



Research Article

Audience Perception and Attitude towards ABS *Health and Lifestyle* Programme among Listeners in Southeast Nigeria

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated audience perception and attitude towards the ABS 88.5 FM's *Health and Lifestyle* Programme among radio listeners in Southeast, Nigeria. Guided by the Agenda Setting and Social Responsibility Theories, the study adopted a mixed-method research design comprising a survey of 387 respondents and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) conducted across the five states of Southeast, Nigeria. Findings revealed among others a high level of general radio listenership but moderate and inconsistent exposure to the *Health and Lifestyle*. Although the programme was perceived as accurate, relevant, and satisfactorily presented by knowledgeable hosts and guests, however, inconsistency in scheduling limited sustained exposure. Dominant content areas included sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child health, and communicable diseases, while non-communicable and terminal illnesses such as kidney failure and cancer were underrepresented. Exposure significantly improved health awareness and triggered concrete health actions, including medication purchase, behavioural modification, and hospital visits. However, exposure did not necessarily translate into trust in health information or prompt professional medical consultation, as perceived vulnerability and fear were stronger motivators than knowledge alone. The study concludes that the *Health and Lifestyle* as a radio programme plays a critical role in health sensitisation but requires improved consistency, broader topical coverage, and increased expert participation to enhance credibility, trust, and sustainable health-seeking behaviour.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

Health communication has become a critical component of public health promotion, particularly in developing societies where gaps in health infrastructure, professional manpower, and access to medical services persist. The dissemination of timely, accurate, and relevant health information is essential for shaping public awareness, influencing attitudes, and encouraging behaviours that promote disease prevention and healthy living. In this regard, the mass media have long been recognised as powerful instruments for reaching large and heterogeneous audiences with health-related messages (McQuail, 2010; Kreps, 2014).

Among the various mass media platforms, radio remains one of the most effective and trusted channels for health communication in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria. Its affordability, portability, extensive reach, and ability to communicate in indigenous languages make it particularly suitable for health education across urban and rural populations (Myers, 2008; Asemah et al., 2013). Unlike print or digital media, radio does not require literacy or internet access, factors that continue to limit health information access for many Nigerians. Consequently, radio health programmes have become central to public enlightenment efforts on disease prevention, maternal and child health, nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, and lifestyle-related illnesses (Utalor, 2019).

Audience perception and attitude are crucial variables in determining the effectiveness of health communication initiatives. Perception refers to how audiences interpret and evaluate media messages in terms of credibility, relevance, accuracy, and usefulness, while attitude reflects a learned predisposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to such messages (Baran & Davis, 2015). In health

communication, positive audience perception and attitude are often necessary precursors to behavioural change, including lifestyle modification, preventive practices, and health-seeking behaviour (Rimal & Lapinski, 2009). Studies have consistently shown that health messages perceived as credible and relevant are more likely to be internalised and acted upon by audiences (Eisend, 2006; Chung et al., 2012).

In Nigeria, radio continues to command a high level of public trust, particularly when compared to social media platforms, which are often associated with misinformation and unverified health claims (Nwabueze & Ikegbunam, 2017). This perceived credibility places a social responsibility on broadcast organisations to provide health information that is accurate, balanced, and aligned with the health needs of their audiences. According to the social responsibility theory, the media are obligated to serve public interest by promoting societal wellbeing, including public health education (Siebert et al., 1956; McQuail, 2010). Failure to do so, especially through inconsistent programming or narrow content focus, undermines the developmental role of the media.

The Anambra Broadcasting Service (ABS) *Health and Lifestyle* Programme represents a deliberate attempt to utilise radio as a tool for health sensitisation and behaviour change in Southeastern region of Nigeria. The programme addresses a range of health topics such as communicable and non-communicable diseases, maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, and general lifestyle practices. Through expert interviews, audience participation, and explanatory discussions, the programme seeks to improve listeners' health awareness and encourage the adoption of safer health behaviours. Similar

radio-based health initiatives have been shown to positively influence audience knowledge and attitudes toward health-related issues in Nigeria (Ezeah & Jonah, 2017; Onyebuchi et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of health programmes cannot be assumed solely based on their availability. Research has shown that exposure alone does not always translate into trust, compliance, or sustained health-seeking behaviour (Rosenstock et al., 1988). The health belief model posits that individuals are more likely to adopt health-protective behaviours when they perceive themselves as vulnerable to a health threat, believe the threat to be severe, and consider the recommended action beneficial and feasible (Glanz et al., 2015). Thus, audience attitudes toward health programmes are shaped not only by message content but also by perceived risk, fear, socioeconomic constraints, and cultural beliefs.

Empirical studies further suggest that inconsistency in health programme scheduling and overemphasis on certain health issues at the expense of emerging or less-discussed conditions can limit the overall impact of media health interventions (Bello, 2015; Adekunle, 2017). In Southeast Nigeria, where non-communicable and terminal illnesses such as cancer, kidney failure, and hypertension are increasingly prevalent, audience expectations may extend beyond traditional coverage of communicable diseases and maternal health issues. Understanding whether existing programmes reflect these evolving health concerns is therefore essential.

Against this backdrop, this study examines audience perception and attitude towards the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme among listeners in Southeast Nigeria. By exploring

patterns of exposure, levels of participation, perceived relevance and accuracy of content, presenter expertise, programme consistency, and resultant health-related actions, the study provides empirical insight into the role of radio health programmes in shaping public awareness and behaviour. The study also integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative focus group discussions to present a holistic understanding of audience experiences. In doing so, it contributes to the broader scholarship on development communication, media credibility, and health behaviour change in Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Radio remains a vital medium for health communication in Southeast Nigeria due to its accessibility, affordability, and wide audience reach. Through programmes such as the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme, radio is expected to educate the public on health issues, promote healthy lifestyles, and encourage positive health-seeking behaviour. However, the continued prevalence of poor preventive practices, self-medication, and delayed response to health challenges in the region raises concerns about the actual influence of radio health programmes on listeners' perceptions and attitudes.

Although the ABS *Health and Lifestyle Programme* is designed to inform and enlighten listeners on health and lifestyle issues, there is limited empirical evidence on how audiences perceive the programme and the attitudes they develop towards its content. It remains unclear whether listeners consider the programme credible, relevant, and responsive to their health needs, or whether it positively shapes their attitudes towards healthier lifestyle choices. This lack of systematic evaluation creates a knowledge gap regarding the programme's

effectiveness, thereby necessitating a study of audience perception and attitude towards the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme among listeners in Southeast Nigeria

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine audience perception and attitude towards the ABS 88.5 FM Awka's *Health and Lifestyle Programme* among listeners in Southeast, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the level of exposure of listeners in Southeast, Nigeria to the ABS 88.5 FM *Health and Lifestyle*;
2. Examine listeners' perception of the relevance, credibility, and usefulness of the health messages presented in ABS 88.5 FM *Health and Lifestyle*.
3. Assess the attitude of listeners towards the ABS 88.5 FM *Health and Lifestyle* in terms of interest, trust, and acceptance of its content; and Evaluate the influence of the ABS 88.5 FM *Health and Lifestyle* on listeners' health awareness and lifestyle-related attitude

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for linking new research findings with existing knowledge (Folarin, 2005). This study adopts Agenda-Setting Theory, Social Responsibility Theory, to examine audience perception and attitude towards the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme in Southeast Nigeria.

Agenda-Setting Theory as propounded by McCombs & Shaw (1972) suggests that the media influence what the public thinks about by highlighting certain issues. Frequent and prominent coverage of health topics by ABS radio can guide listeners to prioritize important

health concerns (Miller, 2002; Nnaemeka & Ezeabalisi, 2020).

Social Responsibility Theory emphasizes the media's ethical obligation to serve the public by disseminating information that promotes welfare and prevents harm (Siebert et al., 1956). In health communication, this theory underscores the role of radio programmes in educating and protecting the public.

4.0 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

4.1 Audience Exposure and Engagement with Radio Health Programmes

Radio remains one of the most accessible and influential media platforms in Nigeria, especially in the Southeast, for delivering health information to diverse audiences. Studies indicate that radio can effectively reach rural and urban populations, enhancing health knowledge and promoting positive health behaviours (Okigbo, Hall, & Merrell, 2012; Utalor, 2019). Findings from this study reveal that 60.3% of respondents listen weekly to the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme, while 39.7% listen occasionally, highlighting the programme's reach and potential to influence public awareness and behaviour through repeated exposure.

Perceived Relevance and Recall of Health Messages

The perceived relevance of health information plays a crucial role in shaping audience attitudes and behaviour. The study shows that 63.8% of respondents consider the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme relevant to their health needs, demonstrating that audiences are more likely to act on information they find meaningful. This aligns with the social exchange theory, which posits that audiences are motivated to adopt behaviours they perceive as beneficial (Blau, 1964). Previous research (Adekunle, 2017; Bello, 2015) also emphasizes that limited

coverage of health topics constrains audience knowledge, as programmes tend to focus more on prevalent issues such as maternal and child health, communicable diseases, and sexual and reproductive health, while other critical conditions like cancer, liver, and kidney diseases receive minimal attention.

Programme Accuracy, Credibility, and Presenter Expertise

Programme credibility and presenter expertise are central to audience trust and message effectiveness. The study indicates that 72.2% of respondents perceive the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme as accurate, while 42.6% regard its presenters as highly knowledgeable. Credibility has been shown to directly influence the audience's willingness to adopt health messages (Eisend, 2006; Nwabueze & Ikegbunam, 2017). Nevertheless, gaps remain in expert involvement, suggesting that integrating health specialists in programme delivery could enhance both accuracy and audience confidence.

Health Behavioural Outcomes

Effective health communication translates into measurable behavioural changes. The study reveals that all respondents (100%) reported taking at least one action based on information from the programme, including adopting healthier behaviours (26.3%), purchasing medications (34.3%), visiting healthcare facilities (21.4%), and advising others (11.6%). These findings support the Health Belief Model, which highlights that perceived susceptibility, severity, and benefits of action motivate behavioural change (Rosenstock, 1974). Focus group discussions further confirmed that participants applied programme information in everyday decisions, particularly concerning sugar control, maternal health, and communicable disease prevention, demonstrating the programme's practical impact.

Consistency and Programme Limitations

The frequency and reliability of programme

airing influence audience engagement and message retention. Only 35.5% of respondents rated the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme as consistent, while 37.8% perceived it as inconsistent. Inconsistent programming may limit the media's ability to fulfil its social responsibility to educate the public (McQuail, 2010). Previous studies (Bello, 2015; Ezeah & Jonah, 2017) highlight that limited sponsorship and airtime constraints often lead to marginalisation of important health issues, reducing the overall effectiveness of radio health programming.

Agenda-Setting and Social Responsibility

The ABS 88.5 FM *Health and Lifestyle* Programme's focus reflects the media's agenda-setting role, which prioritizes certain health issues over others, shaping public awareness and discourse (Maxwell & Riffe, 2012). While topics such as maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health, and communicable diseases are adequately covered, emerging and high-risk conditions like kidney disease, liver disease, and cancer receive less attention, limiting audience preparedness for prevention and intervention.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

Research methodology provides the overall plan and direction for conducting a study (Nwodu, 2017). This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, to comprehensively examine audience perception and attitude towards the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme in Southeast Nigeria. The mixed-method, was used.

First, the study adopted a survey design to examine observable patterns, emerging trends, and statistical relationships relating to audience exposure and perceptions. This approach made it possible to generate quantifiable evidence on the extent of health programme coverage, the prominence of specific health themes, and corresponding audience behavioural responses. By relying on structured instruments, the research obtained measurable data suitable for

statistical analysis and generalisation. In addition, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were employed to gain deeper insight into how exposure to the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme shapes listeners' health-seeking behaviours, attitudes, and interpretations. The interactive nature of the FGDs created room for probing, clarification, and follow-up questions, thereby uncovering nuanced experiences that could not be captured through numerical data alone. Therefore, the questionnaire and the FGD guide provided complementary data sources. While the survey generated demographic and pattern-based information, the discussions enriched the findings with contextual and thematic depth, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of audience engagement and impact.

The study was conducted across the five states of Southeast Nigeria: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. The target population comprised listeners of ABS radio, with specific focus on its Health and Lifestyle Programme, broadcast from stations in Anambra State. The population comprised all residents of the five states who are regular ABS radio listeners. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be residents of Southeast Nigeria and regular listeners of the station to ensure accurate measurement of programme exposure, perception, and satisfaction.

A representative sample was determined using Rakesh's (2013) formula for sample size estimation, yielding a total sample of 400 respondents. Proportionate sampling distributed respondents across the five states as follows: Anambra (101), Imo (99), Enugu (80), Abia (68), and Ebonyi (52). For qualitative data, 30 participants were purposively selected for FGDs, based on high exposure to the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme and willingness to participate. The FGDs were structured into three groups of ten participants from Anambra, Enugu, and Imo states. Purposive sampling was

appropriate as it ensured inclusion of respondents knowledgeable about the programme (Asemah et al., 2022).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and FGD guide. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items covering demographics, exposure, dominant health topics, satisfaction, and perception of ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme. The FGD guide facilitated in-depth discussions on programme influence, satisfaction, and health-seeking behaviours. Each FGD lasted 45–55 minutes and was moderated by the researcher. Participants were coded for confidentiality (FGA1–10, FGE1–10, FGI1–10). Content validity was ensured through expert review by the supervisor and revisions based on feedback. Reliability was established using a test-retest method with 20 pre-test respondents from other states and stations. Guttman's Coefficient of Reproducibility yielded a reliability index of 0.8, confirming instrument consistency (Akpohgiran & Okoro, 2014; Asika, 2010).

Copies of Questionnaire were administered directly to respondents, while FGDs were conducted in state capitals for convenience. Both methods ensured collection of quantitative and qualitative data from respondents exposed to ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme.

Quantitative data were analyzed using percentages and frequency tables, followed by statistical testing of hypotheses. Qualitative FGD data were analysed using descriptive thematic analysis, identifying key patterns, categories, and relationships among responses (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010; Ikegbunam, 2024).

The mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding of audience perceptions, attitudes, and health-seeking behaviours, generating insights to improve health communication strategies in Southeast Nigeria.

5.1 Analysis of Findings

Variable Category	Sub-category / Indicator	Frequency	Percentage (%)
State of Residence	Anambra	101	25.3
	Imo	94	23.5
	Enugu	80	20.1
	Abia	68	17.0
	Ebonyi	56	13.9
Age Group (Years)	18–25	80	20.1
	26–35	54	13.4
	36–45	101	25.3
	46 and above	98	24.5
Gender	Male	208	51.9
	Female	192	48.0
Education Level	Secondary	178	44.4
	Tertiary	135	33.8
	Postgraduate	22	5.6
	Others/Unspecified	65	16.2
Occupation	Unemployed	128	32.0
	Self-employed	99	24.8
	Private sector	88	21.9
	Civil servant	32	8.0
	Others	53	13.3
Radio Exposure	Daily	210	52.4
	2–3 times weekly	123	30.7
ABS Programme Exposure	Weekly	241	60.3
	Occasional	159	39.7
Programme Participation	Callers	119	29.7
	Suggested topics	89	22.2
	Passive listening	192	48.1
Dominant Health Topics Covered	Sexual & reproductive health	101	25.3
	Maternal & child health	94	23.5
	Communicable diseases	90	22.5
	Non-communicable diseases	47	11.9
	Mental health	19	4.7

	Others	49	12.1
Most Recalled Topic	Rhesus factor compatibility	125	31.3
	Maternal health	101	25.3
	Communicable diseases	90	22.5
	Non-communicable diseases	47	11.9
	Mental health	19	4.7
Perception & Satisfaction	Content accurate/very accurate	289	72.2
	Presenter knowledgeable	370	92.5
	Satisfaction with information depth	378	94.4
	Programme inconsistency rating	151	37.8
Behavioural Outcomes	Purchased medication	137	34.3
	Changed health behaviours	105	26.3
	Visited health facilities	86	21.4
	Advised others	46	11.6
	Other actions	26	6.4
Likert-Scale Mean Scores	Awareness improvement	4.0	High
	Trust in programme information	2.1	Low
	Decision to seek medical help	2.8	Moderate
	Perceived fear/vulnerability to risks	3.9	High

The demographic composition of respondents demonstrates a broadly representative audience base across Southeast Nigeria. Respondents were drawn from Anambra (25.3%), Imo (23.5%), Enugu (20.1%), Abia (17.0%), and Ebonyi (13.9%) States, reflecting variations in population distribution across the region. This geographical spread strengthens the external validity of the findings and ensures that perceptions of the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme are not state-specific but regionally grounded.

Age distribution shows that the majority of respondents fall within the economically productive and socially active age brackets of 18–46 years. Specifically, 20.1% were aged

18–25, 13.4% were 26–35, 25.3% were 36–45, and 24.5% were 46 years and above. This demographic is particularly relevant for health communication studies, as individuals within this age range are responsible for personal health decisions, family well-being, and economic productivity. Their engagement with health programming underscores the strategic importance of radio health communication for national development.

Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 51.9% male and 48.0% female respondents. This near parity suggests equitable exposure to radio health programming across gender lines and

implies that the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme has the potential to influence health behaviour among both men and women.

Educational attainment was largely secondary (44.4%) and tertiary (33.8%), with an additional 5.6% holding postgraduate qualifications. This level of education suggests that most respondents possess the cognitive capacity to understand, interpret, and apply health information disseminated through radio programming. Such educational competence enhances message decoding and increases the likelihood of translating health information into practical action.

Occupational data reveal a high unemployment rate (32.0%), followed by self-employment (24.8%) and private sector employment (21.9%). The low proportion of civil servants (8.0%) reflects broader socioeconomic challenges in Nigeria. This employment pattern has implications for health behaviour, as unemployed individuals may rely more on self-medication and preventive information obtained through the media due to financial constraints.

In terms of media exposure, radio listenership remains high, with 52.4% of respondents listening daily and 30.7% listening two to three times weekly. However, exposure to the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme itself was largely weekly (60.3%) or occasional (39.7%), indicating that high radio consumption does not automatically translate into frequent exposure to specific health programmes. This disparity points to structural issues in programme scheduling and consistency.

Participation in the programme was largely interactive, with 29.7% participating as callers and 22.2% suggesting topics of interest. This

level of audience engagement reflects a participatory communication environment and indicates audience readiness for dialogue-driven health programming.

Content analysis reveals that sexual and reproductive health (25.3%), maternal and child health (23.5%), and communicable diseases (22.5%) dominated programme discussions. In contrast, mental health (4.7%) and non-communicable diseases (11.9%) received limited attention. Message recall data further show that rhesus factor compatibility (31.3%) was the most remembered topic, suggesting that repetition and perceived personal relevance enhance retention. Perceptual assessment indicates strong approval of programme accuracy, with 72.2% rating the content as accurate or very accurate. Similarly, presenters and guests were largely perceived as knowledgeable, and 94.4% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the depth of information provided. Despite these positive evaluations, programme consistency emerged as a major weakness, with 37.8% rating the programme as inconsistent.

Behavioural outcomes were notably strong. All respondents (100%) reported taking at least one health-related action following exposure to radio health messages. These actions included purchasing medication (34.3%), changing health behaviours (26.3%), visiting health facilities (21.4%), and advising others (11.6%). However, Likert-scale analysis reveals that while exposure significantly improved awareness (mean = 4.0), it did not significantly influence trust in the information (mean = 2.1) or decisions to seek medical help when sick (mean = 2.8). Instead, perceived fear and vulnerability to health risks were stronger drivers of behaviour change (mean = 3.9).

6.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study reaffirm the enduring relevance of radio as a critical medium for health communication in Southeast Nigeria. Consistent with Utalor (2019) and Onyebuchi et al. (2023), exposure to radio health programmes significantly enhanced health awareness and stimulated positive health actions. The universal report of action-taking among respondents highlights radio's capacity not merely to inform but to activate behaviour, aligning with the core objectives of development and health communication.

However, the study reveals a notable paradox. While exposure to the ABS Health and Lifestyle Programme increased awareness and prompted health actions, it did not automatically translate into trust or consistent professional health-seeking behaviour. This finding supports the Health Belief Model, which posits that perceived susceptibility and fear of health threats are stronger motivators of action than knowledge alone. Respondents acted not simply because they were informed, but because they perceived vulnerability to health risks.

Programme inconsistency significantly undermined sustained exposure and agenda-setting potential. This finding corroborates Bello's (2015) assertion that health programming is often marginalised due to inadequate sponsorship. Such inconsistency contradicts the social responsibility role of the media, which requires consistent dissemination of life-saving information. As Ezeah & Jonah (2017) argue, inadequate health coverage limits public knowledge and exposes populations to avoidable risks.

The dominance of communicable diseases, maternal health, and reproductive health content

reflects a captured-audience phenomenon, where audiences consume what is supplied rather than what is most needed. The limited attention to non-communicable and terminal illnesses, such as kidney failure and cancer, aligns with Adekunle's (2017) position that dominant media content shapes public knowledge boundaries. This imbalance restricts audience preparedness for emerging health challenges.

Credibility perceptions were largely favourable. Respondents consistently distinguished radio from social media, viewing radio as more credible and professionally regulated. Interestingly, focus group discussions revealed a nuanced distinction between trust and accuracy: respondents trusted radio content institutionally, even when they lacked the technical capacity to verify its accuracy. This insight contributes meaningfully to media credibility scholarship, suggesting that institutional trust may outweigh epistemic certainty in health communication contexts.

Finally, the findings strongly support Social Exchange Theory. Respondents adopted health behaviours after weighing perceived benefits against costs, opting for actions they considered manageable and beneficial, such as medication purchase and lifestyle modification. This underscores the importance of practical, achievable health messaging in radio programming.

7.0 CONCLUSION

The ABS 88.5 FM *Health and Lifestyle*; demonstrates substantial potential for improving health awareness and influencing behaviour in Southeast Nigeria. However, maximising this potential requires consistent scheduling, broader topical coverage, greater reliance on health experts, and audience-centred programme

design. Addressing these gaps will strengthen the programme's credibility, deepen trust, and enhance its contribution to public health development.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are:

1. ABS 88.5 FM should institutionalise a fixed and consistent broadcast schedule for the *Health and Lifestyle* Programme to enhance sustained exposure, reinforce agenda-setting effects, and improve long-term audience engagement across Southeast Nigeria.
2. The programme should broaden its thematic scope to give greater attention to non-communicable and terminal illnesses such as cancer, kidney disease, hypertension, diabetes, and mental health conditions in order to reflect emerging health realities and improve preventive awareness.
3. ABS management should increase the regular involvement of certified medical professionals, public health experts, and subject specialists to strengthen credibility, deepen audience trust, and enhance the technical accuracy of health information disseminated.
4. The programme should adopt a more structured evidence-based presentation style, incorporating simplified medical explanations and practical action steps that bridge the gap between awareness, trust, and professional health-seeking behaviour.
5. Sustainable partnerships and sponsorship arrangements with health institutions, government agencies, and development organisations should be established to guarantee programme continuity, improve production quality, and support expanded health coverage.

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