Illocutionary Acts and Public Reactions
to Donald Trump's 2024 Presidential Campaign Tweets

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Abstract-This study examines the use of illocutionary acts in the public's reactions to Donald Trump's tweets on X (formerly Twitter) during his 2024 presidential campaign, guided by Searle's felicity theory. We analyse posts from the official Donald J. Trump account on X from September 1-30, 2024, using qualitative methods in digital setting, with the researcher as the primary instrument. The study is descriptive and inductive, focusing on the content and meaning of illocutionary acts and public reactions, rather than numerical data or predefined hypotheses. Our aim is to understand how these acts influence public reactions, which we categorize as negative or positive, to reveal the link between Trump's tweets and their role in political discourse. The results show that the directive act dominate Trump's tweets, reflecting his intent to influence behaviour. Meanwhile some of the tweets meet Searle's felicity conditions, others do not, resulting polarized public reactions. Trump's communication appears partially effective, reinforcing support within his base while provoking backlash from critics, highlighting how illocutionary force in social media can shape political strategies and deepen public divides.

Keywords: Illocutionary Acts, Felicity Conditions, Political Polarization, Social Media Communications.

I INTRODUCTION

The internet's role in political communication first emerged during Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign, and it subsequently evolved significantly under Obama's innovative use of digital platforms. This transition signalled the increasing influence of online engagement in political discourse. Building on this momentum, the use of X (formerly Twitter) by Donald Trump during and after the 2020 election marked a dramatic intensification in the use of social media for political communication, driven by populist rhetoric. In the aftermath of Joe Biden's electoral triumph, Trump utilized the platform to persistently advance claims of electoral fraud, disseminating a total of 1,718 tweets between November 3, 2020, and January 6, 2021. This rhetorical strategy served to incite widespread public discontent, thereby contributing to the occurrence of the Capitol riots.

Despite claims by Hong & Nadler (2011) that political use of X by U.S. politicians has little impact on public opinion, Trump's digital presence demonstrated otherwise, leading to unprecedented public reactions, both online and offline is prolific use of Twitter exemplifying the transformative power of language in shaping perception and behaviour, a phenomenon explored through the lens of speech act theory (Sunaina & Soni, 2020). This study closely examines Trump's utilization of Twitter (now X) during his 2024 presidential campaign, with a

focus on his tweets following his campaign announcement and throughout the election period. The objective of this study is to explore how public reactions to these tweets reflect their interpretations of his intended illocutionary force. As an exploratory study, it seeks to understand how language functions in political digital discourse and how Trump's rhetorical strategies provoke public engagement and response.

First introduced by J.L. Austin in How to Do Things with Words (1962), the theory posits that speech is not just a way of transferring information, but also an instrument that can be initiate and execute actions with significant consequences. (Agwuocha, 2021). He identified three key categories of speech acts: locutionary acts (the act of saying something), illocutionary acts (the intended function behind the utterance), and perlocutionary acts (the effect on the listener). Building on Austin's theory, John Searle further developed the framework of speech acts, with a focus on the illocutionary act, which he defines as the core or 'complete' component of a speech act. Searle distinguished illocutionary acts (focused on intent) from perlocutionary acts (focused on listener response) and proposed five categories: representatives, directives, commissive, expressive, and declarations. Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary act builds upon criteria such as "direction-of-fit," which assesses the alignment between language and reality, and "sincerity conditions," which address the speaker's genuine intention behind the act (Hansson Wahlberg, 2021). The use of illocutionary acts within political discourse has been extensively studied. These researches have provided insights into how political figures communicate their intentions, emotions, and authority through language. (Novitasari & Gulö, 2023) conducted an analysis of Michelle Obama's 2020 Democratic National Convention speech, identifying three categories of illocutionary acts: assertive, expressive and directives. They found that assertive acts were the most frequent (44%). (Adawiyah et al., 2020) conducted a study focusing on social media, analysing the tweets of Indonesian presidential candidates Jokowi and Prabowo during the 2019 campaign period. A total of 238 tweets were analysed, and five types of illocutionary acts were identified: assertive, directives, commissive, expressive, and declaratives. The most common type of illocutionary act was expressive, accounting for 46.7 % of the total, while the least common was declarative, representing only 3.8%

of the total.

Furthermore, research has concentrated on the felicity conditions that apply to political discourse. (Hamza & Nordin, 2024) examined deviations from Searle's (1969) felicity conditions, which involves propositional content, preparatory conditions, sincerity, and essential conditions, in Donald Trump's language. They found that Trump's speech often violated these conditions, such as making unsupported claims in representative acts, failing to honour commitments in commissive acts, issuing impractical directives, offering insincere apologies, and making declarations with no intended effect. Additionally, studies have explored how the public responds to illocutionary acts on social media. One such study is (Ndraha et al., 2020), which analyses commentary on Anies Baswedan's Twitter. The most frequent illocutionary acts were found to be assertive (50%), followed by expressive, directives, declaratives, and commissive. Additionally, the prevalence of hate speech, including insults, provocation, and defamation, was observed, particularly in the context of public criticism of Baswedan's handling of flooding and rehabilitation projects.

II. METHODS

This study utilizes qualitative content analysis to examine illocutionary acts within Donald Trump's 2024 presidential campaign tweets. In accordance with the principles of qualitative research delineated by Bogdan and Biklen (1992), the study is conducted in a natural digital setting, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument for data collection and interpretation (Hilman et al., 2023). The study's approach is descriptive, prioritizing the content and function of the speech acts rather than relying on quantitative metrics. The analysis emphasizes the process through which illocutionary acts unfold in real-time on digital platforms like X, and how these acts generate public reactions. The analysis employs an inductive approach, identifying patterns and meaning without reliance on pre-established hypotheses. The objective of this research is to assess the communicative effectiveness of Trump's illocutionary acts by exploring how his tweets shape, provoke, or reflect public opinion.

The primary focus of this research is the tweets shared by Donald Trump on his official Twitter account between September 1st and September 31st, 2024. In order to analyse the

language and rhetorical techniques used during this politically relevant time, this period has been selected to represent an essential phase in USA 2024 presidential campaign. From the total of 74 tweets posted in September, only 20 tweets were selected for analysis. These tweets will provide the main data for examining illocutionary acts. The literature review is supported by a comprehensive range of scholarly sources, including academic journals, articles, and previous studies. These sources concentrate on illocutionary acts and public interpretations of political discourse, particularly the context of Donald Trump's communication during his 2024 presidential campaign.

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in the concept of illocutionary acts as postulated by John Searle. While there are several different theories and interpretations of illocutionary acts proposed by other scholars, including Austin (1962), Leech (1983) and Yule (1996), this study focuses specifically on Searles's framework. Searle's theory categorizes speech acts into five types, including assertive (or representative), directives, commissive, expressive, and declarative.

The objective of this study is to analyse the content of Donald Trump's tweets and the public reactions they elicit. To this end, a collection of tweets posted between September 1 and 30 will be manually coded based on Searle's five illocutionary act categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Each tweet will be examined for linguistic cues that indicate the speaker's intent, such as performative verbs, modal expressions, and sentence structure.

To ensure consistency and transparency in the coding process, a coding sheet will be developed. This coding sheet will allow for clear distinctions between illocutionary types.

Furthermore, each tweet will be evaluated against Searle's felicity conditions (preparatory, propositional, sincerity, and essential conditions) to ascertain the efficacy and appropriateness of the speech act. Public reactions, including replies and quote tweets, will also be manually analysed. These responses will be classified according to attitude types—Affect (emotions), Judgement (moral evaluation), and Appreciation (aesthetic or value-based responses)—and evaluated for sentiment, categorized as either positive or negative. This dual-layered analysis aims to highlight Trump's communicative strategies and the audience's interpretations of his linguistic intent, ultimately shedding light on the interaction between political messaging and public perception on digital platforms.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Types of Illocutionary Act

As outlined by Searle (1969), illocutionary acts are classified into five categories: representative, expressive, declarative, commissive, and directive. In this study, a sample of 20 tweets from Trump's official account was systematically analyzed. The results indicated that, from September 1 to September 30, Trump's tweets contained 8 representative acts, 11 directive acts, 6 commissive acts, 7 expressive acts, and 1 declarative act.

Table 1. Illocutionary Act Classification

No	Post	Types of Illocutionary Act	
		Quantity	Types
1	10:42 PM · Sep 30, 2024	1	Representative
2	10:15 PM · Sep 30, 2024	1	Commissive
3	07:32 AM · Sep 30, 2024	1	Directive
4	12:40 AM · Sep 30, 2024	1	Expressive
5	11:47 AM · Sep 25, 2024	2	Representative, Expressive
6	10:18 AM · Sep 25, 2024	3	Representative, Declarative, Directive

7	10:00 PM · Sep 24, 2024	1	Directive
8	12:48 AM · Sep 22, 2024	1	Representative
9	04:20 AM · Sep 20, 2024	1	Directive
10	12:56 AM · Sep 18, 2024	1	Directive
11	12:50 AM · Sep 18, 2024	2	Directive, Commissive
12	01:57 AM · Sep 17, 2024	1	Directive
13	11:30 PM · Sep 16, 2024	3	Representative, Directive, Expressive
14	11:29 PM · Sep 16, 2024	1	Expressive
15	08:52 PM · Sep 15, 2024	1	Commissive
16	08:17 AM · Sep 8, 2024	3	Representative, Directive, Commissive
17	09:43 PM · Sep 3, 2024	1	Directive
18	03:48 AM · Sep 3, 2024	2	Commissive, Expressive
19	03:00 AM · Sep 2, 2024	3	Representative, Commissive, Expressive
20	02:58 AM · Sep 2, 2024	2	Directive, Expressive

Donald Trump's tweets frequently employ multiple illocutionary acts to convey complex messages and engage his audience. This strategy allows him to address various aspects of a situation at once, making his messages more impactful. By blending factual claims, emotional appeals, and warnings, he influences public perception and strengthens his connection with followers. In this way, his use of multiple illocutionary acts enhances his communication, helping him navigate the political landscape effectively.

Table 2. Frequency of Illocutionary Act

No	Types of Illocutionary Act	Frequency	%
1	Representative	8	24
2	Directive	11	33
3	Commissive	6	18
4	Expressive	7	22
5	Declarative	1	3

	Total	33	100

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of illocutionary acts in Donald Trump's tweets. Directives emerged as the most prevalent type, appearing 11 times (33%), followed by representatives (8 occurrences, 24%), expressives (7 occurrences, 22%), commissives (6 occurrences, 18%), and declaratives, which were the least frequent, with 1 occurrence (3%). The total number of identified illocutionary acts is 33. The prevalence of directives suggests Trump's emphasis on influencing his audience's actions through requests, commands, or suggestions, reflecting his intent to assert leadership and guide supporters.

Felicity Conditions
Representative Act

Table 3. Felicity condition of representative act

Utterance	Felicity	
	Yes	No
DATA 19: This happened because Comrade Kamala Harris and Crooked Joe Biden are poor Leaders. Americans are getting slaughtered overseas, while Kamala is disparaging and making up lies about Gold Star families, and Biden is sleeping on the beach on this 16th consecutive day of vacation. They have blood on their hands! Sadly, this is the total lack of "Leadership" that Kamala and Biden represent — One that allows terrorists to take American lives, because they only care about Weaponizing the Department of Justice against their Political Opponent. Just like the Debacle of the Afghanistan Withdrawal that claimed 13 American lives, Kamala and Biden's judgment has not only put lives at risk, but is directly responsible for unnecessary deaths that should have never happened. Our Country and our amazing people are not safe under Joe Biden, and will be less safe under Kamala Harris.(Donald Trump, 2024a)		✓

Preparatory Condition: If S claims P to H, then P must be true in the world of H.
Propositional Content: Speaker has established clear, detailed evidence or causes that support the truthfulness of the preposition they claiming.
Sincerity Condition: For S to claim a Proposition to H, S believes Proposition.
Essential Condition: Speaker asserts Proposition to Hearer with the intent that Proposition is accurate and corresponds to reality.

In Data 19, Donald Trump accuses Kamala Harris and Joe Biden of being directly responsible for the deaths of Americans abroad, specifically the murder of Israeli hostages, including a U.S. citizen. To meet the preparatory condition, he must provide concrete evidence to support these claims. However, instead of presenting verifiable proof, Trump relies on forceful rhetoric and accusations against U.S. leadership. This lack of factual support weakens the hearer's ability to accept the claims as true. Additionally, the propositional content condition may be unmet, as the statements suggest a cause-and-effect relationship without substantiating evidence or logical reasoning.

Representative act

Table 4. Felicity condition of declarative act

Utterance	Felicity	
	Yes	No
DATA 6: When she speaks, I hope everybody remembers that she has caused our cities, towns, and Country itself, tremendous damage, and only I can fix it! (Donald Trump, 2024d)	✓	

Preparatory Condition: Present situation of H.	
Propositional Content: S can declare X, and H understands that H is capable of executing the implications of X.	
Sincerity Condition: S sincerely declare to H that P is true.	
Essential Condition: S declares to H that X will result in a change.	

In Data 6, the declarative statement "only I can fix it" aligns with felicity conditions in several ways. First, by addressing the "broken" state of the southern border, Trump makes his assertion relevant and meaningful to his audience. Second, he claims the authority and capability to resolve the issue, positioning himself as an experienced leader. Third, his strong language signals sincere belief in his ability to fulfill this promise, reinforcing his commitment. Finally, the statement expresses a clear intent to enact change, framing his leadership as the solution to problems attributed to Kamala Harris.

Directive act

Table 5. Felicity condition of directive act

Utterance	Felicity	
	Yes	No
DATA 13: our borders must be closed, and the terrorists, criminals, and mentally insane, immediately removed from American cities and towns, deported back to their counties of origin. We want people to come into our country, but they must love our nation, and come in legally and through a system of merit (Donald Trump, 2024c)	✓	
Preparatory Condition: S holds a position of greater authority or knowledge than the H regarding the situation at hand.		
Propositional Content: S warned that H would eventually face a difficult period in their life. S offered advice on how H should respond when that challenging time arrives.		
Sincerity Condition: S truly believes in the value of the advice being given, as well as a commitment to the advice's effectiveness in addressing H's situation.		
Essential Condition: It is an advice from S to H.		

In Data 13, Donald Trump asserts authority on immigration and national security, fulfilling the preparatory condition. He warns of escalating issues without intervention, satisfying the propositional content condition by advocating border closures and deportations. His urgent tone reflects the sincerity condition, signaling genuine belief in his stance. Finally, the essential condition is met as his call to action, exemplified by *"MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN,"* urges the audience to take his recommendations seriously.

Expressive act

Table 6. Felicity condition of expressive act

Utterance	Felicity	
	Yes	No
DATA 14: I would like to thank everyone for your concern and well wishes - It was certainly an interesting day! Most importantly, I want to thank the U.S. Secret Service, Sheriff Ric Bradshaw and his Office of brave and dedicated Patriots, and, all of Law Enforcement, for the incredible job done today at Trump International in keeping me, as the	✓	

45th President of the United States, and the Republican Nominee in the upcoming Presidential Election, SAFE. I AM VERY PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN! (Donald Trump, 2024c)

Preparatory Condition: A benefits S and S believes A benefits S.
Propositional Content: S thanks H for A.
Sincerity Condition: S appreciates A for what H did to S.
Essential Condition: Deems as an utterance of gratitude and appreciation by S for A.

In Data 14, Donald Trump aligns with the felicity conditions for expressive acts by effectively conveying gratitude. The preparatory condition is met as he acknowledges the intentional efforts of the U.S. Secret Service and law enforcement. The propositional content condition is satisfied through his explicit appreciation of their role in ensuring his safety. His sincerity is evident in his enthusiastic language, signaling genuine gratitude. Lastly, the essential condition is fulfilled as the tweet clearly functions as an expression of appreciation, recognizing their positive impact on his sense of safety and national pride.

Commissive act

Table 7. Felicity Condition of commissive act

Utterance	Felicity	
	Yes	No
DATA 15: As President I will immediately end the migrant invasion of America. We will stop all migrant flights, end all illegal entries, terminate the Kamala phone app for smuggling illegals (CBP One App), revoke deportation immunity, suspend refugee resettlement, and return Kamala's illegal migrants to their home countries (also known as remigration). I will save our cities and towns in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and all across America #MAGA2024! (Donald Trump, 2024b)	✓	
Preparatory Condition: H must desire the promised action and S should believe that the promise is both feasible and in line with H's interest.		
Propositional Content: Future A of H.		
Sincerity Condition: S's utterance is not just words but reflects a real commitment and S must have true intention and willingness to carry out the action promised to H.		
Essential Condition: S intends to commit action by performing the promise act.		

In Data 15, Donald Trump's statement aligns with the felicity conditions of a commissive act. The preparatory condition is met as he presents his promises—such as ending illegal entries and suspending refugee resettlement—as feasible and desirable. He satisfies the propositional content condition by explicitly outlining future actions. His assertive language demonstrates sincerity, reinforcing his intent to follow through. Finally, by framing his statements as serious commitments, he fulfills the essential condition, ensuring the audience perceives them as genuine promises.

Public Reaction

Public opinion is often shaped by immediate emotional responses to political discourse, particularly the tone and language used by political elites during crises. Moses argues that variations in elite communication tone can lead to divided public reactions, suggesting that how information is presented significantly influences public engagement and sentiment (Box-

Steffensmeier & Moses, 2021). These reactions are closely tied to individual attitudes, which reflect personal perspectives and beliefs. Martin and White (2005) and Martin and Rose (2007) define attitudes as subjective evaluations involving emotions, ethical judgments, and situational assessments (Aljuraywi & Alyousef, 2022). Attitudes can be categorized as affect, judgment, and appreciation, and are expressed with positive or negative polarity, shaping individuals' responses to political discourse.

Picture 1. Donald Trump's Tweet
Source: @realDonaldTrump's X official account

One of the tweets with the most comments is the one posted on September 15, 2024, at 8:52. In order to analyses the comments based on the specified categories (affect, resources and judgement), it is possible to identify and categorize keywords and phrases that reflect people's desires, fears, feelings, evaluations and judgments. The following section provides a breakdown of notable terms and their frequencies within each category, along with a count of how often they appear in the comments.

Table 8. Frequency of attitude in Donald's Trump twitter comment section

		Topic	Frequency
Affect	Dis/inclination	Support	8
		Call to vote	10
	Un/happiness	Expression of contentment	6
		Expression of disappointment	1
	In/security	Safety-related	4
		Justice-related	3
	Dis/satisfaction	Expression of discontent	1
Judgement	Normality	Positive descriptor	5
		Negative descriptor	4
	Capacity	Positive assertions of capability	1
		Negative assertions of incompetence	3
	Tenacity	Positive expressions of determination	2
		Negative challenges to resolve	1
	Veracity	Supportive comments on truthfulness	3

			Accusations of lying	3
	Propriety		Just actions	3
			Claims of criminality	2
	Reaction	Impact	Positive Impact	6
			Negative Impact	4
Appreciation	Composition	Balance and Complexity	Balance and Clear Stance	3
			Lack of Balance or Clarity	3
	Valuation		High Valuation	7
			Low Valuation	5

The analysis of public reactions to Donald Trump's 2024 campaign post reveals a highly polarized sentiment, categorized according to the Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation dimensions. Affect responses indicate the presence of intense emotional states, with numerous supporters expressing positive or negative sentiments through expression of affection (Douzandeh et al., 2024), such as *"I love you,"* or through calls to action, such as *"Vote Trump to save America."* These statements indicate a strong desire among supporters to see Trump elected president. In contrast, those with opposing views express a less frequent aversion, with statement such as *"You were failed president."* Similarly, there are prevalent expression of insecurity around themes of safety and justice. Instances of contentment and disappointment appear, with contentment more frequently expressed by supporters and a minimal expression of dissatisfaction. This highlights the different emotional engagements Trump elicit.

In Judgement, opinions on Trump's character and behavior exhibit a divergence of perspective, with a combination of high praise and strong disapproval. Those who supports Trump describe him as an *"honest man,"* aligning his character with his values. In contrast, those who criticize him often use highly negative language, such as *"lying pathetic piece of s***,"* to signal deviations from moral expectations. There is divergence of opinion with regard to his competence and resolve. While some commend his tenacity, other question his capability and follow-through, for example, by stating that he failed to fulfil his promise to build a wall.

Appreciation responses provide an evaluation of the perceived impact, complexity, and value of Trump. Those who support Trump often cite his positive impact, with statements such as *"Vote for President Trump because your country depends on it."* In contrast, those who oppose him challenge this impact, characterizing him as *"the most divisive and the worst president we've ever had."* The comments on balance and complexity are divided; some admire his conviction, while others criticize the oversimplification of his approach. Furthermore, valuation reflects his polarization, with positive supporters often expressing gratitude to the president, while detractors undermine his value, labelling him as a liar or an incompetent fool.

Table 9. Frequency of positive and negative comments

	Frequency	
	Positive	Negative
Affect	31	2
Judgement	14	13
Appreciation	16	12
Total	61	26

The overall attitude of public reactions leans significantly toward support, as evidenced by the numerous affirmations and calls to action, including *"Vote Trump to save America"* and *"I trust you to end the invasion."* These supportive comments demonstrate that a significant proportion of his supporters are convinced of the sincerity of his commitments and perceive his promises as actionable. The high counts of disinclination and unhappiness among the supportive comments indicate that Trump's actions have successfully mobilized a segment of the public, reinforcing their loyalty and willingness to act in alignment with his proposed actions. These reactions indicate that Trump's commissive acts are effective in influencing

certain audience segments, particularly those who align ideologically with him or who perceive themselves to be represented by his stance on issues such as immigration and American sovereignty.

The backlash comments, however, indicate the presence of a notable proportion of the audience who evince a skeptical or even critical attitude. A significant number of those who oppose Trump question his capacity or sincerity in fulfilling his commitments. This is evidenced by the use of derogatory language such as *"You are so incompetent"* and *"You didn't do that when you were president,"* which highlight doubts about his competence or resolve to deliver on his promises. This skepticism undermines the illocutionary force of his commissive acts for these individuals, as their responses suggest that they do not view his commitments as credible or actionable.

The effectiveness of Trump's speech, particularly his use of illocutionary power, is polarized. While it strengthens support among those who are inclined to believe his message, it has little or no impact on those who are doubtful of his track record or intentions. This division implies that, while Trump's commissive tweets successfully meet the felicity conditions for his supporters – enhancing their engagement and calls to action – they fail to establish credibility or trustworthiness among opponents. Overall, his communication appears partially effective: it solidifies support within his base but intensifies backlash from critics, thus amplifying rather than bridging the divide in public perception.

IV. CONCLUSION

During the 2024 presidential campaign, from September 1 to September 30, Donald Trump predominantly employed directive acts in his tweets. Among the 33 documented illocutionary acts, directives were the most prevalent, appearing 11 times, followed by representatives (8), expressive (7), commissive (6), and a single declarative act. This predominance of directives suggests that Trump's primary objective was to influence his audience's actions and behaviours, assert his leadership, and portray himself as a proactive figure capable of guiding his supporters. A subsequent analysis of Trump's tweets identified various types of illocutionary acts, with some aligning with their respective felicity conditions and others falling short. The acts that met felicity conditions exhibited an adherence to sincerity and clear

intentions, thereby supporting their communicative effectiveness. Conversely, other illocutionary acts failed to meet these conditions, primarily due to Trump's use of harsh language or lack of supporting evidence in his claims. For instance, on September 16, 2024, at 11:29 PM, Trump committed a commissive act by making a promise. While the tweet satisfied the felicity conditions inherent to a commissive act, public responses were varied, encompassing support and substantial criticism, thereby underscoring the limited efficacy of the employed communicative strategy.

This study underscores the significance of fulfilling felicity conditions in speech acts to enhance message clarity and audience reception. Nevertheless, the existence of negative public responses even in circumstances where conditions are met indicates that supplementary factors influence interpretation and perception. Future research could explore how rhetorical strategies such as humour, sarcasm, emotional appeals, or identity-based language impact the reception of illocutionary acts. Furthermore, external factors, including media framing, algorithmic amplification, and contemporaneous events such as political debates, scandals, or legal developments, may significantly influence public responses. A comprehensive investigation of these factors would facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between political language, public interpretation, and digital discourse. The attainment of such insights could ultimately contribute to the development of more strategic and ethical political communication practices in the digital age.

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