Use of Interactive Social Networking Sites in Academic Counseling and Student Support Services: A Study on IGNOU Academics

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Media tools brought a paradigm shift in all IGNOU regional centers' academic activities while dealing with student support services, course induction programs, promoting ODL academic programs in their entire region during recent years and also in covid 19 times. Application of new media tools are affordable and effective communication tools to bridge the gap between learners and institutions. Samart e-portal being developed by MHRD, allows quick update of students' info on day to day basis, emails, Facebook, WhatsApp, messenger, Google meet, Instagram and twitter also proved to be very handy in disseminating institutional info to their learners in fraction of seconds globally. This study critically examines how IGNOU Academics effectively using new media tools in all their mundane academic and student support activities. Secondly, try to find out the training needs of academics to improve competence for optimal use. Finally this study comes out with valid suggestions as how to improve capacity building training and infrastructure strategies.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This research study used both primary and secondary data for its qualitative and quantitative research inputs. The study adopted a convenient sampling method to examine various aspects like, use of interactive media technologies by respondents in all their academic counselling and student support services online. A survey was conducted with the help of web based Google forms, prior to sending the survey questions to respondents, all the questions were verified and validated by the experts in the similar fields.

Findings: This study found that, irrespective of their gender and age group, on day to day basis, IGNOU Academics are extensively using new media tools and Social Networking Sites for imparting pre and post admission counseling and also using for all their Student Support Services, which includes simple tools like bulk SMS, email apart from Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp and Google Meet etc. Majority of the respondents requested capacity building training to enhance their efficiency. This research study strongly recommends that all ODL institutes earmark special budget provisions to develop state of the art capacity building computer labs for providing one to one training. These computer labs should be equipped with latest version computers and software. This study also strongly recommends ODL institutions should also acquire high capacity servers with super-fast bandwidth to provide Internet facilities.

Type of Study/Originality/Value: A survey of IGNOU Academics on 'use of Social Networking Sites/New Media Tools in Tutoring, Counseling and Student Support Services' was conducted by the authors to find the effective use of SNS for imparting education through Google form and analysis of data was done through descriptive statistical techniques. This study would be useful to understand the need for strengthening the ICT infrastructure and to provide more training facilities in Higher Educational Sector on effective utilization of SNS, keeping in view, the important and efficient role of SNS as new media tools for Tutoring, Counseling and Student Support Services.

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Introduction:

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is a National Resource Centre for Open and Distance Learning (ODL), with an international recognition. It provides quality education by creating an opportunity to access and receive education to all sections of largest population. IGNOU operates with Headquarters at New Delhi and its 54 Regional Centers across the country. The University has dedicated Academic Officers to provide academic counselling and student support services to the learners spread across the country.

In recent times, IGNOU has moved ahead from traditional correspondence platforms like letter and Face to Face interactions with learners to ICT based learner support systems. Gradually, IGNOU academics have adopted new media tools for all types of students support services and academic counselling purposes. For instance, induction programs using social media networks like Google meet, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, messengers, emails, SMS in order to faster way of resolving students issues and also to bridge the gap between learners and educational institutions. This shift from traditional ways to technological means of learner support services has given some new dimensions, challenges and experiences.

Review of literature:

Mobile communication and Internet wireless networking has no doubt enhanced the connectivity for all stake holders in ODL educational institutions and it has very long way to go (Fozdar, & Kumar, 2007). The growth rate of 9.7% percent enrolment recorded in colleges and universities noticed that they have taken at least one course of ODL for study (Allen and Seaman 2007). Growth rate of 1.5% percent recorded in the students of higher education enrollment. It is also noticed in the corporate world growth of social media networking like Facebook, Friendster, LinkedIn, LiveJournal, and Myspace has widespread used extensively (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). In order to enhance efficiency of the ODL staff in house intensive capacity building training programs are necessary to handle all new media interactive technologies (Gowthaman & Awadhiya 2017; Soni *et al.*,2020) Facebook is the largest social media network used for all purposed by corporate as well as government agencies (Brady et al., 2010) It is found that course management system (CMS) increase teacher- student engagement while social networking sites (SNS) are user centered rather than class centered. A social networking site (SNS) has the potentials to promote online community building and facilitates learning beyond boundaries (Smith, 2009). Distance education courses has in-built advantages to accommodate participation of students in all online discussions on the other hand DE also make a social presence (DeSchryver et al., 2009) It is noticed students with more social presence also tend to be more involved in peer learning and discussions (Cobb, 2009; Swan & Shih, 2005). Another study

revealed that the social presence removes the isolation feelings and detachment of DE learners and also encourage teacher student/peer engagement and participation in online courses (Bai, 2003). It is argued that the web networking technologies changed interaction and communications styles of people's daily life. Educational researchers and practitioners of DE said WEB has huge potentials to shape the learning styles (Barbour and Plough 2009). Majority of the learning communities expressed positive feelings for being socially connected for all their learning activities, they also pointed social networking sites were used as supplementary tools at the time of learning. Teachers concerns and on job difficulties while using social media in education are topics of future research (Hung & Yuen 2010).

Problem of the Study:

IGNOU academics are found highly qualified but they don't have hands on experience to use Social Networking Sites (SNS) and Classroom Management System (CMS). They expressed their inability to explore the optimum benefits of web based new media tools and wireless interactive communication technologies in academic counseling and student support services. They also said if they had capacity building training before put into practice, it would have certainly enhanced their efficiency in Students Support Services and academic counselling sessions.

Scope of the Study:

This Study highlights the use of social networking sites or new media tools by IGNOU academics in pre and post admission counseling, tutoring, information dissemination and other student support services. This Study also explores the possibilities for further requirement of training and better ICT based infrastructure facilities in ODL institutions.

Objectives of the Study:

- To know the understanding extent of utilization of Social Networking sites or New Medial Tools by IGNOU Academics.

- To know the requirement of training and other needs of IGNOU Academics.

- To give suggestive measures for improvement in effective use of Social Networking Sites or New Media tools in Academic Counseling and Student Support Services.

Research and Methodology:

This research study used both primary and secondary data for its qualitative and quantitative research inputs. The study adopted a convenient sampling method to examine various aspects like, use of interactive media technologies by respondents in all their online academic counselling and student support services. A survey was conducted with the help of web based Google forms, prior to sending the survey

questions to respondents all the questions were verified and validated by the experts in the similar fields. Provisions were made for third gender to give social equality while giving their responses. Descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyze the data. The participants in this study were serving IGNOU on regular academic positions, namely Assistant Regional Director, Assistant Director, Deputy Director and Regional Directors/ Senior Regional Directors

Sample

Total sample of 150 academic participants was taken for this study, out of which only 103 academics taken part and responded. Out of 103 respondents, there were 41 female respondents and 62 male respondents ranging between 25 to 65 years of age group.
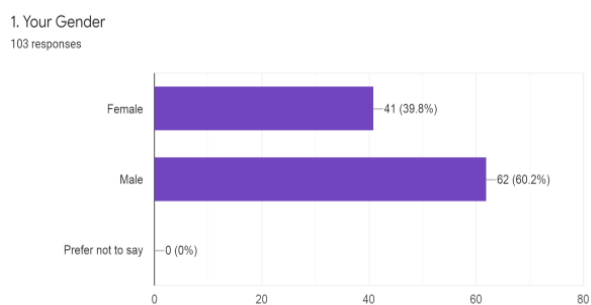
Tool for data collection

Web based Google forms were designed for 150 academic participants. Total 15 questions administered on participants, with 13 close-ended and 2 open ended to receive quantitative and qualitative responses by participants. Google form questionnaires were sent to each respondent on their official as well as personal emails as requested by participants. A Google form link also sent on their personal WhatsApp mobile numbers too.

Analysis of the Study

Graph (1) and (2) shows that, out of 103 responses received, 62% Male Academic Officers and 39.8% of Female Academics falling under various age groups from 25-35 (31), 35-45 (28%), 45-55 (26%) and 55-65 (18%) are using SNS in their tutoring and counseling activities.

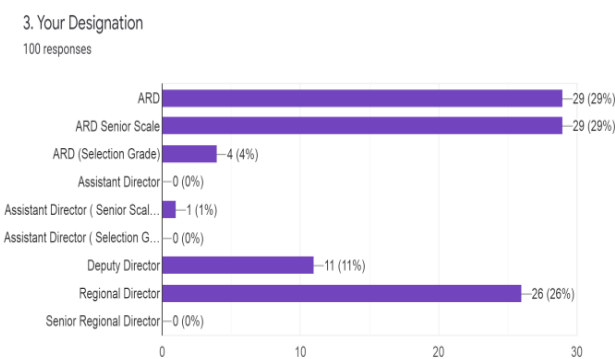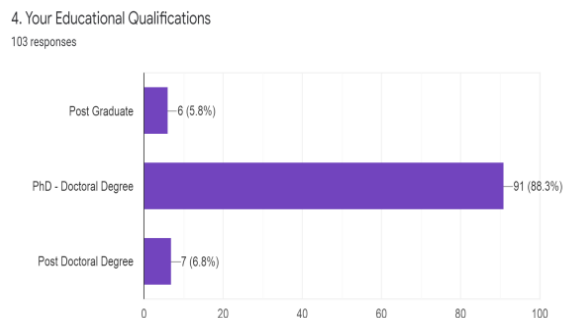| Graph (1) Gender wise response of Academics of IGNOU using Social Networking tools for tutoring and counseling	Graph (2) Age wise response of Academics of IGNOU using Social Networking tools for tutoring and counseling
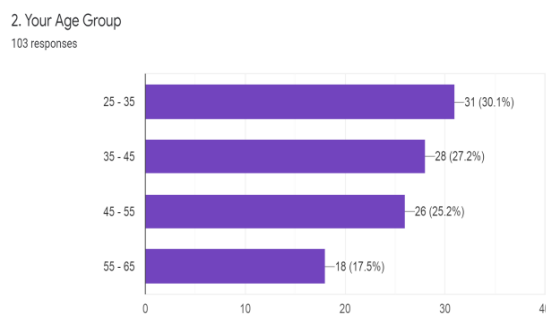
Graph (3) and (4) shows that, out of 103 responses received, 29 %, 29% and 4% Assistant Regional Directors (Entry Level Scale, Senior Scale and Selection Grade Scale, respectively) are using SNS in their tutoring and counseling activities. Further, 11% Deputy Directors and 26% Regional Directors also responded that they are using SNS in their tutoring and counseling activities. Graph (4) indicates that, 91% of these Officers are holding PhD degree to their academic credentials.

Graph (3) designation wise response of Academic Staff of IGNOU on use of SNS tools for tutoring and counseling	Graph (4) Educational Qualifications credentials of Academic Staff of IGNOU on use of SNS for tutoring and counseling

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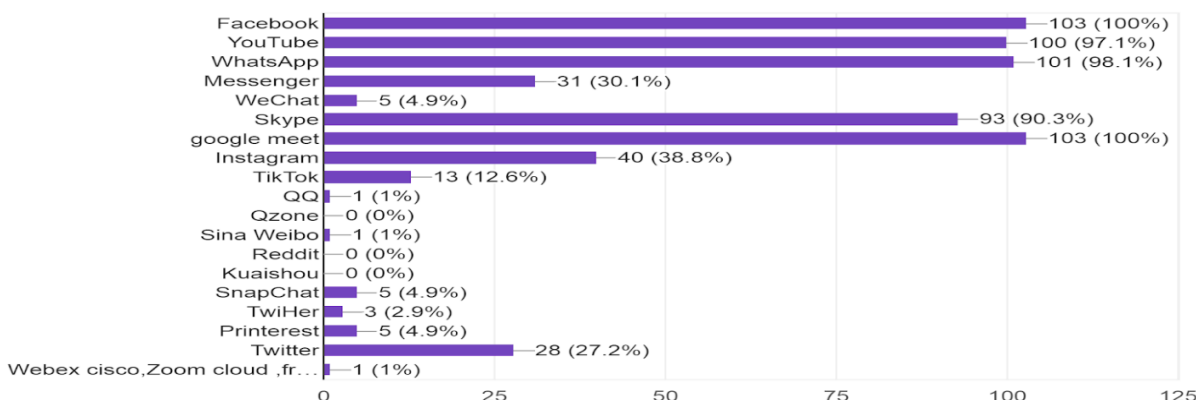Global Journal of Enterprise Information System

Graph (5) shows that, IGNOU Academic's are well aware of pivotal role and utilities of SNS for the counseling and tutoring of learners. 100% response is received on awareness and utility of Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Google meet. There is also a prominent response in case of Skype followed by Instagram and twitter. It clearly indicates that, IGNOU academics are well aware of strengths of utilizing SNS for online Counseling and Tutorials of ODL Learners.

Graph (5) response of IGNOU Academics on awareness of SNS useful for Counseling and Tutoring

5. Types of Social Networking Sites/ Tools you are aware which you are using for counseling and tutoring?
103 responses

- Facebook — 103 (100%)
- YouTube — 100 (97.1%)
- WhatsApp — 101 (98.1%)
- Messenger — 31 (30.1%)
- WeChat — 5 (4.9%)
- Skype — 93 (90.3%)
- google meet — 103 (100%)
- Instagram — 40 (38.8%)
- TikTok — 13 (12.6%)
- QQ — 1 (1%)
- Qzone — 0 (0%)
- Sina Weibo — 1 (1%)
- Reddit — 0 (0%)
- Kuaishou — 0 (0%)
- SnapChat — 5 (4.9%)
- TwiHer — 3 (2.9%)
- Printerest — 5 (4.9%)
- Twitter — 28 (27.2%)
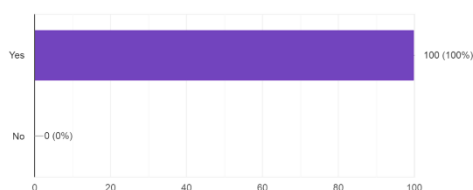- Webex cisco,Zoom cloud ,fr... — 1 (1%)

Graph (6) clearly shows that, there is 100% response from both Male and Female Academics of IGNOU expressing their view that there is a need for training to improve their skills for better utilization of SNS for counseling and tutoring of ODL learners. However, from Graph (7) it is confirmed that, with existing skills, knowledge and basic understanding of soft skills, IGNOU academics are managing to use the SNS for timely dissemination information and milestones of academic programs to the learners through various tools viz., sending bulk SMS (99%), Sending Bulk emails (97%), through whatsApp Groups (94%), Google mail groups (91%), through Google Meet (89%), through Facebook (94%) and through Skype (88%) respectively. This confirms the extensive use of SNS by IGNOU Academics for dissemination of information to the learners.

Graph (6) Response of IGNOU academics on requirement of training for the effective use of SNS for Counseling and Tutorial purposes	Graph (7) Response of IGNOU academics on kind of SNS they are using for Counseling, Tutorial and other purposes

6. Do you feel there is need for training on effective use of Social Networking Sites/tools for handling academic tutoring and counseling.
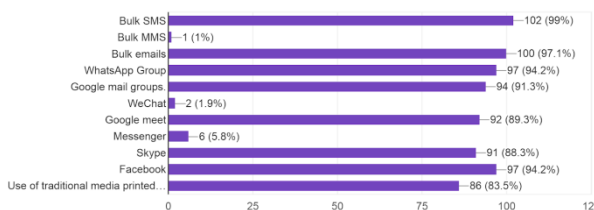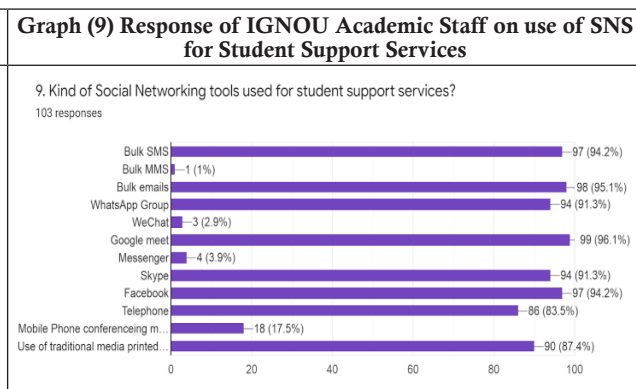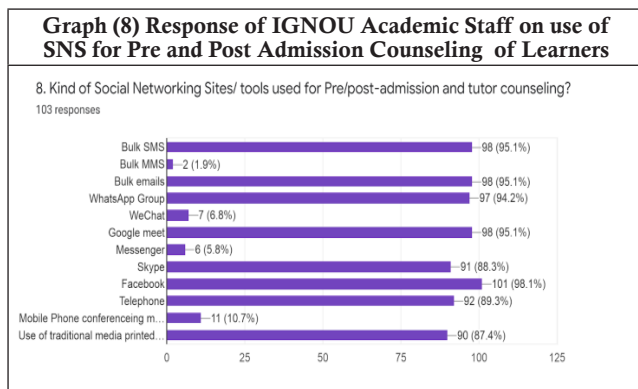100 responses

- Yes — 100 (100%)
- No — 0 (0%)

7. What technology you use disseminate the information, milestones to the learners
103 responses

- Bulk SMS — 102 (99%)
- Bulk MMS — 1 (1%)
- Bulk emails — 100 (97.1%)
- WhatsApp Group — 97 (94.2%)
- Google mail groups — 94 (91.3%)
- WeChat — 2 (1.9%)
- Google meet — 92 (89.3%)
- Messenger — 6 (5.8%)
- Skype — 91 (88.3%)
- Facebook — 97 (94.2%)
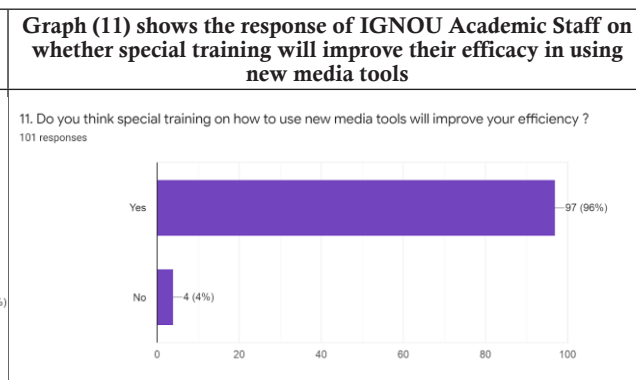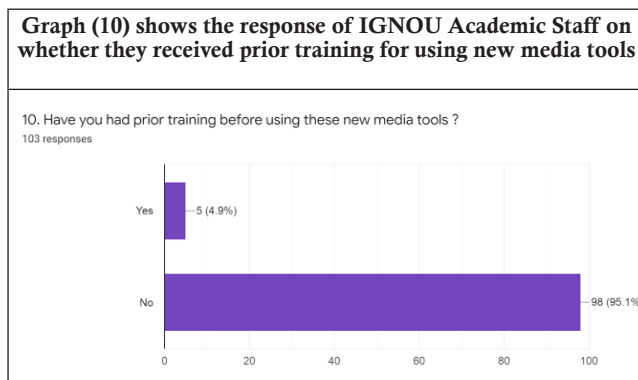- Use of traditional media printed... — 86 (83.5%)

Graph (8) shows the IGNOU academics are using SNS for pre and post admission counseling. They are also, routinely communicating information to learners through various tools viz., sending bulk SMS (95%), Sending Bulk emails (95%), through whatsApp Groups (94%), through Google Meet (95%), through Facebook (98%), through Skype (88%) and through telephone (89%) respectively which confirms the extensive use of SNS. Graph (9) also confirms that they are extensively using other similar tools too (as visible in the bar diagrams above) for student support services. However, Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp, Google Meet, Bulk email, Bulk SMS and Telephone are used enormously.

Graph (8) Response of IGNOU Academic Staff on use of SNS for Pre and Post Admission Counseling of Learners

8. Kind of Social Networking Sites/ tools used for Pre/post-admission and tutor counseling?
103 responses

Graph (9) Response of IGNOU Academic Staff on use of SNS for Student Support Services

9. Kind of Social Networking tools used for student support services?
103 responses

At Graph (10), 5% respondents expressed their views that, they have received prior training before using new media tools. However, majority (95%) of IGNOU Academics have responded that they have not received any training before using new media tools and as per Graph (11) 97% respondents strongly feels that they need special training to use new media tools. Further, there were two open ended questions administered for which IGNOU academics responded that there is a dire need for training on soft skills and provision for advanced ICT infrastructure and high speed internet facilities.

acquired the highest, educational qualifications they are not fully proficient in soft skills, they feel handicapped while using new media interactive technologies. They admitted they don't have hands-on experience to make optimum use of technological benefits. Majority of the respondents requested capacity building training to enhance their efficiency. This research study strongly recommends that all ODL institutes earmark special budget provisions to develop state of the art ICT based Computer labs for providing one to one training to Academics. These computer labs should be equipped with the latest version of computers and software. This study also strongly recommends ODL institutions should acquire high capacity servers with super-fast bandwidth Internet facilities.

Graph (10) shows the response of IGNOU Academic Staff on whether they received prior training for using new media tools

10. Have you had prior training before using these new media tools ?
103 responses

Graph (11) shows the response of IGNOU Academic Staff on whether special training will improve their efficacy in using new media tools

11. Do you think special training on how to use new media tools will improve your efficiency ?
101 responses

Findings and Conclusion:

The findings of the study revealed that the IGNOU Academic Staff working at various Regional Centers are having very high educational qualifications with Doctorate degree in any discipline with a couple of Post-graduation, Diplomas and Certificate programs to their credit, however, the specific training in soft skills for efficient use of SNS is must. This study also found irrespective of their gender and age group, on day to day basis, they are extensively using new media tools and Social Networking Sites for pre and post admission counseling and delivering Student Support Services, which includes simple tools like bulk SMS, email apart from Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp and Google Meet etc. This research study found, even though they have

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The Editorial Board had used the Urkund – a Swedish anti-plagiarism software tool which is a fully-automatic machine learning text-recognition system made for detecting, preventing and handling plagiarism and trusted by thousands of institutions across worldwide. Urkund is GDPR compliant with privacy by design and an uptime of 99.9% and have trust to be the partner in academic integrity. https://www.urkund.com] tool to check the originality and further affixed the similarity index which is {0%} in this case (See below Annexure-I). Thus, the reviewers and editors are of view to find it suitable to publish in this Volume-13, Issue-2, April-June, 2021

Annexure 1

Submission Date	Submission Id	Word Count	Character Count
27-May-2021	D106611047 (Urkund)	2902	19396

URKUND

Urkund Analysis Result

Analysed Document:	FET.docx (D106611047)
Submitted:	5/27/2021 6:17:00 AM
Submitted By:	satishrrg@ignou.ac.in
Significance:	0 %

Sources included in the report:

Instances where selected sources appear: 0

Reviewers Memorandum

Reviewer's Comment 1: This Study highlights the use of social networking sites or new media tools by IGNOU academics in pre and post admission counselling, tutoring, information dissemination and other student support services. This Study also explores the possibilities for further requirement of training and better ICT based infrastructure facilities in ODL institutions.

Reviewer's Comment 2: The study is well structured to highlight the need of using Interactive Social Networking Sites in Academics. The study has used a good number of past literatures, yet a number of more recent studies could be added.

Reviewer's Comment 3:This research study used both primary and secondary data for its qualitative and quantitative research inputs, which makes the finding more robust. The study further provides the basis for extending it to a large number of universities with a higher sample.

Editorial Excerpt

The article has 0% of plagiarism which is the accepted percentage as per the norms and standards of the journal for the publication. As per the editorial board's observations and blind reviewers' remarks the paper had some minor revisions which were communicated on a timely basis to the authors (Satish and Sangameshwar) and accordingly all the corrections had been incorporated as and when directed and required to do so. The comments related to this manuscript are noticeably related to the theme "**Use of Interactive Social Networking Sites in Academic Counselling and Student Support Services: A Study on IGNOU Academics**" both subject-wise and research-wise. The study critically examines how IGNOU Academics effectively using new media tools in all their mundane academic and student support activities. It finds out the training needs of academics to improve competence for optimal use and also provide suggestions as how to improve capacity building training and infrastructure strategies. Overall, the paper promises to provide a strong base for the further studies in the area. After comprehensive reviews and editorial board's remarks the manuscript has been categorised and decided to publish under "**Case Based Study**'' category.

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