

Research Paper

Social media use for body comparison, body image concern and self-esteem

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ABSTRACT

Social media is one of the biggest revolutions that the world has witnessed which has transient the society to a great extent. The aim of present study is to explore and compare young males and females on social media use for body comparison, body image and self-esteem. Three scales were employed to measure the variables in the study. Social media use was measured by Motivation to use Social Media for Body Comparison. To assess body image Body Self Image Questionnaire was used. To measure self-esteem Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale was used. A sample of 100 participants were drawn from different colleges and universities of Delhi/NCR region. Non probability purposive sampling technique was used to select the two criterion groups consisting of fifty males and fifty females respectively. Data was analysed with the help of descriptive and inferential statistics. It was found that females tend to use social media more for body comparison and report higher body image concern however males showed lowered self-esteem compared to female counterparts. The study can serve as a future prospect in the field of applied social psychology in order to design intervention regarding social media usage. The study can provide theoretical framework in the field of positive psychology to induce affirmative body image and self perception.

Keywords: *Social Media, Body Image, Self-esteem, Body Comparison.*

From being a medium of information and forming new connections social media has paved way of indulging oneself in relative comparison. It is imperative for us to recognise how this interaction-based platform has led to increased attention towards appearance concern, poor body image as well as lowered self-esteem. Therefore, the goal of this study is to explore the manner in which these factors are affecting our psychological health and well being.

Social media is an internet based medium or web oriented platform that has enabled sharing of one's thoughts, concepts, ideas, values and beliefs as well as exchange of information through the means of electronic communication. (Manning, 2014) The social media usage has become an essential part of life for young adults which has enabled them to share their personal profiles with the public world (Edge, 2017). There are undying effects of social media which is often associated with increased rates of anxiety and depression, fear of

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missing out, disturbed sleeping pattern commonly leading to insomnia, increased sense of overdependence, a distorted perception of one's body damaging one's self-esteem.

Social media use for body comparison and body image

Body image can be defined as “a person's perception of their physical self and the thoughts and feelings, positive, negative or both, which result from that perception” (National Eating Disorders Association 2016). Social networking sites and applications are increasingly being criticised due to its unhealthy influence on a person's body image. Images on social media depicting the extremely thin body type for females and muscular toned body for men is being currently regarded as “idealistic”. An experimental study carried out Myers and Crowther (2009) found a linkage between comparisons on social media and increased sense of body dissatisfaction. Research indicates that “fitspiration” images in particular depicted on social media causes people to compare their body type with the media portrayals. This type of relative comparison makes people feel dissatisfied with their own body and perceive it negatively. Krones, Stice, Batres, & Orjada (2005) suggested that indulging in “body comparisons to thin-ideal portrayal” often leads to experiences of body dissatisfaction. Another a study conducted by Groesz, Levine, & Murnen (2002) found that women who were shown images of “thin body type” began to perceive their body type negatively after they had viewed these images.

Harmful effects of negative body image

Some of the most common signs and symptoms of negative body image includes poor self-esteem, being emotionally distressed, experiences of anxiety like symptoms, poor eating habits, Unhealthy dietary practices, depression, eating disorders like “anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder” can be also reported. Symptoms obsessive compulsive and related disorders, body dysmorphic disorder, Substance use, withdrawal behaviour, living in isolation, “self-harming” or “self-injury behaviour” can be observed, Cessation of sexual activity due to fear of body exposure, Avoiding swimming, exercising, visiting doctor or indulging in intimate relationship due to fear of embarrassment other symptoms include risky weight loss strategies, feeling of shame, guilt and embarrassment when eating meals, excessive workout, self-criticism and lowered self confidence.

Social media body image and self-esteem

Portrayals on social networking sites demonstrating images of certain body type negatively impact people's self-esteem. They feel dissatisfied with one's own body when they feel they are unable to achieve body type showed on social media. It is due to the idea of perfectionism and unrealistic portrayal of body features and body shape people often indulge in relative comparison. The images being portrayed and feedback and validation being provided to those idealistic images makes people evaluate themselves negatively. People crave for positive reinforcement on social media in form of popularity, fame and liking however when they are unable to receive it, it leads to lower self-esteem as compared to women who were satisfied with their body size and shape, female college students who were dissatisfied had lower self-esteem and more eating disorder symptoms (Geller et al., 2002).

Gender differences on social media impacting body image and self-esteem

Early studies demonstrated that women are particularly vulnerable to be negatively impacted by exposure to social media portrayals of idealistic images. For instance, Mills (2017) suggested this relative comparison with images on social media led female students evaluate their physical appearance negatively. Studies like these highlighted “thin body type” for women are considered idealistic. Theorists and researchers have discussed that

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“internalizing ideal media images “causes women to signify and stress upon their physical appearance as well as on their body shape rather than other “personality characteristics or abilities”. (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). However current research demonstrates both males and females are likely to get impacted by social media portrayals. For males the emphasis is on creating muscular body. In young boys, negative body image is a result of associating perfectionism, thinness and muscular oriented goals as a consequence man often indulge in sense of “self-conscious behaviour”. Research suggested that being exposed to extremely fit or muscular physiques image on social media is linked with body dissatisfaction. Ricciardelli (2003) suggested that the "social media platform was inversely correlated with males self perception and self-esteem”.

Aim

- To study and explore social media use, body image and self-esteem among young males and females.

Objective

In order to achieve the aim of study the following objectives were formulated:

1. To study and compare young males and females on Motivation to use Social Media for body comparison
2. To study and compare young males and females on the dimensions of body self image questionnaire.
3. To study and compare young males and females on Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale.

Hypothesis

1. There will be a significant difference among young males and females on Motivation to use Social Media for body comparison.
2. There will be a significant difference among young males and females on the dimensions of body self image questionnaire.
3. There will be a significant difference among young males and females on Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

A sample consisting of 100 young males and females was drawn from different colleges and universities from the region of Delhi/NCR. Purposive sampling was utilized as a sampling technique in this study. A purposive sample is a non-probability sampling technique which is also referred as judgmental and subjective sampling it is described as a sampling technique which that focuses on selecting sample based on characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. Control was exercised over certain extraneous variables which consist of age range (19 to 23), Educational qualification, geographical region (Delhi/NCR region).

Instruments

Motivation to Use Social Media for Body Comparison: It is a subscale of Motivation for Electronic Interaction Scale (MEIS) developed by Nesi & Prinstein (2015). It is five item likert scale which ranges from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (extremely true). The scale has good reliability with a correlation of $\alpha=0.832$.

Body Self Image Questionnaire: It was developed by David A Rowe (1999). The questionnaire consists of 39 items. Internal consistency reliabilities for the subscales in the

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final version of the BSIQ ranged from .68 to .92. The scale also showed good convergent validity with Body Image Questionnaire and also showed satisfied factorial validity. The scale has good reliability with a correlation of $\alpha=0.832$.

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale: It is ten item scale developed by Morris Rosenberg in 1965. The internal consistency was found to be 0.77. Test-retest reliability for 7-month interval was found to range from 0.85 to 0.63. In order to determine validity, the scale was correlated with “Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory”. The scale showed good criterion and construct validity.

Procedure

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between social media, body image and self-esteem. The study was conducted on 100 young college going adults belonging to different Colleges and Universities of Delhi/NCR region. The sample was categorised among 50 males and 50 females. Three scales were administered on the sample of 100 participants. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, rapport was established with the participants in order to make them feel at ease. Scale were administered in a well-lit environment, with minimized distractions. There was no time limit for completing the tests. The participants were not informed about the nature of the questions that were asked in order to avoid any “socially desirable responses”. During this process, ethical concerns were kept at the background such as: An Informed Consent was obtained from the participants to ensure they had the right to voluntarily participate in the research. Confidentiality was assured as participants were informed that their responses will not be loosely revealed. Participants had their Right to Withdrawal from the research in case they felt uncomfortable at any point of time.

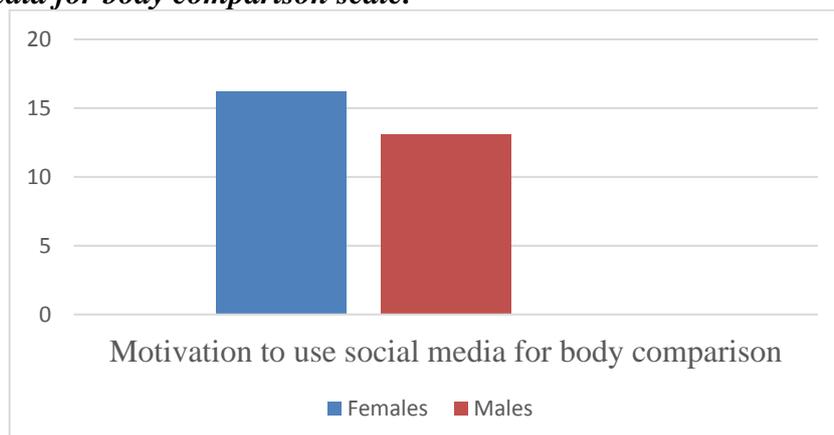
RESULT

Table 1.1: Mean, standard deviation and t for motivation to use social media for body comparison among young males and females.

Variables	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	t
Social Media Use	Females	16.24	2.42	4.53**
	Males	13.08	4.29	

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$

Figure 1.1 Comparison of mean scores of females and males participants on motivation to use social media for body comparison scale.



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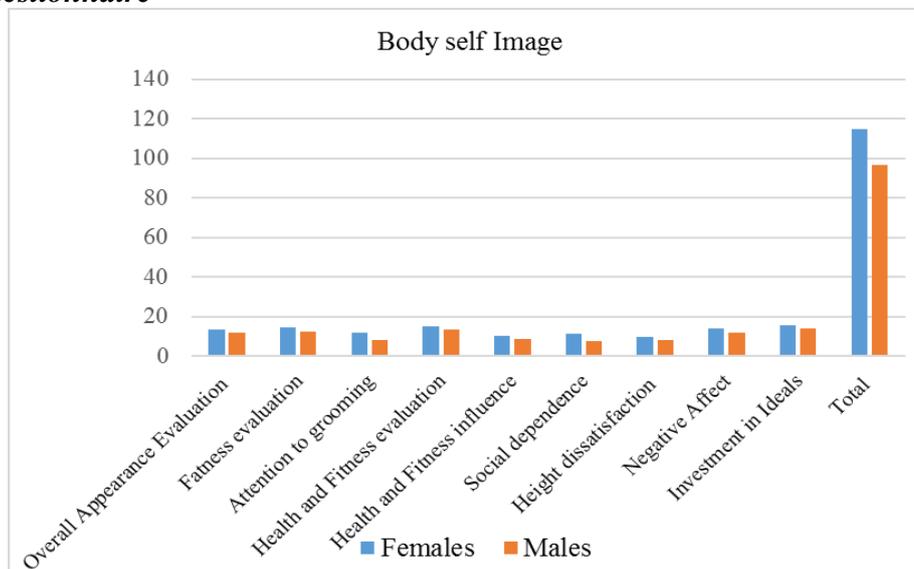
Table 1.1 depicts there is a significant difference between young males and females on motivation to use social media for body comparison. The mean value and standard deviation for females were found to be 16.24 and 2.49 respectively. The mean value and standard deviation for males were found to be 13.08 and 4.290 respectively. The t is 4.533 significant at 0.01 level.

Table 1.2: Mean, standard deviation and t for different dimensions of Body Self Image .

Variables	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	t
Overall Appearance Evaluation	Female	13.54	2.42	2.72
	Male	12.02	3.12	
Fatness Evaluation	Female	14.38	2.87	3.22*
	Male	12.26	3.64	
Attention to Grooming	Female	12.02	3.29	6.82*
	Male	7.88	2.74	
Health and Fitness Evaluation	Female	14.98	3.33	2.36
	Male	13.30	3.75	
Health and Fitness Influence	Female	10.24	2.58	2.87*
	Male	8.64	2.96	
Social Dependence	Female	11.22	2.80	7.12**
	Male	7.46	2.46	
Height Dissatisfaction	Female	9.54	2.81	2.37
	Male	8.08	3.31	
Negative Affect	Female	13.70	3.55	2.37
	Male	12.02	3.50	
Investment in Ideals	Female	15.78	2.80	3.05*
	Male	14.10	2.70	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 1.2. Comparison of mean scores of females and males participants on Body Self Image Questionnaire



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Table 1.2 shows there mean, standard deviation and t for different dimensions of body self-image questionnaire. On the dimension of overall appearance evaluation mean value and standard deviation for females was 13.54 and 2.426 respectively. For males mean and standard deviation was 12.02 and 3.12. The t was 2.71 no significant difference was found on this dimension. The second dimension was fatness evaluation. The mean value for females was 14.38 and standard deviation was 2.78. For males the mean value was 12.26 and standard deviation was 3.64. t was 3.22 significant at 0.05 level. For the dimension of attention to grooming females scored mean value of 12.02 and standard deviation was 3.29. males scored mean value of 7.88 and standard deviation 2.74. The t was 6.82 significant at 0.05 level. On the dimension of health and fitness evaluation. The dimension of health and fitness evaluation females obtained mean value of 14.98 and standard deviation 3.33 respectively. Males obtained mean value of 13.30 and standard deviation 3.75. The t value was 2.36 and the difference was not significant. On the dimension of health and fitness influence females obtained mean value of 10.24 and standard deviation 2.58 respectively. Males obtained mean value of 8.64 and standard deviation 2.96. The t value was 2.87 showing significant difference between two group at 0.05 level. For the dimension of social dependence females scored mean value of 11.22 and standard deviation was 2.80. Males scored mean value of 7.46 and standard deviation 2.46. The t was 7.12 significant at 0.0 level. On the dimension of height dissatisfaction females obtained mean value of 9.54 and standard deviation 2.81 respectively. Males obtained mean value of 8.08` and standard deviation was 3.31. The t was 2.37 significant at 0.05 level. The next dimension is negative affect on which females obtained mean value of 13.70 and standard deviation of 3.55. Males obtained mean value of 12.02 and standard deviation 3.50. the t was 2.37 significant at 0.05 level. The last dimension is Investment in Ideals on which females obtained mean value of 15.78 and standard deviation was 2.80. Males obtained mean of 14.10 and standard deviation was 2.70. The t was 3.05 significant at 0.05 level

Table 1.3. Represents significant gender difference among males and females on Self-esteem Scale

Variables	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	t
Self-esteem	Female	32.32	5.01	5.79**
	Male	26.24	5.47	

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Figure 1.3. Comparison of mean scores of females and males participants on Self-esteem Scale.

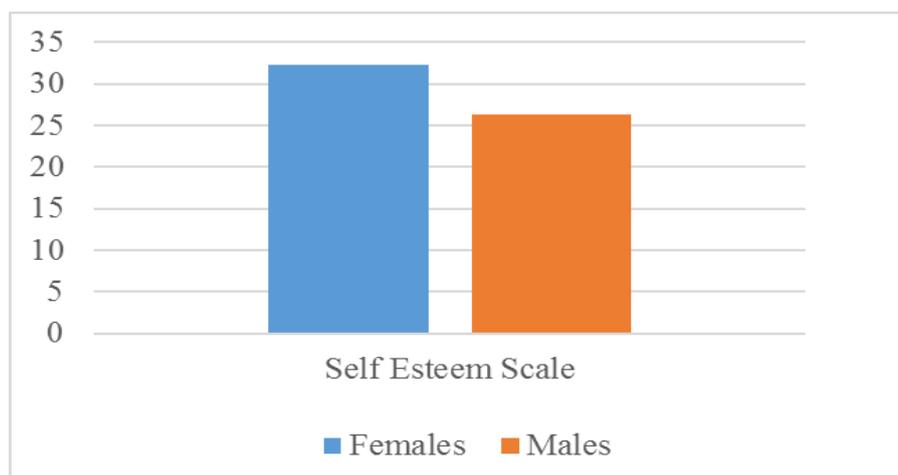


Table 1.3 depicts females obtained mean value of 32.32 and standard deviation of 5.01. Males obtained mean value of 26.24 and standard deviation of 5.47. The t was 5.79 significant at 0.01 level.

DISCUSSION

Social media is regarded as one of the biggest revolutions leading to the beginning of a new era. One of the greatest area of research is social media and growing “body image concerns” which can affect people’s self-esteem negatively. Various research evidences have shown that social media has altered our body perception as well as it has created an unrealistic expectation for people to indulge “body comparisons”. Simmons (2016) stated that social media nowadays has led to rise in self-objectification, an impulsive urge to thin or muscular leading to poor body image. In general terms body image refers to perception of one’s body or “how an individual views his or her body”. This perception is subjective in nature and its influenced by various external factors including social media. Along with impacting body image, social media is also linked self-esteem. Self-esteem refers the degree to which people value themselves. The study involved assessing the relationship between “social media, body image and self-esteem”. The study was conducted on both males and females respectively. The first hypothesis stated that young males and females will differ on Motivation to use Social Media for body comparison scale. Motivation to use social media for body comparison is the first scale which assesses how people indulge in relative comparison because of exposure to social media which creates unrealistic beauty standards for both men and women. On this scale males and females differed significantly. The female participants were found to use social media more often for body comparison. This hypothesis is supported by various researchers such as Fardouly et al.(2015) stated women tend to compare their appearance on social media which makes them vulnerable to feel dissatisfied with one’s body as well as evaluate their body perception gets distorted in a negative manner.

The second hypothesis stated that there will be a significant difference among young males and females on the dimensions of body self-image questionnaire. The scale has in total nine dimensions. The first dimension of the questionnaire is overall appearance evaluation which can be described as a generalised perception of how an individual analyses their appearance. On this dimension there is no significant difference between males and females however according to mean difference females are likely to indulge more frequently in overall appearance evaluation.

The second dimension is fatness evaluation. It can be described as the degree to which oneself perceive as fat or overweight. There is a significant difference between males and females on this dimension. Females are likely to perceive themselves as fat compared to men. These findings have been supported by Lemon and Rosal (2009) who concluded in their study that women are more likely to consider themselves as “fat” or “overweight”. Many reasons could be associated including many forms of verbal discrimination and stereotyping related to women’s weight as well as considering “thin as beautiful”.

Third dimension of the questionnaire is attention to grooming. It refers to the degree to which people devote their time in self and body care. There is significant difference between males and females on this dimension. Females are more likely to pay attention to self-grooming than males. Females tend to pay careful attention to their appearance. Possible

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explanation could be society to focus heavily on female's attractiveness compared to male's appearance and self-care.

Another dimension is Health and Fitness evaluation. On this dimension there is no significant difference between males and females suggesting both males and females are likely to indulge and invest in health and fitness evaluation. There is an increase in fitness and health related awareness in urban cities. People nowadays are becoming more and more health conscious. The findings suggest both men and women are likely to orient themselves towards health and fitness concerns and may show improvement health related perceptions. Health and Fitness Influence is the fifth dimension of the questionnaire. On this dimension there is a significant difference between males and females. According to the finding women are likely to get inspired from health and fitness related content. Tiggerman (2016) considered content on social media particularly "Instagram and Facebook" are showing "fitspiration" images enable women to lay emphasis and get influenced and indulge in fitness related behaviours.

Social Dependence is the next dimension which shows the degree to which people rely on societal opinions, attitudes and behaviours. There is a significant difference between males and females on this dimension. Females are found to have higher degree of social reliance. Women face a lot of pressure to abide to social and cultural standards of idealised body weight. Torrisi (2018) suggested that society is a strong external factor for women which influences our perception and satisfaction level with our body.

Height dissatisfaction is another dimension on which males and females participants differed significantly. Females showed higher level of dissatisfaction compared to male participants. Height is considered as an important component of attractiveness. Fredrickson and Roberts(1997) suggested women are likely to objectified which could lead to increased sense of dissatisfaction with their body components including height and weight.

Negative Affect refers to the presence of both negative feeling and emotions. Female participants tend to report higher negative affect than male participants. Manaf and Saravanan (2016) also supported these findings in which they suggested that females are likely to have negative emotions related to their body perception which can make them vulnerable to body dissatisfaction and can develop symptoms of "eating disorders" compared to men. Many factors are associated with women feeling negative about their body which includes inability to achieve "perfect body size", adhering to cultural and social standards related to body weight, internalization of negative emotions related to body, "self objectification", "upward social comparisons".

Investment in Ideals is last dimension of the questionnaire which refers to the degree to which people devote time and interest in striving to achieve perfection. Men and women differed significantly on this dimension. Female participants are likely to indulge and spend more time on investment in ideals. Marsh (2016) conducted a study on "134 participants" in which they found most participants admitting that they feel the pressure to strive for perfection and a constant need to achieve societal expectation of idealistic body size and appearance.

Overall it can be suggested that female participants significantly reported higher body image concerns .These findings have been supported by other theorists as well such MacNeill (2017)concluded that female participants are more likely to have distorted body

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image and body perception due to various external and internal factors such as media ,societal expectations as well as personality traits.

The third hypothesis stated that there is a significant difference between young males and females on Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale. Self-esteem refers to the belief regarding valuing oneself. It has two major components self-confidence and self-worth. On the component of self-esteem males and females differed significantly. Females showed higher self-esteem compared to male participants. One of the important reasons for lowered self-esteem is poor body image and lack of satisfaction with one's body. Due to exposure to social media portrayals of idealistic images men also experience negative feelings related to their body which can cause lowered level of self-esteem. (Kemp ,2019).

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrated a comparative analysis showing females are likely to use social media more often for body comparison purpose, they are also likely to have higher body image concerns however when it comes to self-esteem men have lowered levels of self-esteem compared to females. It can be concluded that for females Social media acts as a strong element which influences their perception about their body and creates an “altered sense of reality” which can pressurize them to achieve idealistic body type they admire on these sites giving rise to body image concern. Such concerns can give rise to higher level of anxiety and depression, constant self-criticism, perceiving oneself as worthless and decreased level of self-confidence, poor self-concept as well as being prone to eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia nervosa .This research has an application in the field of positive psychology as well as applied social psychology wherein its highlighting modern day challenges faced by our society related to social media usage .The study can help us in designing research based interventions which can focus on using social media effectively as well as promoting positive self-image by modifying their core beliefs of people related to their bodies. Specific behavioural and cognitive strategies can be employed which can help people to appreciate and celebrate every “body type”, uplift their wellbeing and promote self acceptance and self growth as well as transform the concept of “beauty” which is not limited to one's body rather it consists of individual as whole.

Limitations and Suggestions for further research

The study although focused on planning and executing each step carefully however there were certain limitations that were identified and can be enlisted. The sample although provides a basic understanding about the nature of population yet due to time constraints the sample size was small enough to draw generalisation. The sample was purposively drawn therefore it lacked randomness. The sample was selected from urban and metropolitan region as a result it was not representative of rural and semi-rural setting. The researcher had to rely on self reported data it can be supported by secondary sources. The study was limited to region of Delhi/NCR.A larger sample size can be collected and the study can be replicated to the different sections of the society. The sample consisted of young males and females. The sample can extend to illiterates, school going students, dropouts, corporate professionals, government employees and people living in rural or semi rural settings. In order to gain an in depth understanding the data can be supplemented by using qualitative methods like interviews, focus group discussions, participant and naturalistic observation. With the purpose of determining changes in the variables over a period of time longitudinal study can be carried out.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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