Digital Media as a Symbol of Piety: The Use of *Smart Hafiz* in Muslim Middle-Class Families

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Abstract	This study explores the use of Smart Hafiz, an interactive digital media device, in middle-class Muslim families in Yogyakarta as a symbol of piety for children. The study aims to understand how Smart Hafiz is integrated into daily life and how its use reflects the religious aspirations as well as the social identity of middle-class Muslim families. By using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews and participant observations conducted in 2024. This study found that Smart Hafiz is not only used as a means of religious learning, but also as a symbolic reinforcement that piety is not enough to be practiced, but supported by religious symbols. These findings show that digital media plays an important role in shaping religious practices in the modern era, as well as reflecting the dynamics of interaction between religion, technology, and social classes. This research contributes to the study of media and religion, digital media is currently an alternative need for the piety of Muslim middle-class families.
Keywords	**Digital Media, Muslims Middle Class, Religious Practices, Smart Hafiz.**

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Central Statistics Agency, the middle class in Indonesia in 2024 will be recorded at 66.35 percent of the total Indonesian population. By 2024, the middle class and towards the middle class will be 66.35 percent of Indonesia's population. They will spend 81.49 percent of the total public expenditure. (BPS, n.d.) Therefore, the middle class plays a very important role as a component of the economy. They have great purchasing power, drive consumption, and contribute to social and political change, the middle class is essential to the national economy.

The development of the technological era has changed various aspects of life, including religion among Indonesian Muslim families. Including the presence of religious media in the modern context is very diverse. Among them, religious applications such as Qur'an Pro, Muslim Pro, Youtube channels about religious learning, Digital Qur'an religious devices, Al-Qur'an Pen, and one of the devices for children is Smart Hafiz. This study takes a case study of the use of Smart Hafiz in Muslim middle-class families in Yogyakarta. Based on the results of the interview with the Head Supervisor of the Smart Hafiz product distributor, the demand for Smart Hafiz per day reached five hundred units, so the production team could not meet it. (TR Interview, August 23, 2024)

This Smart Hafiz is a doll-shaped toy with a 7inch screen and contains Islamic content including muraottal 30 juz, asmaul husna, sirah nabawi, islamic songs, commendable moral videos, prayer procedures. This media is marketed online, through social media, marketplaces, and even advertisements (*endorsements*) of artists and celebrities. Per unit of this product is priced at 1.9 million, equivalent to the price of *a smartphone*. The target market is young millennial parents, with a middle social class level. Based on the growth of the Muslim middle class, the level of consumption has also increased. This is evidenced by the increase in halal food products, halal cosmetics, and sharia products. They compete to find halal food, buy products to switch to the sharia system, use Islamic fashion such as hijab, Islamic books, Islamic-themed podcasts, Islamic studies.

Religious expressions and the consumption of Islamic symbols are rampant in the public sphere. The product as a sign has an impact on the character of consumerism that has become prominent in the Muslim middle class. The consumptive style as a middle-class character, the appearance of piety follows the movement of modernity. This spirit of piety is what shapes various Muslim ways in the flow of patterns of consumption of objects as a sign. The icon of -Islam- has become popular culture and dominates the market.(Teak, 2017)

The middle class landscape has widened since 2019, according to a World Bank report that the middle class in Indonesia has increased by 20%. The middle class group spends Rp 1.2 million to Rp 6 million per person per month ("Aspiring Indones. Middle Cl.," 2019). The main consumer in the world economy is the middle class. Muslim society dominates the territory of Indonesia and the Muslim middle class is not much different from the middle class in general (Teak, 2016).

Scholars have noted the emergence of the Muslim middle class in the post-New Order period as an increasingly influential group in society. They have been described as the main agents of contemporary consumption culture and lifestyle. The practice of consumption is becoming more important and complex in contemporary urban environments, where consumption is increasingly transforming itself into 'consumerism' (a highly stylized act of consumption), as part of a lifestyle.(Ariel Heryanto, 1999). Progress in development in the field of education, especially the students, has undergone a transformation from a traditional agrarian society to an urban society with modern values and lifestyles. Some of the students grew up as an educated social group mastering various skills in the modern world.(Hasbullah, 2014).

Technological media in the global era is a requirement for interaction, and includes interaction in religion. In other words, for Hoover, religion and technology media are intertwined in the culture of the media audience (Hoover, 2006). Media and religion occupy the same space, serve the same goals and reinforce the same practices.

Morgan emphasized that in general, there are two traditions in the study of the relationship between religion and the media. The first tradition focuses on religion in media, which examines how major religions are. Such as Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam, and other religions are represented in the media and how they affect their adherents individually, religious institutions, and in a broader context. Meanwhile, the second tradition of culturalists who focus on the study of (Morgan, 2008). This concept can be analyzed how the media displays symbols of piety in various forms, both through the representation of religious figures, religious narratives, and visual symbols associated with religious values.

A culturalist approach that emphasizes how religion is used and interpreted in the context of media culture can be more relevant in understanding how society adopts, interprets, and even constructs symbols of piety through the media. In the digital age, for example, religious practices are not only

happening in worship spaces, but also on social media platforms, where individuals display their piety through publicly documented posts, scripture quotes, or charitable activities. In this context, the media is not only a means of religious representation, but also a tool for the formation of religious identity and the mediation of spiritual experiences.

From a culturalist point of view, Smart Hafiz is seen not only as a tool to convey religious content, but also as a cultural product that reflects the social dynamics and identity of a certain group, in this case a middle-class Muslim family. The media has become a cultural symbol that shows how religious principles can be adapted to digital technology, reinforcing the identity of Muslim families in the modern world. The presence of Smart Hafiz shows that technology can be a place where religion and culture interact, enabling new religious education practices and preserving Islamic identity. Therefore, Smart Hafiz considers both different traditions of Morgan theory: as a representation of religion in the media and as a cultural symbol that indicates the adaptation of religion to contemporary technological advances. This research focuses on answering first, the pattern of using Smart Hafiz digital media products in the life of Muslim middle-class families; second, the symbolic meaning of the use of Smart Hafiz media in the context of religious media and the social identity of Muslim middle-class families.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach, a case study approach. The data source uses a purposive sampling technique to determine the right informants, the primary takes five families, before determining the five families, a survey is conducted on the Smart Hafiz media user community. which has a Muslim middle class category in Yogyakarta with indicators on economic and educational factors. The economic factor is that those who have their own place to live (not rented) have two- and four-wheeled vehicles. They own and use *Smart Hafiz* for at least one year by having preschool children and actively using it. The five families from Yogyakarta interviewed were Mrs. O (Bantul), Mrs. N (Bantul), Mrs. S (Yogyakarta), Mrs. A (Sleman), and Mrs. T (Sleman). Secondary data from social media (Facebook of users, Instagram users and endorsed celebrities, Whatsapp groups of user communities and Telegram of user communities), Youtube channels with testimonials of the use of Smart Hafiz products, and other relevant media or references. Data collection was conducted by means of interviews with primary data sources, observation of participants in their families, obsessions through social media, and documentation for content analysis in *Smart Hafiz media*.

The data analysis technique collects interview and observation data from informants to answer motivations, practices of using *Smart Hafiz*, impressions, responses, or criticisms. The results of the answers were analyzed using simulation theory, Jean Baudrillard simulacra, and *Smart Hafiz* content analysis as a form of representation generated from the media. The research period is from May to September 2024.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The presence of Smart Hafiz in Muslim middle-class families shows the transformation of the role of technology in religious practices and social symbolism. As a digital media device, Smart Hafiz not only functions as a religious learning tool for children, but also becomes a symbol of family commitment to religious practices in the midst of modernization. This discussion examines two main aspects: the role of technology in religious practice and the symbolic meaning of Smart Hafiz in the social context of middle-class Muslim families.

In the context of religious practice, *Smart Hafiz* functions as an interactive, fun, and easily accessible medium for religious transformation. This device presents Islamic materials such as Qur'an memorization, daily prayers, and Islamic stories in a format that is attractive to children. This not only increases children's involvement in religious learning, but also helps parents in meeting their children's religious education needs at home. Devices such as *Smart Hafiz* are a solution for middle-class families who often face limited time to provide direct religious teaching.

Based on an interview with Mrs. N, that through *Smart Hafiz* children are able to know how to read. In the media, the *makharijul is* explained , so according to the parents this is very useful.

> "It's really beneficial, it's a benefit for parents. My son recognizes hijaiyah letters, the theory is using SH (Smart Hafiz - in the community it is usually called SH), the practice is in MM Kids (Mushaf Maqomat for Kids is the mushaf of the Qur'an for children produced by Al-Qolam as well)." (Informant N, 28 th, November 2024).

According to informant O, through SH the theories of hijaiyah letters were conveyed and the practice of reading using MM Kids media. MM Kids stands for Mushaf Maqomat for Kids, products from Al-Qolam are also in the form of a package consisting of Mushaf Al-Qur'an, Iqro' book, Sholeh's Children's Encyclopedia, and digital pen. The design of books and mushaf is full of color and there are signs of tajweed with different colors according to their respective reading laws. However, the research only focused on the use of SH. This technology also reflects a shift in the approach to religious education that is no longer entirely dependent on formal institutions such as schools or madrasas, but instead utilizes digital media to support informal learning at home.

3.1. Consumption as a Sign

Baudrillard focuses on analyzing consumerist society, be it as a manipulation of signs, ideological functions, cultural consumption, advertising as a simulation. For him, "the manipulation of signs directs the consumption of images, facts, and information. Consumption equates the real in real signs, equates history in signs of change (Baudrillard, 1998). Haryatmoko's analysis, that the logic of signs and symbols of goods is not associated with a specific function or need, because these goods answer something else, namely social logic or the logic of desire. Consumption is a system that guarantees the order of signs and the integration of groups (Haryatmoko, 2016).

Consumption brings a biased understanding to consumers. Markers can be lost for the sake of signs. The products consumed are actually markers but are used as signs. In the consumerist case of *Smart Hafiz*, it seems as if the doll is a sign, a symbol of pious children so that consumers have answered the imagination to make their children pious children. The real doll is only a marker, but for consumers it seems to be a sign itself. The habits that occur in Muslim consumer society are so easily swept away by advertisements in the media, no longer referring to reality outside the sign, but finally referring to the sign itself.

Smart Hafiz which has become the latest trend in Indonesia to become a religious commodity that brings consumers to a sign, which is actually just a sign. If in Ritzer's analysis that religion has become fast food contained in the doll, it is a phenomenon of McDonaldization of Muslim society. McDonaldization's systematic and orderly planning and distribution model (George Ritzer, 2018; Ritzer, 2002) This concept is not much different from the pattern of production and distribution *Smart Hafiz*. Production prepares the planning and is handed over to the second party distribution team, from the distributor has the target agents of mothers who have children and early childhood recommendations. The claim of the production is 'Fluent in reading the Qur'an'.

Religious products are exploring in the digital realm, the internet, online, social media, mass media, and various virtual religions that are increasingly present in religious life. Various products offered in the media, as if representing the real thing, namely the sign itself, so they compete to consume. Appreciation of a religious belief cannot show anything. To be able to understand and believe in a religious teaching, various rituals and religious events are made into symbolic forms or religious codes that are socially and culturally acceptable. Therefore, religion will always undergo a process of contextualization. The contextualization then shows the specific characteristics of religion that are tied to a four or situations. This means that religion is also adaptive to a *Settings* social and cultural, because religion responds to the cultural environment (Abdullah, 2006). The fascination of consumers who are trapped in Islamic products that are used as a sign cannot be separated from the role of the media. Media and religion play a role in bringing religious messages to be consumed by the audience.

3.2. New Media

Sukarno New media itself refers to newer and developing forms of media, especially those related to digital technology. Hafiz dolls can be considered as new artistic representations that utilize modern media and technology to convey messages or present artistic experiences. It involves using technology such as computer animation, *augmented reality*, or *virtual reality* to create a unique visual experience. The work uses elements of modern technology, creating a more dynamic and interactive form of media. In addition, it can be interpreted as a form of innovative educational media with new technological sophistication, presenting a new experience for users.

As a new media in the toy market as well as an Islamic educational media, it can be said to have succeeded according to the target market. Hafiz dolls as a new media in the digital era are entering the world of toys and education. Just like the beginning of the emergence of smartphones as mobile technology, the internet as a new medium in the world of information (Haddon, 2009). Its presence is able to change the mindset and shift meaning from conventional to the modern world instantly and easily.

Education that eliminates the educator aspect, and tends to be dominated by technologies that lead to virtual religion. If this has become a tendency in parents, then it is not wrong if there is a degradation of social, moral, and noble ideals of education that is increasingly losing its direction. For this reason, parents need to strengthen the principles in educational parenting for children despite the rapid modernization current. Media can be used only as a tool for educators in the educational process, not as a substitute.

Becoming a new media has the opportunity to blur the boundaries not only from the genre of expression but also between the social spaces.(Anderson, 2003) When the millennial generation children want to get Islamic religious knowledge, they have to come to mosques, TPQ, madrasas diniyah and the like. Meeting with teachers is a learning resource for teachers. However, with hafiz dolls, children do not need to go far or difficult to go to places or educational institutions to gain knowledge about Islamic religious education.

3.3. Contestation: Mom and Social Media

'Young' parents, especially the dominance of the role of mothers, part of millennial youth have a tendency to use the media, both digital media, social media as a means to learn and search for various religious topics (Chaider S. Bamualim et al, 2018). Mom plays a big role at home, having a long time side by side with gadgets. Advertising patterns through social media are considered to be an effective

and efficient alternative strategy.

Parents are undergoing generational transformation, and they naturally transmit childhood memories to be applied to the generation of children who are believed to be the digital native generation. This can be shown when they make the decision to choose Smart Hafiz as a media of piety at home. They are experiencing transformations and challenges in the era of disruption, on the one hand they are part of the millennial generation who always coexist with digital media, on the other hand they are responsible as parents to make their children pious children. Every parent wants piety, religious understanding, morals, the best supporting media for their children. The 'best' view of every family is different, the implications of every decision cannot be separated from the influence of background, education, religious constructs, and culture that shape it. And when looking at digital technology media, for them it becomes a new and interesting thing, but not necessarily for children. Children prefer gadgets that are more practical and instant.

In the phenomenon of hafiz doll media ownership, most of them are new parents. This means that they have just become parents and have just had one child. These parents experience a transformation point to become parents who have responsibility in educating children. The meaning of children as God's mandate requires various ways to maintain the trust as best as possible. They take various ways of choosing religious learning methods through technology, social, and internet media.

3.4. Advertising becomes a Real Simulation

According to Baudrillard, advertising is the most powerful mass media. In each ad, there is an image, language, and potential consumers are invited to automatically follow the code that has been read. Advertising does not encourage understanding or learning but to hope. Advertising creates pseudo-events into real daily events through consumer compliance with what is conveyed in the advertisement. Advertising does not propose meaning, cannot be shown to be true or false, advertising removes meaning and evidence. Advertisements that pass by in daily life become an effective and seemingly real semilation. Simulation becomes a generation of reality through a real model without origin. Simulation is the process of representation of an object that then changes to replace the object itself. Simulations have replaced real signs which are then treated as if they were real (Baudrillard, 1995) The fascination of consumers who are trapped in Islamic products that are used as a sign cannot be separated from the role of the media. Media and religion play a role in bringing religious messages to be consumed by the audience.

Likewise, the spirit of consumption cannot be separated from advertising that has filled the homepage coloring human visuals. Advertising here is not only limited to advertising on television. In today's social media era, many sellers choose to trade online rather than offline. One of them is in the doll's sales strategy. The sales system is all done online. Advertisements also come online through social media, not from television or even radio. The social media used are facebook and intagram. From Facebook, multiplying your network of friends is one of the keys to recruiting potential buyers and you should not even get bored in posting merchandise by explaining the benefits and various testimonials.

Meanwhile, in social media intagram, they mostly use the endorsement method. This endorsement is a way to promote goods to artists or celebrities who have thousands or even millions of followers, so that the opportunities for followers to see and observe the posts of artists or celebrities are increasing. (Results of Instagram Social Media Observation in May – July 2024) It is possible to attract the attention of potential buyers to immediately respond to the seller's account. It turns out that this method can be said to be one of the most effective ways. Most of the middle class emphasizes lifestyle more than the

value of the benefits of an item. The lifestyle here is that they will be said to have a style like the upper class if they have followed the style of their idol artists. Yes, one of them is in imitating the artist's 'endorse' post style. Even though in reality the artist is only used as a model to promote goods, he does not necessarily understand well and the goods are used in his daily life.

This is where the power of advertising, if for Baudrillard advertising is the greatest medium, because everyone is invited to follow the dishes that have been served, and the codes that have been read.(Baudrillard, 1998) From pictures, photos, videos, and even words (*Caption*) which is used as if to convince and lead people to follow it. This advertisement is also supported by the development of the contestation of the Indonesian children's Al-Qur'an hafiz competition which aired on television screens during the month of Ramadan. When children memorize the Qur'an, every parent imagines that they want their children to become hafiz like the children present on the screen. And the doll seems to be a supporting medium for children to become hafiz. This shows that the lifestyle of modern Indonesian Muslims is to give birth to hafiz children. So that doll manufacturers are right to produce their merchandise at moments that are indeed able to read the opportunities of modern Muslim consumption power in Indonesia.

3.5. Miniature of the Righteous Child

Parents have the assumption that *Smart Hafiz dolls* are miniature pious children. The concept of 'miniature pious child' refers to the ideal representation of a child who is religious, full of noble morals, and deep in understanding the Quran. In this case, hafiz dolls become an extension of this concept, playing an important role in shaping children's character, relationships, and understanding of the Quran through an entertainment approach. Islamic-based toys and learning tools, including dolls, contribute to shaping the ideal image of pious children. The concept of miniature pious children is studied in the context of various learning tools, including dolls. The shape of the doll reflects a pious child who depicts piety and spirituality. Physically have a child-like posture, wearing sandals as a simple figure according to daily habits. The clothes worn reflect Islamic symbols, wearing hijab/peci, bright colors to attract children's attention. The character, the doll's face displays expressions of tenderness and serenity, creating an impression of peace. There is a symbolic element of religious practice by holding the Qur'an mushaf.

The role of *Smart Hafiz* in promoting virtue values in children through entertainment. The concept of miniature pious children is analyzed in relation to how these dolls help shape children's characters in accordance with religious values. Hafiz dolls go beyond their role as mere entertainment. This doll becomes a piety transformation partner that supports children in becoming religious individuals, with the characteristics of a pious child who is full of noble morals. Through this miniature representation, *Smart Hafiz* dolls are believed to be children's characters in accordance with the teachings of the Quran, develop their love for religion, and guide them to the right path in life.

As in the previous data, when there are children who imitate the style such as the shape of *the Smart Hafiz* doll, and the voices of the children in it. Both when interacting, murottal sounds, songs. This *Smart Hafiz* doll is used as a pious friend. His piety includes being smart at reading the Qur'an (murattal), singing Islamic songs, being able to preach, telling the sirah of the prophet, asmaul husna. The hafiz doll is a visual representation of the idealization of a pious child who prioritizes religious and moral values. With meticulous details and rich symbolism, dedicated as a medium of piety in the family.

Parents have constructed piety according to their wishes, so that hyperreality appears. According to Baudrillard, hyperreality refers to a state in which the difference between reality and representation

becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish, until finally the original reality loses meaning or reference (Baudrillard, 1995). Hafiz dolls are substantially limited to toys, but they have been innovated into Islamic educational toys. Includes the ability of the toy to provide a learning experience that is very similar to reality in the context of Islamic values.

He argues that the loss of the omens and metaphysics of representation marks the beginning of hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1995). The multiplication of imaginary and historical worlds, along with fantasy or (reality), indicates the decline of ideology and the deterioration of reality itself. Not an object of expression, but a consciousness beyond self-awareness. The world of hyperreality is a world filled with various variations in the creation of simulated objects, that is, objects that are purely real and derived from past social realities, or that have no past social reality at all. Hyperreality takes consumers to a place where reality merges with fantasy and imagination, which ultimately makes it difficult to distinguish between the two. In hyperreality, one trusts simulations more than real objects, and one lives in confusion between simulation and reality. For example, real reality dies in hyperreality that is made as ideal as possible and broadcast to the viewer at any time, like reality on television that loses its original reality.

Hyperreality can create false pleasures and the destruction of social life. Because in hyperreality, people consume hyperreality spread by the media and also compete to follow the hyperreality. Especially nowadays, there are many social media that can be used to reveal realities that are different from the real ones (Selu Margaretha Kushendrawati, 2011). Hafiz dolls are designed to provide an accurate simulation or representation of Islamic concepts and values. Enriching children's learning experience related to Islamic teachings. For example, making a Qur'an recitation in a melodious voice, asma'ul husna, songs about bianatang in the Qur'an, making interactive presentations about the stories of the Prophet and the Messenger, teaching prayers, or explaining religious concepts in an interesting and fun way. This process creates hyperreality, namely the reality of the righteous child who should be, which is actually not the real reality.

3.6. Smart Hafiz Media as a Symbol of Piety

Baudrillard first used the term "simulation" in his book "Simulation" to describe the relationship between production, communication, and consumption in Western capitalist consumer society. This shows the nature of overproduction, overcommunication, and overconsumption through media, advertising, fashion, and other fields. The Baudrillard simulation is based on the simulation of the cosmic experience of Western capitalism. Because simulation is basically inseparable from the development of Western capitalism. Western society is called a post-industrial society or a consumer society. According to him, the simulated production model as a picture of the consumer society has nothing to do with the essence that is reproduced and becomes an authentic creation without reality.

References to reproduction are now fantasy or something unreal. Now the difference between reality and fantasy is starting to merge, even fantasy can be simulated to appear real. Simulated production not only creates objects that have no real reference (hyperreality), but also compresses, decompiles, and reconstructs them so that humans can gain new experiences in the simulator space. Anyone can enjoy and feel the simulator room through reality, fantasy, hallucinations, and so on. It can be through the consumption of TV shows, movies, social media and even hafiz dolls. This is a simulation development process that aims to create a simulacra space, and a simulacra space creates hyperreality

Using Baudrillard's simulacra approach, it makes people aware of the power to shape a "children's world" through a "simulated world". When we realize that simulacra and hyperreality can be well

controlled to support the process of quality science and nation transfer for future generations (Murtiningsih et al., 2013). This can be achieved by incorporating it into lessons at home and at school. The modern world tends to move towards a stage where the boundaries between reality and simulation become blurred. Simulation, no longer just a copy of reality, but creates reality itself. Mass media, video games, and other communication technologies play a role in creating simulations. Hafiz dolls can be considered as a manifestation of simulated piety in referring to trends on social media or digital platforms where a person or something is perceived as a symbol of piety or goodness without involving the actual substance or reality.

The concept of simulated piety faced with this phenomenon highlights how a person's image or representation on social media can become more important than everyday life practices or sincerity of heart. People may appear pious or dedicated in digital imagery, but in everyday life, the practice of true piety may be less obvious or even non-existent. The process of simulated piety can occur when a person creates a desired image in cyberspace, such as becoming a "Hafiz" (someone who memorizes the Qur'an) without describing the reality of practicing religion in daily life. This creates a gap between online appearances and real life, reflecting a shift in focus from real life into digital simulation worlds. Keep in mind that this concept is not always negative. However, this invites us to be more critical in assessing and understanding the meaning of piety, as well as not to get caught up in the image that is built on social media without paying attention to the daily practices that support it. The realization of true piety is a process that is applied in daily life starting from parents, and children have the nature of imitation. If they want their children to be pious, parents need to be role models in the family, so that the values of piety, Islamic religious values can crystallize from an early age through good habits.

4. CONCLUSION

In the case study of *Smart Hafiz media consumption*, which is dominated by Muslim middle-class families, they put their hopes in the ideals of piety. The emergence of hyperreality in toys, as if miniature pious children are able to represent piety and transform the values of piety in children. This media seems to be a simulation of piety for the family, and the ideal of piety is realized. However, the fact is that children with digital native characters are less interested in the media, more interested in smartphones. In terms of content, *Smart Hafiz* media is rich in displaying Islamic materials, but it is felt that there are too many and boring. Children tend to like light song content, and children find it less practical in terms of form than small, instant gadgets. In the digital world, the opportunities for the birth of Islamic media are predicted to continue to change. The middle class society has become a consumerist society, it is a challenge to continue to analyze from the point of view of usefulness rather than just a symbol. Digital literacy is needed more deeply, if recommended to children. The transfer of piety is more effectively applied through the example of parents.

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