Imaan mentioned: 'I get so many job advertisements because I am choosing different cities in the job-filter. I think I have so many options to choose that I get tired and feel sick of it'.

Another form of information overload for the participants is the overwhelming amount of job notifications that they receive every week. Participants mentioned that they are using 4-5 different job boards for job seeking and every single board has its own profiles. Managing different board profiles and job notifications at the same time is frustrating and overburdening for participants. For example, Jasmine coded:

It took me a week to make profiles on boards such as LinkedIn, Glassdoor, Jobly. And I receive hundreds of job notifications every week. It just fills my inbox and I become exhausted to go through all of them.

Furthermore, the participants mentioned that most of the job descriptions require some kind of new skills such as knowledge of software or technical language - which lead them to search about those particular skills. And they bump into too much information about that particular skill on YouTube and other channels and get distracted from the original job search plan.

Consequences of challenges on participants' lives

Mental and physical health problems

In this study, the participants are found upset and stressed with the negative perception of certain information during the employment-related information seeking process. The negative perception about information such as, rejections for multiple jobs and no interview invitations impact their mental health negatively. Participants mentioned that they feel a lack of motivation, hopelessness, and inability to focus when they receive negative messages from employers after applying to hundreds of jobs. One participant mentioned:

I cannot go out for leisure activities or even to meet friends because my friends call me for a coffee or lunch, and I cannot afford that during my unemployment period. So, I need to give an excuse to them. In this way, I am left alone at home. I feel depressed and miss my friends in India. (Hamia).

This shows that unemployment limits the opportunities for social networking and leisure activities of the participants which leads to loneliness and depression. While many participants believe that having a job and a salary allows them to afford social activities like lunch, coffee outings, or leisure events - helping them integrate into Finnish society - not all share the same perspective. Some participants emphasize that social integration can also happen through community events, volunteering, language courses, or networking beyond the workplace, highlighting that employment is just one of many pathways to social inclusion. Further, the negative stories of other immigrants are a big source of hopelessness and stress. Negative information experiences have a bad impact on the emotional state of the participants such as, Laila mentioned:

I have never imagined myself going to see a psychologist before coming to Finland, but now, I need to see a psychologist to discuss my emotions. I get depressed after listening to my friends' stories about immigrants' joblessness in Finland. I feel I am useless. I am not able to find any job in Finland even after trying hard. And my qualifications are also useless.

The feeling of discrimination and anger is also clear from the participants' experiences. They feel that the Finnish employers only want to hire a Finn regardless of any qualifications or work experiences. They may ignore the skills, abilities, and qualifications an immigrant woman might have in her profile. Maha commented: 'Just because I am not a Finn, I will not get a job. What about my qualifications and work experiences from Bangladesh?' Self-doubts, negative thoughts, uncertainty about the future and anxiety about their career and families are clear signs of poor mental health of participants.

Besides mental health issues, the participants are also facing physical health problems such as poor posture, muscle pain, weight gain, lack of energy in body, headaches, and stomach problems due to long sitting hours in front of computers for job-seeking. Information overload is seen as the main cause for participants experiencing prolonged sitting behaviours. Maha mentioned:

I think I sit on my laptop for 4-5 hours constantly with no breaks when I watch YouTube videos about job seeking and read blogs on LinkedIn. I feel back neck pain and I have seen a doctor for this purpose. He suggested that I do some exercises.

Discussion

Recently in 2023, Finland ranked as the happiest country in the world for the 6th straight year, according to the United Nations (YLE News, 2023) - which makes us wonder whether it is a happy country for immigrants? Unemployment is one of the main challenges of immigrants in Finland, which is causing long term anxieties, stress, demotivation, and hopelessness (Ndumu, 2019; Ndumu, 2020). The number of unemployed immigrant women is generally higher than the Finnish women (Larja and Sutela, 2015) and the findings of this study does verify this fact. All of the women interviewed are unemployed besides two of them, who are working in a restaurant kitchen, cleaning food delivery jobs, but they are still looking for a white-collar job in their own fields. So, job searching is active for all the participants. The following sections provide discussion, relating the findings to the overall aim of the study to examine the employment-related information seeking behaviour of immigrant women

Employment-related information seeking behaviour: Family, friends, and digital sources

Savolainen's (1995) ELIS concept suggests that individuals seek information to address specific daily life challenges, such as employment, health or education. The findings of this study reveal that participants engage in information-seeking to address employment-related concerns, reflecting the problem-specific information-seeking behaviour described by Savolainen (Savolainen, 1995). This study aligns with previous research indicating that immigrants often seek information to navigate key aspects of their everyday lives, including job searches, healthcare, housing, education, and language learning (Shuva, 2020; Given et al., 2023; Savolainen, 2008).

This study brings an important discussion of employment-related information seeking behaviour of immigrant women from the integration perspective. Previous studies often overlook the perspectives of *women*, and there is a lack of detailed exploration regarding their information-seeking experiences. This study finds that immigrant women are struggling with the unemployment challenges even with their highly qualified and skilled backgrounds. Language barriers and Finnish discriminatory recruitment structures are seen as the major reasons behind the unemployment of this group (YLE News, 2019; Larja and Sutela, 2015). However, employment-related information seeking is a strategic and often emotional process, influenced by trust, urgency, and cultural context. The reliance on informal networks – such as family and ethnic communities – can offer immediate support but may also limit access to diverse or high-quality employment options, potentially reinforcing underemployment or occupational segregation. Due to language and cultural similarities (Ahmad, 2011; Author et al., 2022), it is easier to communicate with people from ethnic communities than the locals. Many LIS studies also suggest the primary information source for immigrants is an informal network of family and friends (Ahmad, 2022; Caidi et al., 2010; Fisher et al., 2004; Rodriguez-Mori, 2009; Shuva, 2018).

Secondly, the digital sources, including social media, are also considered important sources of employment-related information seeking in this study. Social media is considered a significant source of information for immigrants in many previous studies (Khoir et al., 2015; Monteiro, 2022; Erdem, 2018; Fietkiewicz, 2017; Borkert et al., 2018; Charmarkeh 2012, Komito & Bates, 2011). Likewise in this study, the participants find social media the fastest, easy and time-saving way for job seeking and making professional networks. While Shuva (2021b) highlights the positive role of LinkedIn in supporting employment-related information seeking among Bangladeshi immigrants in Canada, this study presents a more nuanced picture in the Finnish context. Although some participants viewed LinkedIn as a helpful tool for finding job opportunities, many expressed concerns about information overload and encountering discouraging or negative content. These experiences suggest that while LinkedIn can facilitate access to employment information, it can also contribute to information fatigue and emotional stress, particularly when users lack digital literacy or supportive networks. Facebook groups, YouTube vlogs, blogs and websites are also mentioned as important information sources in this study. However, social media is considered a double-edged sword. Many researchers have shown correlation between excessive usage of social media and poor mental and physical health (Bezerra et al., 2023; Sujarwoto et al., 2023).

Challenges in seeking employment-related information

The excessive use of social media is associated with information overload and information fatigue (Author et al., 2021) where people get exhausted from too much information. In this study, participants find that the excessive use of social media and other digital tools for job seeking are leading to a state of confusion and exhaustion. But they have no other options besides spending many hours using social media to make professional networks and look for job opportunities. The urgency of getting a job is the main reason leading to the experience of information overload on social media for the participants.

The negative perception about certain information is considered one of the main challenges faced by the participants during the employment-related information seeking process. This brings an interesting aspect out for discussion i.e. the friends' network may provide more harm than help in certain situations. For example, in this study, listening to friends' negative stories and experiences cause discouragement, hopelessness and negative feelings for the participants. Some previous studies (Shuva, 2020; Marshal et al., 2020; Audunson et al., 2011) also highlight the negative information experiences with friends and co-ethnic communities. A perspective that could be explored is how individuals can develop strategies to critically assess and filter the information they receive from peers - distinguishing between helpful advice and demotivating anecdotes. Additionally, future research could examine whether digital platforms provide a counterbalance by offering success stories and motivational content that help reshape negative perceptions.

This study also presents that sometimes the positive information may act as a negative information for people. For example, participants find other peoples' motivational posts about career growth on LinkedIn a source of lack-of-confidence, demotivation and perhaps jealousy. However, not all people think alike and may find those motivational posts a source of inspiration

Barriers to integration

The consequence of challenges discussed above (information overload and negative information) is the poor integration of participants into the host society. From the integration perspective, the study finds some potential barriers to better integration of immigrant women into Finnish society. The disappointment the participants get from the rejections and delays from employers, no interview invitations and other people's negative experiences force them to think about leaving Finland. Finland is already facing the challenge of *brain drain* of highly skilled and qualified immigrants (Nieminen, 2015). Due to low birth rates and longer lifespans, the population of Finland is ageing faster. The country needs a high number of immigrants to deal with the challenges of population ageing and labour shortage (Leinonen, 2023). According to the recent report by Helsinki Times (2022), Finland needs to increase yearly migration gains from 15,000 to 35,000 by 2040 to cope with the growing labour shortage and ageing issues. Thus it is clear that Finland is seeking for new immigrants but unable to better integrate the immigrants who are already living in the country and seeking for work. In previous studies, it is argued that social networks help immigrants entering the job market (Ahmad, 2011; Fisher et al., 2004; Shuva, 2022, Giulietti et al., 2013), but this study argues that a job is required in order to make social networks and to join leisure activities for immigrants. As Hamia mentioned:

‘I cannot go out for leisure activities or even to meet friends because my friends call me for a coffee or lunch, and I cannot afford that during my unemployment period. So, I need to give an excuse to them. In this way, I am left alone at home. I feel depressed and miss my friends in India.

When immigrants have a job and a salary, they can afford going out to lunch or coffee or for a leisure activity and hence, can get more opportunities to socialise and integrate into the Finnish society. However, some immigrants can use local public libraries, and attend various co-ethnic social community programs to build networking for free or charge.

Some suggestions for better integration plan for immigrant women

Employment is an important part in the Finnish integration plan for immigrants (Ahmad, 2011) and therefore, it needs special attention. This study suggests that the integration plan needs to be revisited by the policy makers and consider the importance of women's' perspectives. For example, immigrant women can be offered fast language learning courses which can help them to get a job faster. Recruitment strategies and employment policies for foreigners can be improved. And there can be special training sessions on job-hunting techniques, do's and don'ts while job searching online and how to avoid information overload while job searching - organised by the Employment

offices (TE office), public libraries and employment agencies. For example, *information services* such as employment counselling centres, public libraries, career guidance websites, and digital job portals can provide immigrant women with essential job-seeking support. Services like TE Services in Finland, mentorship programs, LinkedIn career workshops, and multilingual job search platforms can help them access employment opportunities and navigate workplace expectations. Additionally, organizing networking events and industry-specific training through these information services by the Employment office or public libraries can further enhance their integration into the Finnish job market. It is noticed that the Finnish integration plan for immigrants focuses excessively on macro level policies aiming at linguistic and economic integration of new immigrants, while ignoring their individual psychological and physical wellbeing needed for better integration into the host society. Mental health is often ignored when talking about a better integration plan for newcomers (Borrell et al., 2015). Women immigrants generally have poorer mental health statuses than the men and unemployment even further elevate the situation (Mucci et al., 2019). This study suggests that there should be a separate section on mental health concerns in the integration plan with more visuals and simple text. Mental health information could also be integrated into *settlement mobile apps* or *community websites*, using *push notifications* or *reminders* paced over time, instead of providing everything at once. Information should be available in multiple languages and presented through *short videos*, *infographics*, or *audio recordings*, which can be easier to process than dense text. Many immigrants do not even know about the psychological services available at their schools, workplaces or local health centres. Additionally, the guide can encourage immigrants to join leisure activities and sports which can reduce stress and offer opportunities to socialise. In this way, this section of the mental health guide can better incorporate with other sections of integration plan such as, economic, social and structural integration (Ager and Strang, 2008) and help immigrants. In the end, it is important to mention that a mentally and physically healthy immigrant woman can bring up a healthy and happy family and also better integrate into the host society. Therefore, it is essential to take care of mental well-being while seeking a job and integrating in a new country.

Implications of the study

This study highlights the need for integration services to move beyond generic job-seeking support and address the specific *information challenges* immigrant women face, such as information overload, distrust in sources, and lack of tailored guidance. Institutions like the TE Office should consider incorporating personalized information sessions, simplified digital resources, and mental health support into integration plans. For example, employment counsellors could offer guidance on filtering reliable job-related content online, using platforms like LinkedIn effectively, and recognizing signs of information fatigue. Stakeholders such as Talent Boost Finland, Business Finland, and private recruitment agencies can also use these insights to design more targeted, gender-sensitive programs and communication strategies that support informed, confident, and healthier job-seeking among immigrant women.

The Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) concept, as outlined by Savolainen (1995), is employed in this study to investigate the nuanced ways in which immigrant women seek employment-related information in their everyday lives. By applying the ELIS framework to this specific context, the study expands the theoretical boundaries of ELIS, exploring how digital resources, social media platforms, and personal networks play pivotal roles in shaping the information-seeking behaviours of immigrant women. This approach not only enhances our understanding of how gender and immigration status intersect with information-seeking practices, but also addresses a significant gap in the literature regarding the unique challenges immigrant women face in the job search process. The study offers insights into the gendered dimensions of employment-related information seeking, highlighting both the informational barriers these women encounter and the resulting consequences on their career opportunities.

Limitations and future research

There are some limitations to the study. First, it relied on convenience sampling, the findings are not generalisable. Second, this study only considered immigrants having resident permits based on family ties and are part of integration plan in Finland, excluding those who are not part of integration plan. This study also relies on participants' memory or recall and is thus reliable only to the extent that respondents accurately portrayed their information experiences. Further, due to time and resource limitation, the study was not able to study vulnerable immigrant women with limited education, skill and English language proficiency, therefore, we do not know the information behaviour of vulnerable immigrant women. Future studies may consider investigating the employment-related information behaviour of vulnerable immigrant women to comprehensively understand their information challenges and consequences of challenges.

Conclusion

This is one of the few studies in LIS which highlights the employment-related information seeking behaviour of immigrant women from an integration perspective. Family, friends, and digital sources (Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn, Blogs, Websites) are the main information seeking sources for job-seeking for immigrant women in Finland. Negative perception about information and information overload are the two main challenges faced by the immigrant women during the employment-related information seeking process. The consequences of these challenges are the poor mental and physical well-being. Overall, the negative perception about information and information overload about the employment situation in Finland and poor mental and physical health leads to poor integration of women immigrants into Finnish society. Therefore, the study suggests Finnish institutes dealing with immigrants' well-being, to consider the importance of mental and physical health for newcomers and improve the employment policies and recruitment strategies for newcomers.

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Appendix : Interview Guide

Interview guide for interviews with immigrant women

About yourself	<p>Some general questions about yourself:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where are you from?• When did you come to Finland/Sweden?• Why did you choose Finland/Sweden from all other countries in the world?• Did you come alone or family?• What was your occupation/education in your home country before coming to Finland/Sweden?• Which languages did you know before coming to Finland/Sweden?• How long have you been living in Finland/Sweden?
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Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the biggest challenge you have faced since arriving in Finland/Sweden? • How do you define integration, and what does it mean to you personally? • Can you describe some ways in which you've tried to integrate into Finnish/Swedish society? • What aspects of integration have been most challenging for you, and why? • How have language barriers impacted your ability to integrate into society? • Did you face any discrimination in the host country? If so, how? • Do you understand the support system in the country? If yes/no, how/any challenges? • Do you have any suggestions for integration programs to be improved / provide more information to you as a newcomer?
<p>Information seeking behaviour</p> <p>(information needs, information sources, challenges in information seeking)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you think back to the time you had recently arrived in Finland/Sweden, what was your dream or plan regarding your studies or career? • Did you achieve those plans? If yes, why? If no, Why? • What kind of information/guidance did you receive for integration in the society regarding your studies or education? • Did you receive all the information/guidance you needed or anything could be improved? • What are the main topics or areas of interest for which you actively seek information? <p>Sub-questions: (once the participants mentioned that employment is the main concern)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why did you seek employment-related information the most? - What were the main sources to seek employment-related information? - What are the information challenges you would mention that you faced during information seeking for employment? - Are there any challenges you would like to mention that are related to socio-cultural factors? - Did you find any solutions to those challenges? - How did those challenges end up affecting your mental or physical health? Any examples.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Any recommendations for the Finnish system to improve the services for job seekers like you? • Where do you usually look for information when you need it? (e.g., online platforms, community organisations, government agencies) • Why do you look for information on that specific platform? And why not others? • Have you encountered any challenges or barriers when trying to access information on that platform? • Do you prefer to seek information in your native language, or are you comfortable accessing information in the local language? Why or why not? • Have you faced any difficulties communicating with service providers or obtaining information due to language barriers? • Are there any cultural norms or expectations in Finland/Sweden that impact how you seek information or interact with information sources? • Have you encountered any cultural misunderstandings or challenges when seeking information in Finland/Sweden? If so, can you provide examples? • How comfortable are you with using digital tools and online resources to find information? Are there any barriers to accessing technology?
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