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Children's social media use behaviors according to parents' social media addiction and methods used by parents

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The objective of the present study is to ascertain how parents' social media addiction affects their children's social media use behaviors and the methods employed by parents to manage this situation.

Method: A cross-sectional study was conducted on a sample of 218 parents of children between the ages of 7–18. The collection of data was facilitated by two instruments: the “Parent-Child Information Form” and the “Social Media Addiction Scale.”

Results: The present study has revealed that 41.6 % of parents are addicted to social media. Conversely, parents who do not manifest symptoms of social media addiction exhibit a heightened level of awareness regarding their children's social media accounts and demonstrate a more deliberate approach. The predominant methods employed by parents to restrict their children's access to social media included directing them towards sports activities (71.7 %) and fostering peer interaction (37.2 %). Conversely, parents grappling with social media addiction have adopted more stringent measures, including the deliberate confiscation of devices, with the aim of curtailing their children's access to social media.

Conclusion: The relationship between parents' social media addiction and their children's social media use is a complex one. While children of addicted parents demonstrate a higher propensity for social media usage, parents endeavour to restrict their children's exposure to this environment.

Practical implications: Nurses and health professionals can play a pivotal role in raising awareness among families and providing guidance to children on the safe use of the internet.

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Introduction

Social media, an indispensable component of the digital age, exerts a profound influence on not only individual communication styles but also family dynamics and children's social media usage habits (Kanbur, 2020; Mustafaoglu et al., 2018). According to the “The Global State of Digital” report by We Are Social and Hootsuite, the global population of internet users has surpassed 8 billion (Social, 2018). In Turkey, however, the statistics reveal a different picture: 94.1 % of households use the internet from home, and 85 % of individuals aged 16–74 use the internet (TÜİK, 2022). Furthermore, the UNICEF report (UNICEF, 2019) indicates that one in three children under the age of 18 worldwide uses the internet. The Turkish Statistical Institute's Information Technologies Usage Survey on Children 2021 report (TÜİK, 2021) further reveals that 82.7 % of children between the ages of 6

and 15 use the internet, predominantly through mobile phones. The preponderance of data unequivocally substantiates the assertion that social media addiction constitutes a global problem, exerting its influence on both children and parents (Lim & Jeong, 2022).

The impact of parental social media addiction on the digital experiences of their children has been a subject of considerable interest in recent years (Aslan & Turgut, 2024). This observation lends further credence to the notion that children's digital footprints are shaped in the shadow of their parents' social media addiction. Frey et al. (2023) underscored that parents utilize social media to foster a sense of community and shared experiences, leveraging it as a resource for health information regarding their children. It is noteworthy that the propensity for social media addiction escalates with increasing usage duration, a phenomenon that has the potential to diminish emotional engagement with children. The impact of parental social media addiction on the developmental outcomes of their children is a salient concern, as evidenced by research highlighting its potential to hinder social, physical, and mental development (Ye et al., 2023). The prevalence of

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problematic behaviors, such as negative eating habits (Sina et al., 2022), disrupted sleep patterns (Sümen & Evgin, 2021), and adverse health outcomes (Paakkari et al., 2021), as well as mental health problems such as attention deficit, depression, and anxiety (Bozzola et al., 2022), have been documented. Social problems such as the inability to protect privacy (Erk & Firat, 2020), cyberbullying (Atman Uslu & Yildiz Durak, 2022) and disruption in family interaction (Ye et al., 2023) have also been identified.

The objective of this study is to examine the correlation between parents' social media dependency and their children's social media utilization patterns, along with the techniques employed by parents in this context. In the contemporary digital age, there has been a notable increase in children's engagement with social media. However, the role of parents in this process, as well as the impact of their level of addiction on their children, has not been sufficiently explored (Vossen et al., 2024). The present study aims to address this significant gap in the literature by examining how parents' social media addiction influences their children's digital habits. The study will also analyze the strategies employed by parents to manage their children's social media use, thereby providing novel insights into effective parenting approaches. The study's findings will contribute to the academic literature while also raising social awareness, thereby providing valuable information to guide families and policymakers.

Research questions:

- (1) What is the relationship between parents' social media addiction and their children's social media usage behaviors?
- (2) How do parents' internet and social media usage behaviors affect their children's social media usage habits?
- (3) What are parents' attitudes towards their children's social media use?
- (4) How do the measures taken by parents towards their children's social media use vary according to whether they have social media addiction or not?

Methods

Design and participants

The present study constitutes a cross-sectional investigation. The population of the study consisted of parents of children aged 7–18 years who were hospitalised in the pediatric ward of Bartın Maternity and Children's Hospital. The mean annual number of admissions for children aged 7–18 years to this ward is approximately 500. These children are accompanied by their parents, who serve as their companions. A non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was employed, with parents who were available and willing to participate during the designated data collection period being included in the study. Prior to the study, the sample size was calculated using a website that determined a minimum of 218 participants would be required, with a margin of error of 0.05 and a confidence interval of 95 %. The final sample consisted of 226 parents. Due to the implementation of convenience sampling, the findings cannot be extrapolated to the broader population of parents of hospitalised children; rather, they are representative of the characteristics of the sample studied. An effort was made to include parents from a variety of socio-demographic backgrounds to enhance variability within the sample. The inclusion criteria were as follows: The child's age ranged from 7 to 18 years, and the child was at least literate. The child was hospitalised in the pediatric ward, and the parent was at least literate. Neither the child nor the parent had a diagnosed mental disability.

Data collection tools

The data were collected using two instruments: the "Parent-Child Information Form" and the "Social Media Addiction Scale."

Parent Child Information Form: The personal information form was developed by the researcher to evaluate socio-demographic characteristics and to ascertain the characteristics of parent and child social media use. This form was prepared following a comprehensive literature review on the subject (Bozzola et al., 2022; Hammer et al., 2021). The form comprises a total of 21 questions.

Social Media Addiction Scale (SMAS): The measurement tool in question was developed by Tutgun-Ünal and Deniz (2015) with the purpose of evaluating the social media addiction levels of individuals. Following extensive validity and reliability studies, the scale is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 41 items and rated with frequency expressions in the range of "Always," "Often," "Sometimes," "Rarely," and "Never." The scale demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach alpha value of 0.97. The scale items consist of four dimensions: preoccupation, mood regulation, repetition, and conflict. The scale ranges from a minimum of 41 to a maximum of 205 points, with a median score of 100. The total score ranges were analyzed, and it was determined that there is no addiction for scores between 41 and 73, low addiction for 74–106, medium addiction for 107–139, high addiction for 140–172 and very high addiction for scores between 173 and 205. The reliability value of the "Social Media Addiction Scale" utilized in the study was determined to be highly reliable, exhibiting a Cronbach alpha value of 0.62 (Tutgun-Ünal & Deniz, 2015). The Cronbach alpha value was 0.813 in this study.

Data collection

The study was initiated subsequent to the procurement of institutional and ethics committee permissions. Parents who volunteered to participate in the study and met the inclusion criteria were included in the study. Prior to their involvement, written informed consent was obtained from the parents, and the "Parent Child Information Form" and the "Social Media Addiction Scale" were completed. The data collection process was conducted through in-person interactions. The study was terminated once the stipulated sample size was reached.

Analysis

The data obtained in the study were evaluated in a computer environment using SPSS 22.0, a statistical program. Frequency and percentage analyses were used to determine the descriptive characteristics of the participants, and mean and standard deviation statistics were used to analyze the scale. The chi-square test was used to determine the presence of statistically significant differences between the categories. The post hoc analysis of the chi-square test was analyzed with Fisher exact analysis. The data of this research were analyzed at a confidence interval of 95 % and a p significance level of <0.05 (Cohen, 2013).

Ethics

The present study was conducted in accordance with the provisions set forth by the relevant authorities at the University of XXX Ethics Committee (Protocol No. 2023-SBB-0468 dated August 17, 2023) and the provincial health directorate (Number 73357114 dated March 29, 2023). Informed consent was obtained from the parents for their own participation as well as that of their children in the study. The study was subsequently initiated.

Results

Of the parents who participated in the study, 15 % were fathers and 85 % were mothers. The demographic composition of the sample is delineated as follows: 19.5 % of the participants fell within the 24–29 age range, 35.4 % were between the ages of 30 and 35, and 45.1 % were 36 years of age and older. With respect to the parents' educational attainment, 17.7 % had completed secondary school, 31.9 % had attended

high school, and 50.4 % had attained a university degree or higher. The predominant family structure was nuclear families, accounting for 91.6 % of the sample, followed by extended families, constituting 8.4 %. Regarding the number of children, 45.6 % of parents had only one child, 42.9 % had two children, and 11.5 % had three or more children. Among the total number of parents who participated in the study, 55.3 % had female children and 44.7 % had male children. Regarding the children's educational status, 75.7 % were enrolled in primary school, 13.3 % in secondary school, and 11.1 % in high school. The present study examined the prevalence of social media addiction among parents, utilizing the Social Media Addiction Scale as a data collection instrument. The results, presented in Table 1, indicated that 41.6 % of the participants exhibited symptoms indicative of social media addiction.

While a substantial majority of the participants, 96.5 %, reported having a permanent internet connection at home, a notable minority, 3.5 %, did not. Additionally, while 9.3 % of the participants have been using the internet for between one and five years, 90.7 % have been using the internet for more than five years. Additionally, while 58.8 % of the children of the parents participating in the study have their own phones, 41.2 % do not have their own phones. Regarding the utilization of social media by their offspring, 48.2 % of parents responded in the affirmative, while 51.8 % responded in the negative. Regarding the duration of time that parents allocate to social media, 81.9 % of parents reported dedicating between one and four hours, while 18.1 % reported devoting more than four hours. In contrast, 221 % of children reported spending between one and four hours on social media, while 79.9 % indicated spending more than four hours on the platform. The most prevalent social media platforms utilized by children were WhatsApp (23.4 %), Instagram (23.1 %), YouTube (19.0 %), Facebook (17.6 %), Twitter (0.9 %), Tiktok (0.3 %), and Snapchat (0.1 %). A statistically significant difference in the social media platforms utilized by children

was observed according to the parents' social media addiction status, as indicated by a chi-squared test result of $X^2 = 11.711$, $p = 0.001$. A subsequent analysis revealed that children of parents with social media addiction were more likely to use Tiktok than those without (5.2 % versus 1.8 %, $p < 0.001$) (Table 2).

The results, which were self-reported, also indicated that 66.4 % of parents had spoken with their children about social media, and 50.4 % claimed awareness of their children's social media accounts. Moreover, 65.9 % of respondents expressed discomfort regarding their children's use of social media, and an overwhelming 94.2 % considered measures to limit it. The methods employed by parents to restrict their children's access to social media were reported as follows: 71.7 % of parents directed their children towards sports activities, 37.2 % encouraged peer interactions, 14.9 % allowed limited usage, 3.1 % forcibly took away phones or tablets, 1.5 % reprimanded their children, 0.7 % engaged in games, 0.2 % confiscated devices after usage limits were established, and 0.2 % suggested family activities (Table 3).

A notable discrepancy was observed in the awareness of the child's social media accounts, contingent on the parents' propensity for social media addiction. The proportion of parents without social media addiction (70.2 %) exceeded that of those with social media addiction (29.8 %) ($X^2 = 13.114$, $p < 0.001$). A similar discrepancy was observed in the methods employed to restrict the child's access to social media, with those without social media addiction demonstrating a higher frequency of such practices ($X^2 = 14.194$, $p < 0.001$). Parents grappling with social media addiction (7.1 %) exhibited a higher propensity to forcibly remove phones and tablets to prevent their children from accessing social media compared to those not experiencing addiction (0.4 %), a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.001$) (Table 3).

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between parents' social media addiction and their children's social media use. The study's findings indicated that children of parents with social media addiction exhibited a higher propensity to utilize platforms such as TikTok. Conversely, parents who do not exhibit signs of addiction demonstrate a heightened level of awareness regarding their children's social media utilization. Parents often prioritize sports and peer activities as a means of distraction for their children, steering them away from the allure of social media. A substantial proportion of parents have a permanent internet connection at home, with 96.5 % of respondents in a 2013 study indicating that they had such a connection (Ayas & Horzum, 2013). Moreover, an even greater proportion, 90.7 %, had been using social media for more than five years. In Ayas and Horzum's (2013) study, it was determined that 82.8 % of the participants had internet connection at home. In a separate study, Ulusoy and Bostancı (2014) found that 91 % of parents used social media. Okumuş and Parlar's (2018) research further revealed that the majority of parents with children who use social media also utilize social media themselves.

According to the Social Media Addiction Scale, 41.6 % of parents exhibit symptoms consistent with the diagnostic criteria for addiction. While 29.8 % of parents with social media addiction reported awareness of their child's social media account, 70.2 % of parents without social media addiction also reported awareness of their child's social media account. Moreover, 8.5 % of parents with social media addiction expressed a desire to restrict their children's access to social media, while 96.2 % of parents without social media addiction expressed a similar desire. Güney's (2020) investigation into the factors that motivate students to engage with social media revealed that the majority of students are influenced by their family and friends in making the decision to utilize social media. Kwak et al. (2018) arrived at the conclusion that parental neglect is significantly related to adolescents' smartphone addiction. A study by Manap, A., & Durmuş, E. (2020) revealed a positive correlation between the increase in internet addiction among children and the rise in negative parental modeling exhibited in media use. In the

Table 1
Distribution of participants according to descriptive characteristics (N = 226).

Descriptive Characteristics	n	%
Age		
24–29	44	19.5
30–35	80	35.4
36 and Over	102	45.1
Interviewed parent		
Mother	192	85.0
Father	34	15.0
Education level of the parents interviewed		
Primary School	40	17.7
High School	72	31.9
Undergraduate and postgraduate	114	50.4
Number of children		
1	103	45.6
2	97	42.9
3 and above	26	11.5
Family type		
Core	207	91.6
Wide	19	8.4
Age of the child		
7–11	183	81.0
11–15	29	12.8
16 and above	14	6.2
Gender of the child		
Girl	125	55.3
Male	101	44.7
Child's educational status		
Primary School	171	75.7
Middle School	30	13.3
High School	25	11.1
Social media addiction (parent)*		
Yes	94	41.6
No	132	58.4

* was determined according to the Social Media Addiction Scale.

Table 2
Children's social media use behaviors according to parents' social media addictions (N = 226).

	Total n (%)	Parents without Social Media Addiction (%)	Parents with Social Media Addiction (%)
Presence of a constant internet connection at home			
Yes	218 (96.5)	125 (57.3)	93 (42.7)
No	8 (3.5)	7 (87.5)	1 (12.5)
		$\chi^2 = 2.890, p = 0.144$	
Child's own phone ownership			
Yes	133 (58.8)	74 (55.6)	59 (44.4)
No	93 (41.2)	58 (62.4)	35 (37.6)
		$\chi^2 = 1.019, p = 0.399$	
Child's use of social media			
Yes	109 (48.2)	70 (64.2)	39 (35.8)
No	117 (51.8)	62 (53.0)	55 (47.0)
		$\chi^2 = 2.929, p = 0.089$	
Child's daily social media usage time			
1–4 h	50 (22.1)	33 (25.0)	17 (18.1)
Over 4 h	176 (77.9)	99 (75.0)	77 (81.9)
		$\chi^2 = 1.524, p = 0.256$	
Social media platforms used by the child*			
Whatsapp (1)	199 (23.4)	106 (24.0)	93 (24.3)
Instagram (2)	197 (23.1)	108 (24.5)	89 (23.2)
Youtube (3)	162 (19.0)	77 (0.9)	85 (22.2)
Facebook (4)	150 (17.6)	86 (19.5)	64 (16.7)
Twitter (5)	77 (0.9)	53 (12.0)	24 (6.2)
Tiktok (6)	28 (0.3)	8 (1.8)	20 (5.2)
Snapchat (7)	9 (0.1)	2 (0.04)	7 (1.8)
		$\chi^2 = 11.711, p = 0.001$	
		6 (with and without social addiction), p < 0.001	

* Multiple selected items.

contemporary age, characterized by technological advancements, social media has become a domain that is readily accessible to children and challenging to regulate. Consequently, it is strongly recommended that parents exercise caution with regard to their children's deliberate use of social media without any tangible or psychological benefits (Okumuş & Parlar, 2018).

The study revealed that children predominantly utilize WhatsApp (23.4 %), Instagram (23.1 %), YouTube (19.0 %) and Facebook (17.6 %). Furthermore, a significant relationship was identified between parents'

social media addiction and their children's platform preferences. In [Ulusoy and Bostancı's \(2014\)](#) study on social media use in children and the role of parents, the most popular social media network was determined as Facebook, and 86 % of the parents participating in the study stated that their children use Facebook. In [Okumuş and Parlar's \(2018\)](#) study, 86 % of the students indicated that they were members of at least one social media platform. [Güney's \(2020\)](#) study concluded that the majority of the 189 students included in the study were members of a social media site.

Table 3
Parents' behaviors towards their children's social media use according to their social media addiction (N = 226).

Parents' Behavior	Total n (%)	Parents without Social Media Addiction (%)	Parents with Social Media Addiction (%)
Talking to the child about social media			
Yes	150 (66.4)	89 (59.3)	61 (40.7)
No	76 (33.6)	43 (56.6)	33 (43.4)
		$\chi^2 = 0.158, p = 0.755$	
Knowledge of the child's social media accounts			
Yes	114 (50.4)	80 (70.2)	34 (29.8)
No	112 (49.6)	52 (46.4)	60 (53.6)
		$\chi^2 = 13.114, p < 0.001$	
Discomfort with the child's use of social media			
Yes	149 (65.9)	84 (63.6)	65 (69.1)
No	77 (34.1)	48 (36.4)	29 (30.9)
		$\chi^2 = 0.748, p = 0.398$	
Thinking about keeping your child away from social media			
Yes	213 (94.2)	127 (96.2)	86 (8.5)
No	13 (5.8)	5 (3.8)	8 (91.5)
		$\chi^2 = 2.259, p = 0.155$	
How to keep your child away from social media*			
Directing to sports activities (1)	159 (71.7)	93 (43.4)	66 (39.2)
Ensuring that they spend time with their peers (2)	142 (37.2)	85 (39.7)	57 (33.9)
Not objecting to using social media for short periods of time (3)	57 (14.9)	31 (14.4)	26 (15.4)
Forcibly taking away phones and tablets (4)	12 (3.1)	1 (0.4)	12 (7.1)
Shouting and complaining (5)	6 (1.5)	2 (0.8)	4 (2.3)
Playing games (6)	3 (0.7)	0 (0.0)	3 (1.7)
Taking the phone/tablet after saying it is expired (8)	1 (0.2)	1 (0.4)	0 (0.0)
Identifying activities that the family can do together (9)	1 (0.2)	1 (0.4)	0 (0.0)
		$\chi^2 = 14.194, p < 0.001$	
		4 (with and without social addiction), p < 0.001	

* Multiple selected items.

The study's results indicated that children of parents with a social media addiction (5.2 %) exhibited a higher propensity to utilize TikTok compared to those without (1.8 %). This study diverges from extant research on social media addiction and parent-child relationships in several significant respects. Firstly, the issue of parents' social media addiction and their children's social media use is a topic that has received scant attention in the extant literature (Harris & Jacobs, 2023). It is noteworthy that children of parents with social media addiction tend to use platforms such as TikTok more. This finding lends further credence to the notion that parental social media usage habits exert a direct influence on their children. The extant literature has examined the impact of parents' internet usage habits on their children's digital behaviors (Pons-Salvador et al., 2022). However, this study offers a novel contribution by clearly delineating the relationship between social media addiction and specific platform preferences.

A variety of methods are employed by parents in an attempt to limit their children's social media use. These measures encompass directives for children to engage in sports and peer activities, the collection of devices for designated periods, the imposition of restrictions on social media use, the issuance of verbal warnings, and the organization of family events. Additionally, parents who manifest symptoms of social media addiction have been observed to impose more stringent restrictions on their children's access to social media. In Ulusoy and Bostancı's (2014) study on social media use in children and the role of parents, 83 % of the parents who participated in the study were found to control their children's movements on social networks. A separate study by Cengiz Saltuk and Erciyes (2020) sought to ascertain parental attitudes towards technology use among preschool-aged children. The study's findings indicated that a significant proportion of the participating mothers engaged in limited quality time with their children, minimal play activities, directed their children towards social activities, and participated in cognitive games. In a similar vein, Ozsoy, D., & Atılğan, S. S. (2018) study found that parents exercise significant control over their children's internet and device usage by implementing bans and setting usage duration limits.

The present study also revealed discrepancies between parents' methods of restricting their children's social media use and their own social media addiction. A notable observation was that parents who did not exhibit signs of social media addiction employed more constructive strategies in guiding and limiting their children's social media use. Conversely, parents with social media addiction have been observed to implement more stringent and abrupt interventions, which have the potential to adversely impact the child (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). While extant literature provides some insights into the dynamics of parental control and social media use, a comparative analysis of parental addiction levels and the methods employed remains underdeveloped (Nielsen et al., 2020). In addressing this gap in the literature, the present study offers a novel perspective by exploring the impact of parents' social media addiction on their attitudes towards child-rearing.

Practice implications

The results of this study carry significant implications for the realm of pediatric nursing practice. As children's engagement with social media increases, nurses can play a vital role in supporting families by promoting safe internet usage and preventing potential risks associated with social media addiction. The results of the study indicate that pediatric nurses should prioritize educational programs that inform parents about healthy social media habits and strategies to manage their children's digital activities. Nurses can guide parents to adopt constructive methods, such as encouraging physical activities and fostering peer interactions, rather than imposing punitive restrictions. Furthermore, the findings underscore the necessity for the

development of family-centered interventions that address parental social media use in conjunction with children's habits. It is imperative that pediatric nurses possess the capacity to identify families that may be at risk and offer customized counseling to enhance awareness regarding the potential health consequences of excessive digital engagement. These consequences may include sleep problems, mental health issues, and exposure to cyberbullying. The integration of these strategies into routine pediatric healthcare services has the potential to significantly contribute to the fostering of healthier digital environments for children.

Limitations

The present study was conducted within the framework of certain constraints and limitations. Firstly, the sample of the study was limited to parents in a specific region, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, the data are based on parents' self-reports. The subjective nature of parental self-reporting may introduce bias, which may be further compounded by the parents' subjective assessments of their own social media addiction levels and their children's social media use habits. In order to obtain more objective data, different data collection techniques, such as direct observation or digital monitoring of children's social media use, could be used. Finally, the assessment of children's social media addiction was not a direct component of this study, and therefore further analysis was not conducted. In subsequent studies, the assessment of children's addiction levels may facilitate a more comprehensive examination of the relationship between parents' social media addiction and children's usage habits.

Conclusion

The present study revealed a correlation between parents' social media addiction and an increased likelihood of their children engaging in social media use, particularly on platforms like TikTok. Parents who exhibited more responsible internet usage exhibited children with healthier digital behaviors. Conversely, non-addicted parents exhibited heightened awareness and adopted more constructive strategies to guide their children's online activities. Conversely, parents grappling with addiction often resorted to more stringent yet less efficacious measures. These findings underscore the necessity of addressing parents' digital behaviors in conjunction with their children's media use to foster more conducive family media environments.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Aysel Topan: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Ayla Gündoğdu Karakaya:** Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation. **Betül Akkoç:** Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Aylin Kurt:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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