

An Analysis of the Influence of Social Media and Digital Platforms on the Islamic Understanding of Generation Alpha

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Abstract:

The increasing social media consumption among Generation Alpha - the digital-native cohort born after 2010 - has introduced both new opportunities and challenges in the realm of Islamic religious education. This is particularly evident in the context of online learning, an area that remains underexplored empirically at the junior high school level. This study aims to examine the influence of social media and digital platforms on students' understanding of Islam at Muhammadiyah 1 Berbah Middle School, while also identifying the digital literacy challenges they encounter. Adopting a quantitative descriptive approach, the study involved a sample of 152 students selected through stratified random sampling based on grade level and gender, from a total population of 250 students. Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire employing a 4-point Likert scale to assess four key variables: social media usage, understanding of Islamic teachings, digital literacy, and perceived benefits and challenges. Analysis using SPSS revealed that social media plays a dual role: while 63% of respondents reported that it supported their understanding of Islamic teachings, 68% frequently encountered conflicting religious information, and only 55% consistently verified such content. Moreover, 57% of students acknowledged the need for guidance in filtering religious information online. These findings highlight the urgent need for digital literacy training, greater educator involvement, and the development of credible Islamic content to enhance the positive impact of social media on religious education. Further research is recommended to explore causal relationships and the influence of other stakeholders, such as families, in strengthening students' religious digital literacy.

Abstrak:

Fenomena meningkatnya konsumsi media sosial oleh Generasi Alfa, generasi digital-native yang lahir setelah tahun 2010, telah membawa tantangan dan peluang baru dalam pendidikan agama Islam, khususnya dalam konteks pembelajaran daring yang belum banyak diteliti secara empiris di tingkat sekolah menengah pertama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh media sosial dan platform digital terhadap pemahaman Islam di kalangan siswa SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Berbah, sekaligus mengidentifikasi tantangan literasi digital yang mereka hadapi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kuantitatif dengan jumlah sampel 152 siswa yang diambil melalui stratified random sampling berdasarkan jenjang kelas dan jenis kelamin dari total populasi 250 siswa. Instrumen penelitian berupa kuesioner tertutup dengan skala Likert 4 poin untuk mengukur empat variabel: penggunaan media sosial, pemahaman ajaran Islam, literasi digital, serta manfaat dan tantangan yang dirasakan. Hasil analisis data dengan SPSS menunjukkan bahwa media sosial berperan ganda: 63% responden

merasa terbantu dalam memahami ajaran Islam, namun 68% sering menemukan informasi keagamaan yang bertentangan dan hanya 55% yang secara konsisten memverifikasi informasi tersebut. Sebanyak 57% mengaku memerlukan panduan dalam memilah informasi agama secara daring. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya pelatihan literasi digital, keterlibatan pendidik, serta pengembangan konten keislaman yang kredibel guna mengoptimalkan peran media sosial dalam pendidikan agama. Penelitian lanjutan disarankan untuk mengeksplorasi hubungan kausal dan peran aktor lain seperti keluarga dalam meningkatkan literasi digital keagamaan.

Keywords:

Social Media, Digital Platforms, Islamic Education, Generation Alpha,
Religious Understanding

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Introduction

In today's hyperconnected world, social media and digital platforms have become deeply embedded in the daily lives of young people, particularly Generation Alpha – those born from 2010 onwards – who are growing up in a fully digital environment. This cohort is characterized by its seamless interaction with technology from an early age, using smartphones, tablets, and online content not as supplementary tools but as integral components of communication, learning, and identity formation (Aldayani, Juneva, Herlina, Matasik, & Jeni, 2024; Fadlurrohman, Husein, Yulia, Wibowo, & Raharjo, 2020). Often referred to as “true digital natives,” Generation Alpha is distinguished not only by early exposure to technology but also by a strong reliance on instant access to information and interactive media, both of which shape how they construct meaning and process knowledge.

For Muslim youth within this generation, digital platforms present unprecedented opportunities for accessing religious knowledge. From Qur'an applications and da'wah podcasts to short videos by Islamic scholars on TikTok and YouTube, as well as interactive forums and Islamic meme culture on Instagram, Generation Alpha increasingly engages with Islam through digital media (Wijayanto, 2024; Ummah, 2023). Ideally, these platforms can serve as effective tools for expanding religious understanding and internalizing Islamic values in a format aligned with their digital lifestyles. Digital content, when designed thoughtfully, can simulate contextual, visual, and interactive learning experiences that may be more appealing and relatable than traditional lectures or textbooks (Puspitasari & Ramadhan, 2024).

However, this potential must be balanced against empirical concerns. Existing studies indicate that although digital platforms offer access to religious resources, they also pose risks related to misinformation, superficial engagement, and ideological polarization (Zuhri, Sakdiah, Faizah, Kasih, Pratiwi, & Dewi, 2024; Putri, 2023). Generation Alpha frequently encounters conflicting interpretations of Islamic teachings, content lacking credible sources, and algorithm-driven feeds that prioritize engagement metrics over authenticity. In the absence of adequate digital literacy – the critical ability to evaluate, verify, and contextualize information – students may become vulnerable to internalizing religious messages that are biased, fragmented, or even radical in nature (Muflihun, 2020; Shadiqin, Fuadi, & Ikramatoun, 2023).

This issue is further compounded by the psychological and cognitive characteristics of Generation Alpha. This cohort tends to prefer fast-paced, visual, and bite-sized content, which may diminish the depth of their engagement with complex or abstract religious concepts (Fadlurrohim, Husein, Yulia, Wibowo, & Raharjo, 2020). Moreover, some scholars argue that religious knowledge acquired through social media often fosters ritualistic or emotional expressions of religiosity, rather than cultivating critical understanding or theological reasoning (Musfirah & Lismawati, 2024). In the absence of adequate guidance from educators and parents, students may find it difficult to distinguish between authentic religious teachings and viral yet misleading content. Although scholarly attention to the role of social media in shaping religious behavior is growing, much of the existing literature centers on Generation Z and Millennials. These older cohorts differ significantly from Generation Alpha in terms of technological exposure, cognitive development, and digital behavior. As such, studies focused on these groups do not sufficiently capture the immediacy, frequency, and intensity with which Generation Alpha interacts with digital platforms. This gap underscores the need for new empirical investigations that examine how the youngest generation constructs religious understanding in the digital age—an understanding shaped not only by the content they consume, but also by the medium through which it is delivered.

This study seeks to address this research gap by analyzing the influence of social media and digital platforms on the Islamic understanding of students at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Berbah, a mainstream Islamic junior high school located in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. While the institution is not formally categorized as a technology-oriented school, it represents a typical urban religious educational setting where students have daily access to the internet and digital media. As such, it offers a valuable context for exploring how average Muslim adolescents in Indonesia engage with religious learning in the digital sphere. To guide this investigation, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do social media and digital platforms influence the Islamic understanding of Generation Alpha students at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Berbah?
2. What challenges do these students encounter in distinguishing valid from invalid religious information online?
3. What pedagogical or technological strategies could enhance their digital literacy and religious comprehension?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute meaningfully to both the academic literature on digital religious education and the practical field of Islamic pedagogy. It offers an evidence-based analysis of how social media mediates the construction of religious knowledge among Generation Alpha and proposes actionable strategies for educators, parents, and religious institutions to adapt in response to this shifting landscape. Ultimately, the study argues that understanding the religious worldview of Generation Alpha requires examining not only what they learn about Islam, but also how they learn it – and through which media.

Research Method

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the influence of social media and digital platforms on the Islamic understanding of Generation Alpha. A quantitative approach was deemed suitable for capturing general patterns, frequencies, and relationships among key variables in a structured, replicable manner. While qualitative or mixed-method approaches may have provided richer insights into subjective experiences, the primary objective of this study was to describe observable trends within a broader student population rather than to explore in-depth perceptions or test causal mechanisms. In line with this purpose, hypothesis testing was not conducted, and descriptive statistical analysis was considered adequate (Sugiyono, 2016; Jonathan, 2006).

The population consisted of all students at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Berbah born in or after 2010, totaling 250 individuals. A sample of 152 students was selected through stratified random sampling, ensuring proportional representation across grade levels (Grades 7, 8, and 9) and gender categories. This sampling method was chosen to enhance internal validity and reduce sampling bias. Out of 172 questionnaires distributed, 152 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 88.4%, while 20 students either declined participation or did not complete the instrument.

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire comprising 19 items organized under four key variables: 1) Social Media Usage – Measures the frequency and types of digital platforms used to access Islamic content. 2) Islamic Understanding – Captures students' self-assessment of their knowledge and comprehension of Islamic teachings. 3) Digital Literacy – Assesses the ability to evaluate, verify, and critically analyze religious information encountered online. 4) Perceived Challenges – Identifies difficulties in distinguishing valid religious content and the influence of misinformation or popularity-based content. Then, each item was rated using a 4-point Likert scale, allowing for standardized interpretation of responses across participants. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics via SPSS to determine frequency distributions, percentages, and central tendencies for each variable.

Table 1. Theoretical and Operational Definitions and Indicators

Variable	Theoretical Definition	Operational Definition	Indicators
Social Media and Digital Platforms	Social media and digital platforms are tools used to disseminate Islamic religious knowledge widely through interactive content (Budi & Ula, 2024; Habibi, 2018; Ummah, 2023; Zuhri, Sakdiah, Faizah, Kasih, Pratiwi, & Dewi, 2024).	Students' use of social media and digital platforms to access, understand, and practice Islamic teachings through online religious content.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Frequency of using social media for learning Islam2. Type of digital platform used (e.g., YouTube, TikTok, Islamic apps)3. Perceived benefits in broadening religious horizons4. Ease of accessing religious information5. Willingness to engage in online religious studies
Generation Alpha as Digital Natives	Generation Alpha refers to individuals born after 2010 who have grown up with early and constant exposure to digital technology, leading to a high dependence on social media for instant information (Budi & Ula, 2024; Puspitasari & Ramadhan, 2024).	Characteristics of Generation Alpha in actively using digital technology to obtain religious information, with a strong preference for instant access.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Reliance on social media for religious knowledge2. Frequency of accessing Islamic apps or religious forums3. Interest in Islamic content on digital platforms4. Speed in accessing and receiving religious information
Digital Literacy in Religious Education	Digital literacy refers to the ability to critically evaluate, verify, and analyze religious information obtained through digital media (Lisyawati, Mohsen, Hidayati, & Taufik, 2023; Muflihah, 2020).	The extent to which students can assess the credibility and accuracy of Islamic content accessed via social media and digital platforms.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ability to evaluate the validity of religious content2. Awareness of hoaxes and misinformation3. Critical attitude toward

			unverified information 4. Use of social media features (comments, reviews) for validation 5. Preference for credible and authentic sources
Challenges of Social Media in Religious Learning	Social media presents challenges such as the spread of unverified content, risk of radicalization, and misunderstanding of Islamic teachings (Juliswara, 2017).	The difficulties students face in navigating religious content online and the resulting impact on their Islamic understanding.	1. Difficulty distinguishing true from false religious information 2. Tendency to accept popular content without verification 3. Exposure to hoaxes and disinformation 4. Susceptibility to viral religious content 5. Need for supervision and guidance in religious media consumption

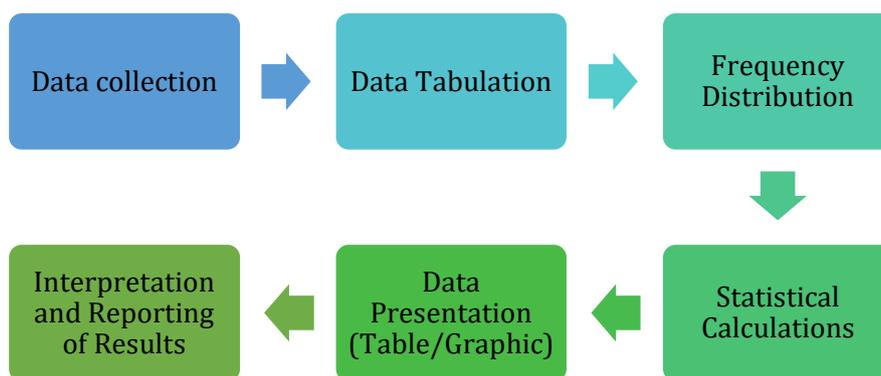


Figure 1. Research Method Framework

To ensure instrument validity, the questionnaire items were developed based on established literature (Lisyawati, Mohsen, Hidayati, & Taufik, 2023; Juliswara, 2017; Muflihin, 2020). The initial draft was then reviewed by three subject-matter experts in

Islamic education and digital literacy to assess content validity, item relevance, and clarity. Items identified as ambiguous or overlapping were revised accordingly to enhance precision and construct alignment. Then, a pilot test was conducted with 20 students from a comparable Islamic junior high school to assess item clarity, linguistic neutrality, and respondent comprehension. Based on the pilot results, necessary adjustments were made to ensure all statements were age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and free of technical jargon. The final version of the questionnaire utilized a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 4 = Strongly Agree) to encourage decisive responses and reduce central tendency bias. It is acknowledged, however, that the use of a 5-point scale including a neutral option might have allowed for more nuanced respondent positioning.

Particular attention was paid to avoid indicator redundancy between variables. While both "Digital Literacy" and "Social Media Challenges" involve information processing, the former measures students' competencies in critically assessing content, whereas the latter captures perceived obstacles and vulnerabilities. This conceptual distinction was confirmed during expert validation to prevent construct overlap and the risk of double-counting in subsequent data interpretation. In addition, the data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical techniques to examine the frequency, percentage distribution, and mean scores of student responses across variables. The analysis process included the following steps: 1) data tabulation from Google Form responses; 2) frequency distribution analysis to classify response patterns; 3) calculation of percentages and means for each questionnaire item; and 4) interpretation of trends, presented visually through graphs and tables for ease of understanding.

Data cleaning and preliminary organization were carried out using Microsoft Excel, while SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used for statistical processing. Although this study did not employ inferential statistical tests such as t-tests or ANOVA, SPSS was selected due to its reliability in generating grouped summaries and its potential for future analysis. This includes examining correlations or regression-based relationships, such as the possible association between high social media use and low digital literacy among students.

Results and Discussion

This study analyzes the influence of social media and digital platforms on the Islamic understanding of Generation Alpha students at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Berbah. A total of 152 students participated by completing a structured questionnaire. The analysis is organized into five sections: respondent profile, social media usage, digital literacy, challenges faced, and perceived influence on religious understanding.

Respondent Characteristics

Table 2. Respondent Profile

Description	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	81	53%
Female	71	47%

Class		
Grade 7	69	45%
Grade 8	60	40%
Grade 9	23	15%
Social Media Access		
Have Access	100	100%
No Access	0	0%

The data in Table 2 shows that all respondents reported having access to social media, confirming its pervasive role in their daily lives. The gender distribution is relatively balanced, with a slight majority of male respondents. The largest groups of participants came from Grade 7 (45%) and Grade 8 (40%), indicating that lower and middle grades are actively engaged in digital activities.

Use of Social Media and Digital Platforms

Table 3. Frequency of Social Media Use for Learning Religion

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree
I often use social media to learn about Islam.	0%	9%	68%	22%
I often watch religious lectures on YouTube or TikTok.	2%	18%	62%	18%
Social media helps me understand the teachings of Islam better.	0%	11%	55%	34%
Social media makes it easier for me to access information about Islam.	1%	8%	53%	39%
I often follow religious studies broadcast online through social media.	7%	33%	47%	13%

The responses in Table 3 highlight a strong trend of using social media for Islamic learning purposes. Notably, 90% of students reported using social media to learn about Islam (Agree or Strongly Agree), and 80% indicated they frequently watch religious lectures on platforms like YouTube or TikTok. A significant portion also acknowledged that social media facilitates understanding (89%) and improves access to Islamic information (92%). However, the participation in live religious broadcasts is comparatively lower, with only 60% indicating regular engagement. This suggests that while students are comfortable with on-demand or asynchronous religious content, they are less involved in structured or real-time religious learning sessions.

Digital Literacy and Information Retrieval Skills

Table 4. Digital Literacy in Accessing Information

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree
I always check the authenticity of religious information before believing it.	3%	10%	55%	32%

I often come across conflicting religious information on social media.	3%	10%	68%	20%
I tried to find other sources to compare the religious information I found.	4%	17%	59%	20%
I check other users' comments or reviews to ensure the validity of religious information.	2%	13%	64%	22%
I have more faith in content that comes from official institutions or well-known scholars.	3%	20%	53%	25%

The results in Table 4 indicate that the majority of respondents demonstrate self-reported efforts to critically evaluate religious content accessed via digital platforms. For instance, 87% of students claim they verify the authenticity of information before believing it, and 79% report comparing sources. Similarly, 86% refer to social media comments or reviews as part of their evaluation process, and 78% express higher trust in content from credible religious authorities. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution. While students report digital literacy practices, the frequency of encountering conflicting information (88%) and subsequent patterns in Table 5 suggest that actual filtering effectiveness may be inconsistent. This gap between perceived competence and actual vulnerability raises concerns about the depth and consistency of students' critical evaluation skills.

Challenges in Using Social Media to Learn Religion

Table 5. Challenges in Accessing Islamic Information on Media

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree
I feel confused by the conflicting religious information on social media.	5%	38%	45%	12%
I am more likely to trust religious content that is widely favored on social media.	7%	36%	46%	11%
I once came across religious information on social media that turned out to be untrue.	8%	21%	53%	18%
I easily believe in religious information that often appears on social media.	13%	42%	37%	9%
I feel that I need guidance in sorting out religious information on social media.	3%	13%	57%	27%

Table 5 illustrates the main challenges students encounter when using social media for religious learning. Although many students report critical behavior (Table 4), a

significant 71% acknowledge having encountered misinformation, and 69% express a need for guidance in navigating online religious content. These figures indicate persistent exposure to unverified or contradictory content, which can undermine religious understanding. Interestingly, while 57% of students feel confused by conflicting messages, 43% do not, reflecting a divided perception that may indicate either resilience or unawareness of inconsistency. Moreover, 57% report trusting popular religious content, revealing a tendency toward popularity bias, which could amplify exposure to misleading information if not guided by critical thinking or credible source identification. These patterns suggest that although students are digitally active, their ability to navigate religious content critically and independently remains limited. There is a clear need for targeted digital literacy interventions, particularly in distinguishing credible Islamic content from misleading or oversimplified narratives.

The Influence of Social Media on Understanding Islam

Table 6. Positive Influence of Social Media in Islamic Learning

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree
Social media helps me understand the teachings of Islam better.	3%	9%	63%	26%
Social media has broadened my knowledge of Islamic teachings.	1%	9%	62%	28%
Social media encourages me to behave in accordance with the teachings of Islam.	3%	14%	59%	24%
Social media motivates me to study Islam more diligently.	2%	10%	50%	38%

The data in Table 6 demonstrate that students perceive social media as having a generally positive influence on their Islamic understanding and motivation. A combined total of 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media helps them better understand Islamic teachings, and 90% indicated that it has broadened their religious knowledge. Additionally, a strong majority reported that social media content encourages religious behavior (83%) and motivates deeper study of Islam (88%). However, when these findings are viewed in conjunction with the earlier data on exposure to misinformation and conflicting religious content, a more complex picture emerges. Despite high levels of self-reported verification behavior and critical awareness, students still frequently encounter false or confusing religious information online. This contradiction suggests that while awareness of digital risks exists, effective filtering and critical evaluation skills are inconsistent. These findings reinforce the dual role of social media in religious learning. On one hand, it provides students with flexible, engaging, and personalized access to Islamic knowledge. On the other hand, it presents significant challenges, including the spread of unverified content, popularity-driven consumption patterns, and ideological ambiguities. This duality aligns with findings in previous studies

on the risks and potentials of digital religious engagement (Putri, 2023; Zuhri, Sakdiah, Faizah, Kasih, Pratiwi, & Dewi, 2024).

Conclusion

This study highlights the influential role of social media and digital platforms in shaping the religious understanding of Generation Alpha at SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Berbah. The findings demonstrate that social media holds significant potential in supporting Islamic learning, particularly by facilitating access to religious information, broadening students' perspectives, and encouraging behaviors aligned with Islamic teachings. These benefits align with the digital preferences and habits of Generation Alpha, who are increasingly turning to platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Islamic apps for religious content. Despite these opportunities, the study also reveals substantial challenges. Students frequently encounter conflicting or misleading religious information online, and many lack the digital literacy skills necessary to critically assess content credibility. While students report efforts to verify information, their continued exposure to disinformation and their tendency to trust viral or widely shared content suggest a gap between awareness and practice. This highlights a vulnerability among Generation Alpha, who may internalize inaccurate or ideologically biased interpretations of Islam without realizing it.

The characteristics of Generation Alpha as digital natives offer both promise and risk. Their early and frequent engagement with technology provides opportunities to enhance religious education through innovative, interactive, and media-rich approaches. However, their high dependence on technology, combined with limited critical evaluation skills, calls for a more strategic approach to guiding their religious development. Notably, the majority of respondents expressed a need for guidance in sorting religious information, emphasizing the critical role of educators, religious leaders, and parents. In response to these findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, schools and religious institutions should implement comprehensive digital literacy programs that teach students how to verify, cross-check, and assess the reliability of religious information. These programs should incorporate training in critical thinking and media literacy, with a focus on navigating religious content online. Second, Islamic educational institutions and religious leaders are encouraged to collaborate in developing engaging, age-appropriate, and evidence-based digital Islamic content. Content formats such as videos, podcasts, and gamified apps can resonate with Generation Alpha's learning preferences while promoting accurate teachings.

Third, a blended approach to religious learning is recommended. Conventional methods such as live lectures, group discussions, and Qur'anic recitations should be combined with digital resources to create a balanced and contextually relevant educational experience. Fourth, Islamic studies teachers must actively guide students in identifying and evaluating credible religious sources. Educators can play a pivotal role by modeling information verification practices and facilitating classroom discussions on current digital religious content. Finally, social media should be strategically leveraged to promote values of moderation (*wasatiyyah*), tolerance, and inclusiveness in Islam. Such efforts are

essential to counteract the spread of polarizing and radical narratives that may circulate online. By cultivating responsible digital engagement, religious educators and institutions can empower Generation Alpha to become both faithful and critical digital citizens.

This research offers a foundational framework for understanding how social media influences Islamic learning among Generation Alpha. Future studies should explore the effectiveness of digital literacy interventions within Islamic school contexts, conduct longitudinal research to track changes in media use and religious understanding over time, and investigate the specific roles of platforms like TikTok or Instagram in shaping religious behavior. Additionally, research should consider the role of families in fostering digital literacy and supporting religious development at home. Through such inquiries, a more comprehensive strategy for digital-era Islamic education can be developed.

Ethical Statement

The study was undertaken in strict adherence to ethical protocols to ensure the protection, safety, and rights of participants. All ethical approvals and necessary permissions were obtained before the research began. The conduct of the study was guided by institutional and international ethical standards, ensuring a transparent and responsible research process.

CRedit Author Statement

Author: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – Original draft preparation, Writing – Reviewing and Editing, Formal analysis.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this article.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available upon reasonable request.

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