

Influence of eWOM on purchasing decisions: an analysis with emphasis on the tourism sector

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Influencia del eWOM en la decisión de compra: un análisis con énfasis en el sector turístico

Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado¹  , Katty Alamo Larrañaga¹  , Rony Flores Ramírez¹  

¹Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Facultad De Ciencias Económicas. Tarapoto, Perú.

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Corresponding author: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado¹  

ABSTRACT

The research analyzed the role of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) as a strategic tool in marketing and its influence on purchasing decisions, with a special focus on the tourism sector. International and national studies were reviewed that showed a positive and significant impact of eWOM on consumer behavior. Unlike traditional word of mouth, eWOM spread through digital platforms, reaching mass audiences and generating a constant flow of opinions. The key dimensions of eWOM—quantity, quality, and credibility—were identified as determining its effectiveness. A greater number of comments increased the visibility and social validation of brands; credibility ensured the perception of authenticity; and the quality of information improved the perceived usefulness when deciding on a purchase. Studies in Indonesia and Yogyakarta showed that sales promotion and digital marketing enhanced eWOM, strengthening customer satisfaction and loyalty. In Argentina and Peru, various studies confirmed that proper eWOM management contributed to improving brand image and engagement, as well as increasing purchase intent and loyalty. In the tourism sector, it was observed that the perceived credibility, quality, and usefulness of online reviews shaped perceptions of destinations and services, influencing visitor loyalty. In conclusion, eWOM emerged as a valuable resource for attracting and retaining customers, with strategic management essential for maintaining competitiveness in digital environments.

Keywords: eWOM; Purchasing Decision; Credibility; Quality; Tourism.

RESUMEN

La investigación analizó el papel del boca a boca electrónico (eWOM) como herramienta estratégica en el marketing y su influencia en la decisión de compra, con especial atención al sector turístico. Se revisaron estudios internacionales y nacionales que evidenciaron un impacto positivo y significativo del eWOM en el comportamiento del consumidor. A diferencia del boca a boca tradicional, el eWOM se difundió a través de plataformas digitales, alcanzando audiencias masivas y generando un flujo constante de opiniones. Se identificó que las dimensiones clave del eWOM —cantidad, calidad y credibilidad— determinaron su efectividad. Una mayor cantidad de comentarios incrementó la visibilidad y validación social de las marcas; la credibilidad aseguró la percepción de autenticidad, y la calidad de la información mejoró la utilidad percibida al decidir una compra. Estudios en Indonesia y Yogyakarta demostraron que la promoción de ventas y el marketing digital potenciaron el eWOM, fortaleciendo la satisfacción y fidelización de los clientes. En Argentina y Perú, diversas investigaciones confirmaron que una adecuada gestión del eWOM contribuyó a mejorar la imagen de marca y el engagement, así como a incrementar la intención de compra y la lealtad. En el ámbito turístico, se observó que la credibilidad, calidad y utilidad percibida de las reseñas en línea moldearon la percepción de destinos y servicios, influyendo en la fidelidad de los visitantes. En conclusión, el eWOM se presentó como un recurso valioso para atraer y retener clientes, siendo esencial su gestión estratégica para mantener la competitividad en entornos digitales.

Palabras clave: eWOM; Decisión de Compra; Credibilidad; Calidad; Turismo.

INTRODUCTION

In the current context of increasing digitalization and globalization, online interactions have become a determining factor in consumer dynamics. Among these, electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has emerged as a key tool for influencing consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing decisions. Unlike traditional word of mouth, which takes place in face-to-face interactions, eWOM spreads through digital platforms, reaching mass audiences and allowing for a constant flow of information and opinions that are immediately accessible. This phenomenon has transformed the way people learn about products and services, giving a central role to the credibility, quality, and quantity of opinions shared online.

Several studies have demonstrated the significant impact of eWOM in different sectors and geographical contexts. Research such as that conducted by Wangsa et al.⁽¹⁾ in Indonesia and Azhar et al.⁽²⁾ in Yogyakarta shows that digital marketing and sales promotion strategies can enhance eWOM and, in turn, improve purchasing decisions and customer satisfaction. Proper eWOM management can have a decisive influence on brand image and consumer behavior. In Peru, studies such as those by Guerrero et al.⁽³⁾ in Lima and Morillo et al.⁽⁴⁾ in Ancash corroborate the existence of a positive relationship between eWOM and purchasing decisions, with relevant implications for the optimization of strategies on social media and other digital platforms.

In the tourism sector, eWOM takes on special relevance, as the experiences and ratings shared by travelers on platforms such as social media, forums, and review sites have the ability to shape perceptions of destinations and services. Seijas et al.⁽⁵⁾ point out that factors such as credibility, quality of information, and trust associated with eWOM are significantly correlated with customer loyalty, reinforcing the need to manage it strategically.

In this scenario, understanding the role of eWOM and its dimensions is crucial for companies, especially in competitive markets such as tourism. Analyzing how the quantity, quality, and credibility of online reviews influence purchasing decisions will enable the design of more effective communication and marketing strategies aimed not only at attracting new customers but also at strengthening the loyalty of existing ones. This research is intended as a contribution to understanding and harnessing the potential of eWOM as a strategic tool in commercial management and the building of lasting relationships with consumers.

DEVELOPMENT

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In Indonesia, Wangsa et al.⁽¹⁾ examined how sales promotion influences digital word of mouth and purchasing decisions. The study was conducted in the city of Denpasar, using a sample of 143 people who responded to a questionnaire. The sample was selected using a non-probability sampling model, using the purposive sampling approach. The results revealed that sales promotion has a favorable and considerable impact on both purchasing decisions and digital word of mouth. Furthermore, it was found that digital word of mouth favorably affects purchasing decisions and can be an indicator of the impact of promotional strategies on such decisions. The results suggest that, to improve purchasing decisions, it is essential to conduct a detailed analysis of sales promotion strategies and digital word of mouth because strengthening the quality of the latter could maximize the effect of promotion on purchasing decisions.

In Yogyakarta, Azhar et al.⁽²⁾ analyzed the impact of digital marketing and electronic word of mouth on purchasing decisions and customer satisfaction. The research was conducted with a sample of 100 customers of the company Kappy Komputer. The results indicated that digital marketing favors both purchasing decisions and customer satisfaction. Electronic word of mouth, on the other hand, had a positive effect on purchasing decisions but not on customer satisfaction. Finally, it was found that a purchasing decision has a positive influence on customer satisfaction.

Organizations in Córdoba can benefit from eWOM to strengthen their image and positioning, as well as to increase consumer involvement in the online communication process. The methodology used was qualitative, employing interviews with business owners and online surveys of consumers between the ages of 18 and 65 in the same locality. Respondents were asked whether a negative online comment about a product or service would influence their purchasing decision, finding that 61 % would be willing to change their decision, 36 % would do so only in certain situations, and only 3 % would not change their position. These results underscore the significant impact of eWOM on companies' financial performance. It was concluded that the analysis and proper management of eWOM represent a key factor for companies, giving them an advantageous position in the market.

In Lima, Guerrero et al.⁽³⁾ investigated the existence of a positive relationship between engagement, eWOM, and purchasing decisions on social media for tourism agencies in Peru. They conducted a quantitative survey on a sample of 403 people. The results confirmed that all hypotheses were validated, showing a positive influence between the study variables. These results allow tourism agencies in Lima to better understand and optimize their social media marketing strategies.

In Ancash, Morillo et al.⁽⁴⁾ investigated the relationship between electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and the purchasing decisions of customers at Las Poncianas Hotel Club. The study, which was non-experimental, cross-sectional, and quantitative-descriptive-correlational in design, was carried out with a population of 600 customers, from which a sample of 169 participants was obtained through random probability sampling applying specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data collection was carried out using a 20-question questionnaire, whose reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.921. Based on the correlation analysis, using Spearman's Rho coefficient, a low, positive, and significant relationship ($p = 0.379$, $p = 0.000$) was identified between eWOM and purchasing decisions, suggesting that as eWOM strengthens, its influence on purchasing decisions could increase among hotel customers.

In a study conducted in Tarapoto.⁽⁶⁾ analyzed how WOM Marketing influences purchasing decisions at the company Sorsa Motors, using an applied, relational, non-experimental, and cross-sectional methodology. Two surveys were conducted on a sample of 132 customers. The key results showed a significant relationship between WOM marketing and purchasing decisions, with a bilateral significance of less than 0.05 (0.000). In addition, a relevant positive correlation was found, with a coefficient of 0.643. The main conclusion of the study revealed that Sorsa Motors customers' decisions regarding available brands are influenced by information shared on communication platforms through two aspects: a central channel, related to the quality of the information, and a peripheral channel, based on

the credibility of the source.

In Tarapoto, Seijas et al.⁽⁵⁾ sought to determine the relationship between electronic word of mouth and customer loyalty in a company in the tourism sector in Peru. To do this, they conducted a basic, quantitative, correlational, non-experimental, cross-sectional study using a sample of 384 tourists. They applied Spearman's rho coefficient to analyze categorical data. The data showed a positive and significant correlation between customer loyalty and several factors of electronic word of mouth: credibility ($\rho=0.722$), quality of information ($\rho=0.744$), trust ($\rho=0.727$), and perceived usefulness ($\rho=0.723$). It was concluded that electronic word of mouth is moderately associated with customer loyalty, suggesting that it is an effective tool for strengthening visitors' intention and loyalty to tourist destinations.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Foundations of the independent variable

Traditional word of mouth or WOM

Since the 1960s, several studies have focused their attention on exploring word of mouth or WOM. This phenomenon, which is highly relevant in the field of marketing, has undergone a conceptual evolution over time. An study⁽⁷⁾ describes word of mouth as a communicative exchange that takes place orally and personally, which is linked to a product. This definition includes two key aspects: first, the interpersonal nature of word of mouth, which requires the physical presence of the participants; and second, the need for the recipient of the message not to perceive the sender as part of a commercial entity.⁽⁸⁾

Later, the definition of WOM was expanded,⁽⁹⁾ suggesting that it involves not only the exchange of information about products and services, but also aspects related to the seller or the company. Considering that WOM is a type of interpersonal communication that occurs directly between people, the traditional components of a communication process can be identified: a sender, a receiver, and a message. This process can be initiated from either of two perspectives: the consumer (acting as the sender) shares information (such as a message) with another consumer (acting as the receiver), or the receiver seeks information from the former regarding a consumer experience.⁽¹⁰⁾

In this sense, traditional word of mouth is understood as the direct exchange of information, opinions, and recommendations between individuals in a face-to-face setting, such as family, friends, and colleagues, as opposed to electronic word of mouth. This method of communication, rooted in interpersonal trust, continues to be a strong influence on brand reputation and purchasing decisions, as people tend to value the experiences and recommendations of those they trust personally.

Electronic word-of-mouth or eWOM

The evolution of e-commerce and the increasing digitization of the market have led to unprecedented competition among companies seeking to stand out in an increasingly saturated environment. In this context, consumer communication methodologies have undergone significant transformations. One of the most notable aspects of this change is the growing importance of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), which has become a crucial factor influencing consumer behavior and attitudes.⁽¹¹⁾

According to Mar García et al.⁽¹²⁾, eWOM encompasses any form of comment related to a product or service that is easily

accessible and available to a wide audience on online platforms. The accessibility and rapid spread of these comments on the Internet allow many people to access shared experiences and opinions, thus influencing their purchasing choices.

In this context, eWOM can be understood as the dissemination of data, criticism, and suggestions about products, services, or experiences through digital platforms. This phenomenon allows users to share and access a variety of perspectives and testimonials about different brands and products. As a result, eWOM has gained increasing importance in the reputation of companies, as online interactions can reach wide audiences and have a lasting impact on the perception of a brand.

Types of eWOM

Two types of eWOM can be distinguished:⁽¹³⁾

- **Organic eWOM:** This refers to suggestions, ratings, and opinions about products or services that users post online genuinely and spontaneously, without direct intervention from the company or brand through strategies. This type of eWOM originates from consumers' personal experiences and spreads across various online platforms. Organic eWOM is considered valuable to companies because it comes from authentic sources and can significantly influence how the brand is perceived and the purchasing decisions of other consumers.

- **Amplified eWOM:** This involves various strategies, notably community marketing, which encourages the participation of users with similar interests in forums and groups, creating a space for positive interaction that strengthens brand identification. Marketing through opinion leaders, such as influencers on social media, who exert influence over consumers, is also used. In addition, social marketing, which rewards participation in social causes, and the use of blogs as a tool to encourage discussion and brand awareness. Finally, social media is essential, allowing users to share information and product experiences, generating a more credible perception than traditional advertising.

eWOM in the tourism sector

According to Seijas et al.⁽⁵⁾, eWOM in the tourism sector is a phenomenon that has experienced significant growth in the digital age. This term refers to the way in which users' experiences and opinions about tourism services are shared and disseminated through online platforms. In other words, eWOM in the tourism sector refers to the electronic communication of travelers' experiences, thereby influencing the decisions of other potential tourists.⁽¹⁴⁾

Currently, the active presence of users on social media, review sites, and specialized forums has greatly enhanced the impact of eWOM. Travelers share their experiences, suggestions, and opinions about hotels, destinations, restaurants, and tourist activities, creating a continuous flow of information that directly impacts the purchasing decisions of other consumers.⁽¹⁵⁾

For Reyes et al.⁽¹¹⁾, companies in the tourism sector have had to adjust to this new reality by actively managing their online presence and responding effectively to user opinions. Therefore, eWOM in the tourism sector is not only a reflection of individual travelers' experiences, but has also become a tool that shapes the collective perception of tourist destinations and services.

Dimensions of eWOM

There are three key factors of eWOM that have an influential impact on consumer attitudes and behaviors:^(16,17)

Quantity of eWOM

One of the fundamental factors affecting the effectiveness of eWOM is the amount of information generated, as it refers to the extent and frequency with which opinions, reviews, or comments about a product, service, or experience are shared online, with these recommendations and criticisms being possible factors influencing the purchase decision.

According to Mesarina,⁽¹⁸⁾ a high volume of recommendations and ratings can provide a more complete and representative view of the overall perception of a product, allowing consumers to access a wider range of opinions, which can be crucial for making informed decisions.

The amount of eWOM through comments and reviews from a large number of consumers can contribute to the visibility and awareness of a product or service online. The more positive comments are shared, the greater the likelihood that the brand will be perceived as trustworthy and high quality. This accumulation of testimonials can generate a social validation effect, positively influencing the purchasing decisions of other consumers.

Credibility of eWOM

Prastiwi et al.⁽¹⁹⁾ state that the credibility of eWOM is understood as the trust and reliability that consumers place in the online opinions, comments, and recommendations of other users about products or services. In a digital context, where information circulates rapidly through social media, forums, online reviews, and other platforms, the credibility of eWOM becomes a crucial factor in consumers' purchasing decisions.

Safitriani et al.⁽²⁰⁾ indicate that trust in eWOM is built through several elements. One of these is the authenticity of opinions and the perception that they come from genuine, unmanipulated sources, as consumers tend to trust experiences shared by other real users who have used a product or service, which leads them to verify that recommendations and ratings are credible, reliable, and honest.

Furthermore, for Le-Hoang,⁽²¹⁾ the credibility of eWOM is also linked to relevance and context. Opinions that are relevant to a consumer's individual needs and presented in a context that resonates with their specific situation are more likely to be considered credible.

Quality of eWOM

The quality of eWOM refers to the nature and value of the information shared. High-quality content implies that the information is current, understandable, relevant, and accurate. Therefore, in the context of eWOM, the quality of the comments or recommendations shared becomes an important factor, as it directly affects the perceived usefulness of online opinions.⁽²²⁾

When users find high-quality content in eWOM, they are more likely to trust the information provided and consider it valuable when making decisions. Quality translates into the ability of information to influence the perceptions and behaviors of recipients, whether when purchasing a product, choosing a service, or forming an opinion about a brand.⁽²³⁾

Furthermore, quality in eWOM is also linked to clarity, consistency, and accuracy in the expression of opinions. Information that is easy to understand, backed by tangible

experiences, and expressed in a compelling manner tends to stand out and be more influential in consumer decision-making.⁽²⁴⁾

Fundamentals of the dependent variable

Purchase decision

The purchase decision-making process involves a consumer evaluating and selecting a product or service to purchase. This selection has a significant impact on consumer satisfaction, as it determines which products effectively meet their needs and expectations. It is essential for organizations to understand the purchase decision because it allows them to develop more efficient marketing and sales tactics that stimulate demand, increase sales, and strengthen customer loyalty. Similarly, this choice can influence brand reputation and overall business performance, making it an essential aspect of development and longevity in a competitive market.⁽²⁵⁾

Factors influencing the purchase decision

The factors that affect the purchase decision can be varied and depend on both the context and the particularities of each consumer. Among the most frequent factors that can influence this decision are:^(26,27)

- Price: The cost of a product is a key factor in the purchase decision. Consumers tend to look for an appropriate relationship between the price and the benefits offered by the product.
- Quality: The perceived quality of a product has a decisive influence on the purchase decision. Consumers tend to prefer products that offer greater durability and performance.
- Brand: A brand's image and reputation can be decisive factors in the purchase decision. Consumers often feel more confident choosing products from well-known and trusted brands.
- Reviews and recommendations: The opinions of other consumers, as well as recommendations, play a key role in the purchasing decision. The experiences shared by other users are considered a factor of trust when evaluating products or services.
- Personal preferences: The particular needs and desires of each consumer are essential aspects of their purchasing decision. Products or services that best meet those needs and desires are more likely to be selected.
- Previous experience: Previous experiences with a brand or product also influence purchasing decisions.
- Social influence: The opinions and behaviors of family members, friends, and other social groups can significantly influence purchasing decisions. Consumers are often influenced by those around them.
- Accessibility and ease of purchase: Product availability and ease of purchase are also determining factors. Consumers tend to prefer products that are easy to find and buy.

From this perspective, it is recognized that purchasing decisions are determined by a number of interrelated factors that influence consumer preferences. Elements such as price, product quality, social influence, and convenience play a crucial role, acting together to shape purchasing decisions.

Consumer behavior models

It is important to be aware of some consumer behavior models that could influence purchasing decisions, as in the case of this project, which seeks to identify their relationship with eWOM. In this regard, based on the work of Cardona et al.⁽²⁷⁾, the following models are highlighted:

- Economic model: Focused on maximizing profits and minimizing costs, this model predicts purchasing decisions based on economic indicators such as purchasing power and product prices. Consumers choose products that offer the highest value at the lowest cost, and an increase in their purchasing power can lead to greater purchases.
- Psychoanalytic model: Recognizing the influence of the subconscious on consumer behavior, this model is based on Freud's principles of levels of consciousness (ID, ego, and superego). Hidden symbols in marketing can influence a person's subconscious mind and guide their purchasing decisions.
- Sociological model: Considering the role of the individual in society and how this affects their purchasing behavior, this model suggests that social relationships and culture influence purchasing decisions. Consumers may purchase similar products because of their association with specific social groups, regardless of their position in the social hierarchy.

Of the models presented, the psychoanalytic model could have a more direct relationship with eWOM. Although the other models could also have some relevance, the focus on the influence of the subconscious and hidden symbols suggests a closer connection with digital forms of communication and the influence of subconscious perceptions on consumer behavior.

In this sense, the psychoanalytic model suggests that eWOM could have a significant impact on consumer behavior by working at a subconscious level, making it important to understand how purchasing decisions are formed in today's digital environment.

Definition of basic terms

Tourism: Activity involving the movement of people from one place to another for recreational, cultural, leisure, or business purposes.^(28,29)

Influencers: People who have the ability to influence the opinions, behavior, and decisions of others through their online platforms, such as social media, blogs, or videos.⁽³⁰⁾

Customer experience: Refers to the overall impression a customer has of all their experiences with a company over time, including product quality, customer service, and other related factors.⁽³⁰⁾

Social media: An online platform that facilitates interaction and content sharing between users, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, among others.

Engagement: The degree of participation, interaction, and connection that a user has with a brand, product, or service, generally measured through metrics such as likes, comments, and shares on social media.⁽²³⁾

Online interaction: Communication and participation that occurs through electronic media and online platforms, including social media, chats, emails, among others.⁽²⁴⁾

Testimonials: Written or spoken statements or comments that express a customer's experience and satisfaction with a

particular product or service.⁽²⁴⁾

Customer loyalty: Actions and strategies focused on retaining current customers, promoting repeat purchases, and developing lasting relationships.

Exclusivity: The state of being unique or limited to a select group, which can apply to products, services, or experiences that are not readily available to the general public.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis carried out shows that electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has become a key element in marketing strategies and consumer behavior dynamics, particularly in an environment marked by digitalization and globalization. Unlike traditional word of mouth, eWOM amplifies the reach of communication between consumers by spreading through digital media, allowing opinions, experiences, and ratings to influence mass audiences quickly and continuously.

The studies reviewed, both internationally and nationally, agree that eWOM has a positive and significant impact on purchasing decisions. Research such as that conducted by Wangsa and Azhar shows that factors such as sales promotion and digital marketing not only enhance eWOM, but also strengthen customer satisfaction and loyalty. In the case of Latin America, Lancioni shows that proper management of this tool contributes to improving brand image and increasing consumer participation in digital environments, while studies in the Peruvian context, such as those by Guerrero, Morillo and Seijas, reinforce the existence of positive relationships between eWOM, engagement, loyalty, and purchasing decisions.

Likewise, the theoretical review highlights that the dimensions of eWOM—quantity, quality, and credibility—are decisive for its effectiveness. A high number of comments can increase a brand's visibility and social validation, credibility ensures that opinions are perceived as authentic and reliable, and the quality of information improves the perceived usefulness for consumers when making decisions. When properly managed, these elements increase the power of eWOM to influence purchasing behavior.

In the tourism sector, eWOM takes on additional strategic value, as travel decisions often depend heavily on the experiences shared by other users. The credibility, perceived usefulness, and quality of reviews on specialized platforms not only shape perceptions of destinations but also strengthen customer loyalty, underscoring the need for tourism companies to maintain an active presence and proactively manage their online reputation.

In short, eWOM represents a powerful marketing and loyalty tool in today's digital environment. Proper management involves encouraging the generation of authentic content, ensuring the quality and relevance of information, and building consumer trust. This will enable companies not only to attract new customers, but also to sustain long-lasting and competitive relationships in increasingly demanding markets.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado,

Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Data curation: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Formal analysis: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Research: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Methodology: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Project management: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Resources: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Software: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Supervision: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Validation: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Visualization: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Writing – original draft: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

Writing – review and editing: Jorge Augusto Meléndez Alvarado, Katty Alamo Larrañaga, Rony Flores Ramírez.

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