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Digital Impact on Student Well-Being: Unravelling the Link between Online Engagement and Academic Burnout

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Abstract

In the contemporary era, digital technologies play a significant role in the lives of school students, shaping their academic experiences and social interactions. This chapter investigates the relationship between digital influence and academic burnout among school students. It describes a complex interplay between digital influence and academic burnout, highlighting the multifaceted nature of technological engagement in educational settings. While digital platforms offer avenues for learning and social connection, excessive use and dependence on technology contribute to increased levels of academic burnout. Factors such as social media comparison, information overload, and constant connectivity emerged as key contributors to students' feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced academic efficacy. Additionally, the chapter underscores the importance of promoting digital literacy and implementing strategies to foster healthy technology use among students. By understanding the nuanced dynamics between digital influence and academic burnout, educators and policymakers can develop targeted interventions to support students in navigating the digital landscape while maintaining their well-being and academic success.

Keywords: Digital influence, Academic burnout, Healthy technology, Educators and policymakers, Interventions.

Introduction

Digital influence in education encompasses the use of technology in learning environments, transforming how students engage with educational content and interact with teachers and peers. This influence spans various aspects, such as online learning platforms, digital learning resources, social media, and adaptive learning technologies. These advances present both opportunities and challenges for students, educators, and institutions. Online learning allows students to attend classes remotely, providing flexibility in educational experiences (Cohen & Wess, 2020). Learning Management Systems (LMS) platforms like Moodle and Canvas are widely used to manage courses and provide a centralised hub for educational activities (Selwyn, 2016). Digital Learning Resources such as E-Books, Online Libraries, Digital textbooks, and resources allow students to access learning materials anytime and anywhere (Nicholls et al., 2018). Educational Apps designed for various subjects offer interactive and engaging learning experiences (Yang, 2019). The digital influence caters to social media and networking platforms like X and Facebook offer channels for students and teachers to communicate and collaborate (Greenhow &

Askari, 2017). It also provides a wide range of support in educational communities, online forums, and groups fostering peer-to-peer engagement and networking (Ahn, 2011). Interactive and Adaptive Learning can be enhanced using Gamification. The use of game-like elements in educational contexts has been shown to enhance student motivation and engagement (Hamari et al., 2014). Personalized learning like AI-driven platforms adapts educational content to students' learning styles and paces, promoting individualised learning experiences (Smith, 2017). There are various other challenges and opportunities such as the Digital Divide Disparities in accessing digital resources can exacerbate educational inequities (Warschauer, 2016). The rise of digital technologies in education brings concerns regarding data protection and student privacy (Livingstone et al., 2017). The Impact on teaching and learning heads to shift in pedagogy of digital technologies encourages new teaching methods such as flipped classrooms and project-based learning (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Real-Time Feedback Digital platforms enable immediate assessment and feedback, enhancing students' ability to learn effectively (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Due to the over-dependence on digital influence when constant exposure to digital platforms and technology exacerbates academic burnout in students. The pressure to keep up with online coursework, social media expectations, and the overwhelming amount of information available can lead to feelings of anxiety and mental exhaustion. This digital overload can blur the boundaries between study time and personal time, making it difficult for students to disconnect and recharge. As a result, persistent engagement with digital tools and platforms can contribute significantly to academic burnout, diminishing students' academic performance.

Context of Academic Burnout

Academic burnout can be conceptualized as a specific type of burnout experienced by students due to prolonged exposure to academic stressors, such as heavy workloads, high expectations, and time pressure. Emotional exhaustion where the students feel drained and overwhelmed by their academic demands. Cynicism or depersonalization in students develop negative attitudes toward their studies, school, or peers, and may become detached or indifferent. Reduced academic efficacy among students perceive a decline in their ability to perform academically, leading to a sense of incompetence. These symptoms can interact with each other, exacerbating the overall experience of burnout.

Academic burnout is influenced by various factors within the academic environment, including academic pressure and high expectations from teachers, parents, or society can create a sense of urgency and stress for students (Salanova et al., 2010). Heavy workloads and difficulty managing time can contribute to feelings of overwhelm and exhaustion (Law et al., 2020). Digital influence, such as remote learning, can introduce new stressors such as technical difficulties and isolation (Elmer et al., 2020). The constant exposure to peers' accomplishments on social media may lead to feelings of inadequacy and stress (Hunt et al., 2018). Academic burnout can also be exacerbated by individual factors such as perfectionism, lack of coping strategies, and personality traits. Addressing academic burnout involves recognizing its symptoms and underlying causes, providing adequate support to students, and promoting healthier academic environments.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital learning tools and online education, making digital influence a central part of students' academic experiences (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Even post-pandemic, the use of digital technologies in classrooms is expected to continue and grow, making understanding its impact on students imperative (Means & Neisler, 2021). Academic burnout can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Ishikawa et al., 2018). Burnout can

negatively affect students' motivation, engagement, and overall academic performance, leading to lower grades and decreased learning outcomes (Salmela-Aro et al., 2008). The constant connectivity and expectations of online learning can create new sources of stress for students (Wang et al., 2021). Social media can exacerbate feelings of comparison and inadequacy, contributing to academic stress and burnout (Hunt et al., 2018).

Given the pervasive use of technology in education, schools must find ways to manage its impact on students and mitigate potential negative effects (Madigan et al., 2019). Identifying effective strategies for preventing and addressing academic burnout in a digital age is crucial for maintaining students' well-being and academic success (Smith & Waller, 2016). Disparities in access to technology can exacerbate educational inequities and impact students' experiences with digital learning (Warschauer, 2016). Ensuring that all students have access to the resources and support they need is essential for fostering a positive academic experience in a digital context (Selwyn, 2021).

As digital technologies continue to shape the educational landscape, understanding and addressing these issues is crucial for fostering a supportive and equitable learning environment. The constant influx of information from various digital sources can lead to cognitive overload for students. This, in turn, can contribute to stress and feelings of being overwhelmed, which are key factors in academic burnout (Hensley-Clancy, 2020). The availability of digital devices and platforms can easily distract students from their academic work. This distraction can lead to poor time management and decreased productivity, which may result in increased stress and burnout (Junco, 2012). Excessive use of digital devices, especially before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns. Poor sleep has been linked to decreased academic performance and increased stress, both of which contribute to academic burnout (Levenson et al., 2016).

Social media platforms often lead to comparison with peers, creating a sense of pressure to perform academically or socially. This pressure can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and contribute to academic burnout (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). While digital technologies can connect students globally, they may also lead to isolation and loneliness. Lack of real-world social interaction can lead to emotional distress and contribute to burnout (Primack et al., 2017). The shift to online learning has brought its own set of challenges, including technical difficulties, lack of in-person support, and changes in learning dynamics. These challenges can add stress and contribute to burnout (Bao, 2020). While digital tools offer opportunities for learning and connection, excessive or inappropriate use can contribute to stress, lack of focus, and other factors that can lead to burnout.

Growth and Prevalence of Digital Technology in Education

The learning experience has been revolutionised by offering numerous benefits and challenges. The growth of digital technology in education presents both opportunities and challenges for students. As schools continue to integrate digital tools and platforms, it's important to consider the potential impact on academic burnout. The availability of digital devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones, along with greater access to high-speed internet, has made digital education more widespread and accessible (Pew Research Center, 2018). Schools are increasingly using digital platforms, learning management systems (LMS), and educational software to facilitate teaching and learning. This includes virtual classrooms, online assessments, and digital textbooks (Herold, 2016). Digital technology allows for personalized learning experiences tailored to student's individual needs and learning styles. Adaptive learning software can provide customized educational content and feedback (Pane et al., 2017). Many schools have adopted blended learning models, combining traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning components.

This flexibility can enhance learning opportunities but also poses challenges in terms of managing digital workload (Horn & Staker, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to remote and online learning. While this change ensured the continuity of education, it also introduced new challenges such as managing screen time, ensuring student engagement, and addressing technical issues (Hodges et al., 2020). With the growth of digital education, there is a greater emphasis on teaching students' digital literacy and competency. This includes not only using technology effectively but also understanding its impact on well-being and managing digital interactions responsibly (Livingstone, 2018).

Types of Digital Influence

Online Classes: Online classes, also known as virtual learning or e-learning, have become increasingly prevalent in education. Students can access course materials and participate in classes from any location with an internet connection, providing more flexibility in their schedules. Online classes may offer a wider range of courses and learning resources than traditional in-person classes. The absence of face-to-face interaction with teachers and peers may hinder the development of social skills and collaborative learning. Being at home or in other non-traditional learning environments may expose students to distractions that can hinder academic focus. Connectivity problems and technical glitches can disrupt the learning process and cause frustration.

Social Media: Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter), etc. have become integral to the daily lives of students, influencing their social interactions, learning habits, and even mental well-being (Alsabawy et al., 2021). Social media can influence students' academic experiences in various ways. Social media allows students to connect with peers, educators, and professionals, providing opportunities for networking and learning. Social media can serve as a source of news and information, keeping students informed about current events and trends.

Social media can lead to negative comparisons with peers and pressure to present a curated image, potentially impacting mental health. Notifications and engaging content on social media can significantly divert attention from academic tasks, as studies have shown that constant interruptions from social media reduce focus and productivity, leading to lower academic performance (Rosen et al., 2013). Additionally, the dopamine-driven feedback loops created by social media notifications make it difficult for students to resist checking their devices, further disrupting their concentration on academic work (Taneja et al., 2015). Students may face issues related to privacy, cyberbullying, and online harassment on social media platforms.

Educational Applications: Educational applications encompass a wide range of software designed to enhance students' learning experiences. These apps can be used for studying, organising, or completing assignments. Many educational apps offer interactive content such as quizzes, games, and simulations that engage students in active learning. Apps for scheduling, note-taking, and task management help students stay organised and manage their academic workload. Educational apps often provide access to a wealth of resources, including textbooks, videos, and articles, aiding in research and study. The quality and accuracy of educational apps can vary, and not all apps offer reliable or effective content. Some educational apps may require a subscription fee, which can be a barrier to access for some students.

Relationship between Digital Influence and Academic Burnout

Digital technology has revolutionised the way students learn and interact with academic material, but it

can also contribute to academic burnout through various means such as excessive screen time, constant connectivity, and information overload. Prolonged screen time can lead to digital eye strain, headaches, and fatigue, impacting students' physical and mental well-being (Rosenfield, 2016). The blue light emitted by screens can interfere with sleep patterns, leading to sleep deprivation, which exacerbates burnout (Hersh et al., 2015). Long periods of screen time can contribute to sedentary behaviour, which is associated with physical health issues and stress (Colley et al., 2013).

The constant accessibility of digital technology can blur the lines between academic and personal time, making it challenging for students to disconnect and take breaks (Rosen et al., 2013). Continuous access to information can overwhelm students, making it difficult to filter out irrelevant content and focus on priorities (Hiltz & Turoff, 1985). The expectation to always be connected and responsive to academic notifications and messages can contribute to stress and anxiety (Baron & Corbin, 2012). Virtual learning environments can limit face-to-face contact with peers and teachers, leading to feelings of isolation and detachment (Bao, 2020). Connectivity problems and software glitches can disrupt learning and cause frustration (Pappas, 2021). The ability to switch between multiple digital platforms during online classes can result in multitasking, which may decrease focus and efficiency (Rosen et al., 2013).

Social media can create pressure to maintain an ideal academic and social image, leading to stress and burnout (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Social media notifications and engaging content can divert attention away from academic tasks and responsibilities (Junco, 2012). Exposure to online harassment or cyberbullying can impact students' mental health and contribute to stress (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Depending too much on educational apps and online resources can hinder the development of traditional learning skills and self-reliance (Schaffhauser, 2016). The quality and reliability of educational apps can vary, affecting students' learning experiences and contributing to frustration (Hew & Cheung, 2010).

Pressure from Digital Grading Systems and Competitive Environments

Digital grading systems and competitive environments can exert significant pressure on students, contributing to stress and potentially leading to academic burnout. Digital grading systems often provide immediate feedback on assignments and assessments, which can be beneficial but also create pressure for students to perform well constantly (Popenici & Kerr, 2017). Instant feedback can intensify stress and anxiety, especially if students receive lower than expected grades. Digital grading systems enable the tracking of students' performance over time, creating pressure to maintain or improve grades continuously (Jou & Elliott, 2017). Digital grading systems may allow students to see their peers' grades, leading to comparisons that can increase stress and competitive pressure (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014). This can foster a culture of competition rather than collaboration among students. Depending on how digital grading systems are implemented, students may feel that their academic performance is being scrutinised by others, leading to additional stress (Zagelbaum et al., 2011). The perceived lack of privacy can create pressure to conform to high expectations.

Competitive academic environments often emphasise high performance and excellence, creating pressure for students to achieve top grades (Misra & McKean, 2000). High expectations from teachers, parents, or peers can lead to stress and burnout. Competitive environments may rank students based on academic performance, fostering a culture of competition that can lead to stress and anxiety (Ho et al., 2014). Constant comparisons with peers can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt. In competitive environments, students may fear failure and its consequences, such as not meeting academic or career

goals (Putwain, 2008). A focus on high-stakes testing and standardised assessments can lead to students prioritising grades over learning, which may reduce intrinsic motivation and increase burnout (Ravitch, 2013). Pressure to perform well on assessments can lead to test anxiety and stress.

The Effect of Social Media on Academic Stress and Comparison & Burnout

Social media has become an integral part of students' lives, offering opportunities for connection, communication, and information sharing. However, it can also contribute to academic stress and comparison, which may affect students' mental health and academic performance.

Academic Stress: Social media can contribute to academic stress indirectly by influencing students' decision-making, study habits, and knowledge acquisition, rather than through its mere usage. Social Comparison Theory suggests that students often compare themselves to their peers on social media. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, or LinkedIn expose students to posts highlighting academic achievements, internships, or extracurricular success. This can create pressure and unrealistic expectations, leading to stress and anxiety about personal academic performance (Vogel et al., 2014).

Social media provides a constant stream of information, much of which may be educational or related to academic topics. However, the vast quantity and inconsistency in the quality of shared information can overwhelm students. Trying to process and sift through this barrage of information can result in cognitive overload, making it harder to focus on actual academic tasks (Frost & Rickwood, 2017). The quick, fragmented way information is consumed on social media—often through memes, short posts, or videos—can distort students' perception of knowledge acquisition. This can lead to poor study habits, where students may rely on superficial understanding instead of deep learning, ultimately affecting academic performance (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010).

While the content on social media can be educational, the platform's design encourages multitasking and constant scrolling, leading to procrastination. Instead of focusing on academic work, students may be drawn into social media interactions, gradually reducing their productivity and contributing to poor academic performance (Rozgonjuk et al., 2019). Exposure to diverse opinions and information on social media can influence students' decision-making. For instance, seeing peers discussing certain career paths or study methods may lead students to reconsider their academic priorities, possibly steering them away from effective learning strategies or influencing them to adopt poor study habits that aren't suited to their needs (Kitsantas et al., 2016; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). Rosen et al. (2013) investigated the impact of media and technology usage on attitudes and behaviours and found that excessive use of digital devices can contribute to stress and affect students' academic performance. Emphasized the importance of establishing boundaries and healthy habits with digital technology. Misra & McKean (2000) explored academic stress and its relation to anxiety, time management, and leisure satisfaction.

Comparison: Social media encourages social comparison, as students may compare their academic achievements and experiences with those of their peers (Vogel et al., 2015). Constant comparison can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem if students perceive themselves as falling short. Social media often showcases others' successes and achievements, creating unrealistic expectations and pressure to excel (Chou & Edge, 2012). Students may compare their own lives and academic performance unfavourably against curated, idealised versions of others. Students may feel pressured to conform to the academic accomplishments or study habits of their peers as seen on social media (Sterling et al., 2014). Fear of missing out (FOMO) on academic opportunities or experiences shared by others can contribute to stress.

Burnout: O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson (2011) Investigated the effects of social media on children, adolescents, and families and found that social media use can contribute to academic stress and comparisons among students. Vogel et al. (2015) explored the relationship between social comparison on social media and self-esteem and their study found that students who frequently compare themselves to others on social media may experience reduced self-esteem, which can contribute to burnout. Jou and Elliott (2017) studied the relationship between academic stress, learning motivation, and self-regulation in students and found that the immediacy and visibility of digital grading systems can increase students' stress levels. Twenge & Campbell (2018) examined the link between media use and psychological well-being in adolescents and they identified that digital media use, including digital grading and feedback, can negatively affect students' psychological well-being.

Possible Mitigating Efforts

One of the efforts shall be to encourage students to establish limits on screen time and social media use to reduce the risk of burnout. Educational institutions should offer support and resources for students struggling with digital influence aiming at students balancing academic responsibilities with leisure and personal time. This will help them for mindful and intentional use of digital technology, including awareness of its potential impact on mental health. Researchers indicate that digital influence, including online learning, social media use, and digital grading systems, can contribute to academic burnout among students. By promoting healthy and balanced use of digital technology, educational institutions, and families can support students in managing stress and maintaining well-being. To this end, efforts shall be directed to:

- Advocating for balanced academic policies that consider digital stress factors.
- Developing and implementing stress reduction programs that incorporate digital wellness.
- Collaborating with tech companies to create more mindful digital environments.
- Encouraging the integration of mental health and digital wellness into school curricula.

Using social work methods can address digital influence on academic stress and burnout:

- Social Case Work and Individual Counselling: Helping students develop healthy digital habits and coping mechanisms.
- Social Group Work and Group Therapy: Facilitating peer support groups to discuss challenges and share strategies to balance academic stress and digital screen time.
- Community Organizing: Working with schools and universities to implement policies and programs by building networks and communities that cater to the divergent needs of the students in relation to digital influence that may trigger academic burnout.
- Education and Awareness: Conducting workshops on digital wellness and stress management at different levels with the participation of the student community. Promoting collaboration with educational institutions to develop supportive policies and offering training to educators on recognizing and addressing digital stress.
- Family Interventions: Engaging with families to create supportive home environments to achieve mindful digital use and prevent academic burnout.
- Advocating for increased resources and attention to this issue in academic and policy circles. It also demands taking a more proactive role in policy development at institutional and governmental levels.
- Increasing specialised training for social workers in digital wellness and its impact on academic stress.

- Developing evidence-based interventions specifically tailored to address digital-induced academic stress and burnout. This is possible when interdisciplinary fields like psychology, education, and technology collaborate to create comprehensive solutions.

Coping Strategies and Solutions

Managing academic burnout requires the implementation of effective coping strategies and solutions to support students' well-being and academic performance. Addressing academic burnout requires a multi-faceted approach involving students, educators, and institutions. By implementing coping strategies such as time management, healthy lifestyle choices, and relaxation techniques, students can better manage stress. Educators and institutions play a crucial role in fostering supportive environments and providing resources to help students cope with academic challenges. The social workers need to strive to promote:

- Digital Detox as a Recovery Strategy: Regular breaks from digital devices help reduce cognitive overload, restore focus, and improve academic performance, mitigating burnout.
- Need for Clear Digital Boundaries: Encouraging students to set limits on their screen time, minimize multitasking, and take breaks from digital devices can reduce the risk of academic burnout.
- Supporting Mental Health through Digital Habits: Suggesting educators to integrate mental health support, such as advising students on managing their digital habits and incorporating offline activities into their learning routine.
- Policies to Manage Digital Overload and Healthy Digital Learning: Social Workers need to insist that policymakers recognize the cognitive and emotional impact of constant digital connectivity on students and educators and thus draft policies that promote balanced digital use. Thus, establish policies that promote structured and well-balanced digital learning environments, such as limiting screen time and encouraging offline activities to reduce burnout.
- Incorporating Mental Health Resources: Social Workers need to challenge the existing academic environment that promotes academic burnout due to digital learning and demand for the integration of mental health resources and digital detox strategies in educational institutions to mitigate the negative effects of digital influence on academic performance.
- Training for Educators on Managing Digital Influence: Social workers suggest that educators receive training on managing digital platforms in ways that minimize student burnout, including structuring online tasks and communication in a more balanced manner.

Future Trends and Considerations

As digital technology continues to evolve and play a significant role in education, future trends, and considerations will shape how academic burnout is addressed among school students. Educators, policymakers, and students shall stay informed about these trends to proactively manage the potential impact of digital influence on students' well-being and academic performance. Below are some future trends and considerations.

- Combining in-person and online learning can offer students flexibility and accommodate different learning styles. Schools and universities may continue to adopt hybrid learning models to provide a more personalised and adaptable education experience.
- Recorded lectures and resources allow students to access course materials at their own pace. This approach can reduce stress and allow for better time management, potentially mitigating burnout.

- AI-powered adaptive learning systems can tailor educational content to individual students' needs and learning paces. Personalised learning can reduce frustration and help students stay engaged and motivated. AI can provide data-driven insights into student's performance and well-being, helping educators identify students at risk of burnout and intervene early.
- Schools and universities may offer digital wellness programs to educate students about healthy technology use. These initiatives can include workshops on setting digital boundaries, managing screen time, and balancing online and offline activities.
- Parents and educators play a key role in promoting digital well-being by modeling healthy technology habits and providing guidance. With the support of social workers increased access to mental health services can help students manage stress and cope with challenges.
- Remote counselling and teletherapy services may become more common, providing flexible options for students. Schools may adopt a more holistic approach to student well-being, incorporating social-emotional learning and mindfulness practices into the curriculum.
- Schools and universities must prioritise the ethical use of technology, ensuring students' data privacy and security. Clear policies and guidelines around the use of digital tools and data collection can help protect students' rights.
- Educators should use digital grading systems transparently and constructively, offering supportive feedback and opportunities for improvement. Educators will need ongoing training and professional development to effectively use digital tools and address academic burnout.
- Focused training on recognizing and supporting students' mental health can help educators better address burnout. Collaboration among researchers, educators, and policymakers can lead to innovative solutions and policies.
- Future trends in education emphasise flexibility, personalization, and digital well-being to address academic burnout. By embracing these trends and considering ethical and holistic approaches, educational institutions can support students' well-being and academic success. Staying proactive and adaptive to changes in technology and educational practices will be key to managing academic burnout in the years to come.

Given the rapid evolution of digital technology and its increasing role in education, further research is essential to understand and address the challenges associated with academic burnout. Conducting longitudinal studies can provide insights into how digital influence and academic burnout evolve. This approach can help identify trends and patterns in students' experiences and well-being. This can focus on evaluating the effectiveness of different interventions for managing and preventing academic burnout. Research could focus on how schools and families can work together to promote students' mental health across different cultural and geographic contexts. Understanding cultural differences can inform tailored interventions and support for diverse student populations. This can examine how contextual factors, such as socioeconomic status, access to technology, and family support, impact students' experiences with academic burnout. Thus, by exploring the impact of emerging technologies, cultural differences, and post-pandemic challenges, researchers can contribute valuable insights to support students' well-being and academic success.

Conclusion

By understanding the complexities of digital influence on academic burnout, students, educators, and institutions can work together to implement effective strategies for prevention and intervention.

Prioritising digital wellness, mental health support, and balanced learning environments will help students navigate the challenges of the digital age and promote academic success and overall well-being. While online learning offers flexibility, it can contribute to feelings of isolation, difficulty balancing academic work, and increased stress. Hybrid and asynchronous learning models may offer more personalised and adaptable educational experiences. Excessive use of digital devices can contribute to stress and affect students' mental health and academic performance. School social workers play key roles in identifying and supporting students at risk of burnout. Raising awareness about healthy digital habits and digital well-being is essential and the contribution of social workers is significant. Social workers can facilitate the use of time management strategies like scheduling breaks and prioritising tasks to stay organised and avoid burnout. By fostering supportive environments, promoting digital literacy and well-being, and investing in mental health support, all stakeholders can help mitigate academic burnout and support students' overall well-being and academic success. As technology continues to evolve, staying proactive and adaptive to changes will be crucial in effectively managing the challenges of digital influence on students' academic lives.

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