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Corporate Social Media: A Typology of Consumers

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Corporate Social Media: A Typology of Consumers

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CORPORATE SOCIAL MEDIA: A TYPOLOGY OF CONSUMERS

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Introduction

The trade and academic literature is replete with commentary about the need for companies to develop promotional strategies and to adopt media platforms that are more engaging and conversational with customers than traditional top-down company directed one-way communication strategies of the past (Thomas et al., 2012; Foster, West and Francescucci, 2011; Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009). This viewpoint is supported by Christodoulides (2007) who found that many customers view information about a company or brand that they obtain from blogs, social networking sites and the like as being more relevant, believable and important to them in their interactions with the company than similar company provided information.

Social media savvy customers are by all counts a highly diverse lot and reaching them effectively requires the use of different messages for different groups (Heo and Cho, 2009; Stern, Rao and Gould, 1990). For example, some social media users follow a wide variety of posts and enjoy the benefits of special offers while others have mixed feelings about being marketed to on social media websites. Interestingly, this new brand of customer also expects businesses to really know them, their life cycles, their personalities and the goods and services that they desire (Beauchamp, 2013).

Changes in customer perceptions and expectations have also forced companies to shift resources from offline to online strategies with their corresponding social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, texts, email and Yelp (among others) and utilize customer analytics

in order to measure impact (Pate and Adams, 2013). The shift from company-to-customer communication to a customer-to-company paradigm has also resulted in changes in the importance that businesses place on engaging customers effectively in order to ensure customer satisfaction (Challagalla, Venkatesh and Kohli, 2009), loyalty (Dick and Basu, 1994), increase sales (Neff, 2007) and to meet profit expectations (Xevelonakis and Som, 2012; Voyles, 2007). Many companies have found it difficult to implement these changes effectively and are now being forced to retain even marginal customers (Doorn et al., 2010).

Consequently, social media outlets have earned a respected place as a part of many companies' strategic marketing elements (Adegoke, 2004). Companies have also become more reliant on their internal metadata and web analytics to learn more about their customers (Phippen, 2004). Research in this area also suggests that efforts to include social media as a means of enhancing marketing effectiveness are paying off (Jackson, 2009). In spite of this progress many businesses do not know which customer segments are more likely to follow Corporate Social Media (CSM) outlets, which consumer segments are more likely to make purchases as a direct result of CSM, and which consumer segments tend to 'like' a company's Facebook page, follow a brand's Twitter or Instagram page, or sign up for text messages from a retailer (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

This study attempts to remedy a portion of this need by helping readers develop a better understanding of corporate social media users, their motivations and profiles by providing a market segmentation schema that helps answer these important questions. To accomplish the stated objectives this study begins with a review of the historic theoretical foundations of consumer engagement and its importance. The authors then provide a review of the corporate social media and customer segmentation literature. Research objectives, methodology and study results are then provided. This study extends research in this area by providing a market segmentation schema that can be utilized by managers at the firm level and extends the customer segmentation literature as it applies to the use of social media.

Literature Review

Theoretical Progression

Researchers from around the world have historically employed a variety of theories in order to better understand customers' purchase intentions. In recent times these theories have been adapted in order to help explain the impacts of the internet and social media usage as they relate to consumers' purchase intentions. Given this theoretical evolution it is necessary to provide readers with a historic theoretical progression so that they may better understand the foundation upon which this study is based.

This historical progression begins with Consumer Socialization Theory which suggests that communication among consumers affects their cognitive, affective and behavioral attitudes (Ward, 1974). Fishbein and Ajzen (1977) and Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) drew on this research in order to establish the basis for the theory of reasoned action (TRA) which established the relationship between attitude, intention and behavior. Later Venkatesh et al. (2003) adapted and extended TRA thereby providing the basis for their Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). The TAM established the relationship between behavior intention, performance expectations, pay expectations and social influence in an online setting. Shortly thereafter, Chen and Dubinsky (2003) added to this body of research with the consumer perceived value model (CPVM) which looked at perceived customer value in a business-to-consumer setting. This

study found that the factors impacting perceived customer value include the valence of the on-line shopping experience, perceived product quality, perceived risk and product price.

Each of these theories is ultimately linked to the concept of customer engagement (CE). Customer engagement refers to the depth of the relationship that customers have with one another or with a company or a brand. The basis for this engagement can be either consumer or company led and the medium of engagement can be either online or offline. At its core the purpose of CE is to develop long-term relationships and customer loyalty and advocacy through face-to-face or online word-of-mouth communication (Rohm, Kaltcheva and Milne, 2013; Brodie et al. 2011). Given the competitiveness of the modern day marketplace, companies are devoting an increasing amount of their resources to engage with their customers more effectively in the customers' preferred online environment (Vinerean et al., 2013).

Corporate Social Media

The link between customer engagement and corporate social media programs stems from a concept commonly referred to as *Groundswell*. The premise of groundswell is that people use online social media platforms to get information they need from one another instead of from the target company. This concept is based on the belief that information flows from many-to-many are more relevant and trustworthy than traditional one-to-many company-to-customer flows (Tariq and Wahid, 2011). Groundswell also enables consumers to connect with one another and to influence the collective perception of a company and its offerings. As a result, social media savvy consumers typically change their purchasing habits more quickly than offline shoppers (Li and Bernoff, 2011).

It must also be noted that each person's motivation and intention for using social media can be very different. In some instances, individuals may be seeking to gain popularity or recognition for their talent or work. Others may view the depth and breadth of information that is available as a means of making connections, which they deem to be commercially advantageous. Still others may view social media as a means of furthering an altruistic goal or a socially beneficial program. These individuals typically have multiple intentions or motivations at different points of time which will cause them to act in an inconsistent manner as the situation varies. Still other customers use social media as a means of gathering information in order to reduce the risk of making a bad purchase decision (Wang, 2012). These varying consumer motivations have in turn forced companies to be more vigilant in their segmentation efforts so that their advertising spend is not wasted (Tariq and Wahid, 2011).

Segmentation

Segmentation is a highly effective and valuable tool that businesses routinely employ to help them better understand how heterogeneous consumers interact with and behaviorally respond to corporate social media marketing. Segmentation is therefore considered to be a fundamental component of any effective marketing program as it provides the basis for more precise targeting and ultimately increases customer value and engagement (Wedel and Kamakura, 2002; Kotler et al., 1996).

Studies on corporate social media user segments include, but are not limited to those which address media usage in a multi-media environment (Heo and Cho, 2009), online product search and purchase behavior of generation Y (Valentine and Powers, 2013), online impulse buying behavior (Flight and Scherle, 2013), and online fashion shopping (Sung and Jeon, 2009). Other relevant studies include: general online shopping behaviors (Bhatnagar and Ghose, 2004a), perceived risk of online shopping (Bhatnagar and Ghose, 2004b) and online shopping behaviors and online word-of-mouth (Aljukhadar and Senecal, 2011).

This growing body of literature demonstrates the importance of understanding the characteristics of corporate social media user segments. While each of these studies furthers our understanding of online corporate social media users none of them adequately addresses the profiles of the corporate social media users and their corporate interaction with this medium which provides the basis for this study. The following section addresses this issue and details the research objectives of this study.

Research Objectives

This study responds to the need for a better understanding of corporate social media users. The existing literature base in this area is comparatively light when compared to other fields indicating its relative newness and the need for additional research. Consequently, the primary research objective of this study is to explore whether consumer segments exist, and if so, which segments are more receptive to corporate social media marketing and will ultimately purchase the product or service in question. The secondary research objective is to profile the resulting consumer segments based on their demographics and market potential. Despite conflicting evidence of the discriminating ability of demographics in profiling online consumers, we include demographics to investigate the value of segmenting customers as is commonly done in offline customer marketing (Bhatnagar and Ghose, 2004a).

To accomplish our stated research objectives, we examine the following actions by outlet for each respondent's favorite restaurant: 1) Liking their Facebook page, 2) Following their Twitter feed, 3) Following the restaurant's Instagram, and 4) Signing up for the restaurant's text message alerts. Respondents were also asked to share an estimate of the number of businesses they follow through social media and their likelihood to purchase products as a direct result of corporate social media. The following section will be devoted to a discussion of survey development and the sampling method used to develop the suggested segmentation method.

Method

Survey Development

In order to accomplish this study's stated objectives, a set of 4 focus groups was conducted among interested community members, faculty, staff and students by the lead author who is also a certified market researcher. Food and beverages were provided as incentives for participation. The focus groups were scheduled for 90 minutes but generally lasted longer as participants were fully engaged in the matter and chose to stay longer.

The primary objectives for the focus groups were to: 1) explore feelings about social media in general, such as the participants' perceptions of the meaning of social media and participants' terminology, how social media works for them, and the extent and manner that social media fits into their lives; 2) understand the role that corporate tweets, posts, etc. play in their complete social media activities and mindset, as well as their purchase decisions and following of CSM; 3) gain a better understanding for possible characteristics, factors, activities, behaviors, etc. that might motivate consumers to follow a company's social media activity; and most concretely, 4) develop a meaningful questionnaire with applicable questions to better understand Corporate Social Media following motivations, and factors that influence consumers to purchase products as a direct result of CSM posts.

The results derived from the focus groups led to the development of the survey instrument which was reviewed by each of the authors and revised in an iterative process until consensus was reached. At this point the survey instrument was reviewed by a group of undergraduate and graduate college students who evaluated the items for clarity and intent. Each of the students

indicated that no further revisions were required. The survey instrument was then entered into Qualtrics, an online data collection software, and the link was sent to faculty, staff, and both undergraduate and graduate students at four southern universities, one mid-western university and one northeastern university.

Survey Results

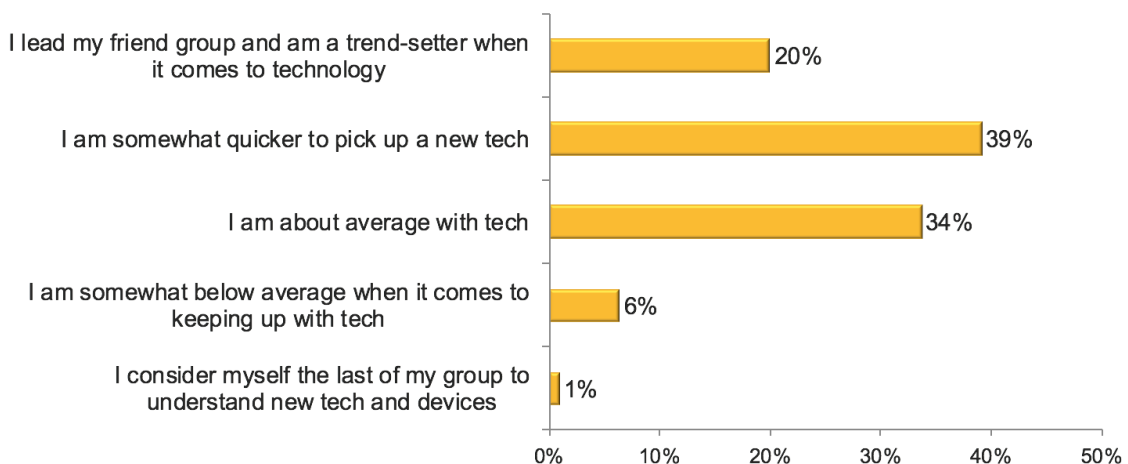
The survey was administered to 230 potential respondents and yielded 177 usable responses (77% response rate). The data was then analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics for descriptive statistics, and then SAS Enterprise Guide to develop the segments. The demographics of the respondents are shown as follows (See Table 1):

Table 1: Demographic Characteristic

Demographic Characteristic	Results
Gender	Males = 33% Females = 67%
Education Level	High School = 4% Some College = 59% Bachelor's Degree = 28% Master's or Post-Masters = 9%
Age	18 – 24 = 50% 25 – 39 = 34% 40+ = 16%

Respondents were also asked to describe their level of technological expertise using a scale adapted from Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis 1986). About seven percent of respondents stated their expertise level is considered lower than average for adapting to new technology, while 20% characterize themselves as experts in technology (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Technological Expertise Level



Consumer Segmentation Schema

To develop the consumer segmentation schema, the authors analyzed the data in order to develop a better understanding of consumers' likelihood to: a) follow corporate social media outlets, and b) make purchase decisions as a direct result of CSM are used as the determining factors for development of the cluster solution. Diagnostics from a centroid cluster analysis suggested that a five-cluster solution provides a good model for classification of the full consumer response set.

Next, a k-means cluster analysis was conducted using responses from the following two questions: 1) "How likely are you to try a product as a direct result of social media (large following, friends liked it, etc.?)?" and 2) "About how many businesses do you personally (not for work purposes) follow, or have 'liked', etc. through a social media outlet of any kind?" Both questions were asked using a 5-point Likert type scale with lower values indicating less likelihood and fewer businesses followed. Results from the k-means five-cluster solution include an approximate expected overall R-squared value of 0.812, and a pseudo F-statistic of 122.64, which are both well within the standards for a high quality cluster model (Albright and Winston 2014). The resulting segments with sample proportion, means, and standard deviations for each cluster are as follows (See Table 2):

Table 2: Cluster Segments

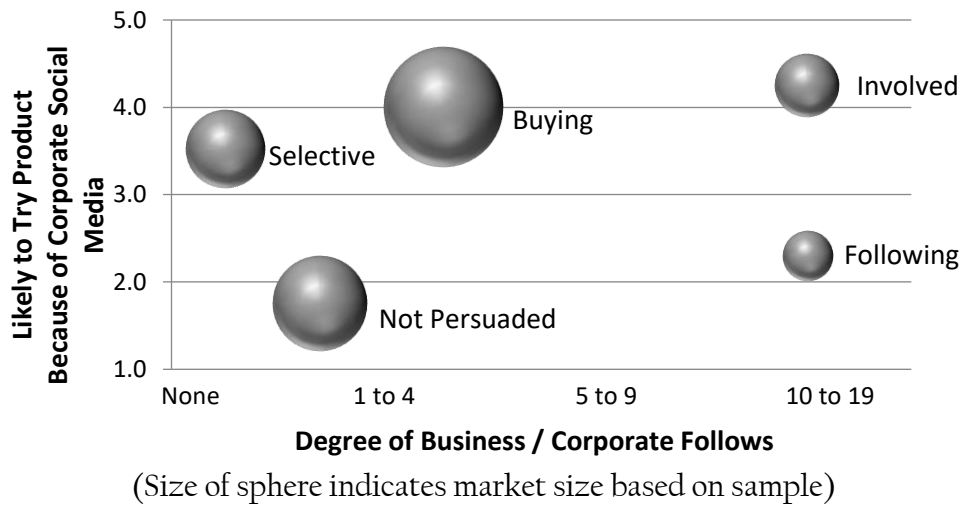
Clusters	Sample Proportion	Number of Businesses Followed*	Likely to Try Because of Corporate Social Media (CSM)**
1 – Selective	17%	1.29	3.52
2 – Following	7%	4.44	2.30
3 – Buying	40%	4.00	2.47
4 – Not Persuaded	25%	1.81	1.75
5 – Involved	11%	4.44	4.25

*Scale for 'Number of Businesses Followed' is 1 = none, 2 = 1 to 4, 3 = 5 to 9, 4 = 10 to 19, and 5 = 20+ businesses followed

**Scale for 'Likely to Try Because of CSM' is 1 = very unlikely to 5 = very likely

The resulting segments with descriptions are as follows:

Figure 2: Corporate Social Media Consumer Clusters



The “Following” segment has less than average likelihood to try products and services because of social media, and greater than average number of businesses they follow. These consumers are most likely following businesses for reasons such as staying informed, watching prices, or keeping up with trends. The “Involved” segment scores greater than average on both factors (more likely to try products and services because of social media, and a greater number of businesses followed). They are present in both breadth (social media monitoring by following large numbers of businesses), and depth (intended purchases as a result of social media posts). The “Not Persuaded” segment is much less likely to try products and services because of social media, and follow fewer businesses than average. The “Selective” segment has a moderately strong likelihood to try products and services because of social media, and consumers within the segment follow only a few chosen businesses. Consumers from the “Buying” consumer group are more heavily influenced by social media, and they follow about the average number of businesses compared to other segments.

Once individual responses were scored with the applicable segment scores, the differences across segment groups were analyzed using ANOVA with a Tukey post-hoc procedure in order to develop richer descriptions for each segment. A summary of the statistically significant results using 90% confidence are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Cluster Segment Characteristics

Segment	Characteristics	Interpretation of Cluster Group
1 – Selective	<p>Moderately Influenced by Corporate Social Media - Follows Least Number of Businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not especially influenced by sources outside of themselves (compared to other segments) • Level of technical expertise is slightly lower than average • Gender split is about as expected • Somewhat older consumers • Least concerned about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Unappealing content – Misuse of contact information – Lack of privacy • Academic lives are strongly impacted by social media • 17% of the sample population 	<p><i>Entering into this group's circle of cherry-picked businesses to follow is a rare luxury, but may pay off as they tend to make purchases as a direct result of following business' social media.</i></p> <p><i>Accessing these consumers may involve getting to know them in-store, starting by brick-and-mortar then moving to a more digital relationship</i></p>
2 – Following	<p>Not Purchasing due to Corporate Social Media - Follows High Number of Businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly influenced in purchased decisions by number of likes and followers (compared to other segments) • Level of technical expertise is about average • Age is about average • More male dominated group • Consumer lives are least impacted by social media • Most discouraged than average by a lack of trust • 7% of the sample population 	<p><i>“Following” consumers tend to lurk, observe, and for reasons other than consumer-related, monitor corporate social media from afar.</i></p> <p><i>Engage with these consumers by first earning their trust through showcasing number of likes and other followers to encourage comfort with their sites, and also make sure they know that your sites are secure, then deliver compelling, relevant offers to start consumer-related conversations that transform them from observers to active participants.</i></p>

<p>3 – Buying</p>	<p>Heavily Influenced by Corporate Social Media - Follows About Average Number of Businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns / discouraging factors are about on par with other segments • Level of technical expertise is about average • Less influenced (compared to other segments) in purchased decisions by number of follows and likes; • Strongly influenced by in-person word of mouth • About average age group • Somewhat more female dominated group • May have greater proportion of students since academic lives are strongly impacted by social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40% of the sample population 	<p><i>These consumers are buying online and not especially concerned more than other segments about the factors that drive consumers away from corporate social media.</i></p> <p><i>Use the academic angle and excellent content to appeal to this group, and once on their somewhat selective list, these consumers will purchase.</i></p>
<p>4 – Not Persuaded</p>	<p>Least Influenced by Corporate Social Media - Follows Fewer Number of Businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somewhat more discouraged than average by: Type of business • Level of technical expertise is slightly lower than average • Least discouraged by: Small print / obligations as a result of registration, possibly due to small number of business follows • Gender split is about as expected • Oldest group • Professional and academic lives are least impacted by social media • Least influenced (compared to other segments) in purchased decisions by television commercials, and in-person word of mouth 	<p><i>These skeptical, somewhat stubborn consumers are unimpressed and not impacted greatly by corporate or other forms of social media, and they do not appear to allow other forms of advertising to sway their opinions.</i></p> <p><i>Before this group becomes accessible, multiple businesses would need to prove the value of social media and business communication, specifically as it applies to their specific needs.</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% of the sample population 	
5 – Involved	<p>Most Influenced by Corporate Social Media - Follows Most Number of Businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most discouraged by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Unappealing content – Fear of unwanted communication – Small print / obligations as a result of registration • Highest level of technical expertise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youngest group • Gender split is about as expected <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal lives are most impacted by social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchased decisions strongly influenced by television commercials • 11% of the sample population 	<p><i>These consumers are young, connected, and listening to businesses. They are no strangers to social media and their experiences as technically savvy consumers may have stemmed their concerns over small print.</i></p> <p><i>The use of eye-catching and entertaining content that is useful could serve as critical strategies to get through to this leader group.</i></p>

Benefits of the Segmentation System

The concept, process and need for segmenting markets effectively is well established in both the trade and academic literature. However, as companies begin shifting their marketing platforms from top down company-to-customer to bottom up customer-to-company or customer-to-customer the means by which companies segment their markets must also change. As such, this study provides an important step in helping companies achieve the means necessary to better adapt to these changes.

The segments outlined herein aid in the identification of the five generic types of consumers that characterize the nebulous world of social media. Specifically, this taxonomy provides:

- 1) A mechanism for developing an effective means of customer segmentation. Businesses can use this generic process using internal data to identify which customer segments are applicable to their businesses.
- 2) Better estimate market sizing. This taxonomy will help businesses better estimate the proportion of their consumers that fit into each category and allocate resources accordingly.
- 3) Determine the right consumer segment/s for targeting. This schema enables businesses to determine which market segment or segments are best aligned with their overall corporate strategy.

4) Better understand what each segment looks like from a demographic standpoint in order to gain more information about segment members' lifestyle and perceptions. By understanding segment members' circumstances, lifestyle, etc. businesses are better able to develop messages that will appeal to each individual segment.

5) Understand how to move the consumer segments toward the top right portion of the map i.e. towards Involved & Following consumer segments in order to increase customer retention, profitability and to generate positive customer based word of mouth communication.

6) Formulate a social media strategy that will a) identify and communicate with social media influencers and b) portray the business in a positive manner in order to build a strong brand image.

Managerial Implications

This study's results have important managerial implications because they are illustrative of how social media is used by real people in the real world. In this regard social media serves as the intersection of people's personal, professional, social, and creative lives and their use thereof runs the gamut. In the online world of social media personal proclivities reign supreme. The user is in control and their preferred behavioral norms set the ground rules for interaction. Users' friends, family, and fellow enthusiasts are familiar with these behavioral norms and respond accordingly. As a polite outsider businesses are largely unfamiliar with these established norms and are at a relative disadvantage when attempting to communicate in this manner.

As a result, businesses must become creative in order to develop an understanding of these behavioral norms and the positioning strategies necessary to facilitate entry on consumer feeds, boards, and walls. From a marketing perspective the customer segments identified in this study represent two different types of challenges: 1) how to capture the user as an audience member and 2) how to translate engagement into sway for purchase decisions.

If businesses view the segments as two sides of the same coin where they would want them in their community and buying, then this analysis will be key to look at what is standing in the way of one or both of these things. Moreover, businesses must become clear on the strategies necessary to tip the balance in their favor and energize their base. For example, this segmentation schema will help businesses identify customers that are actively engaged and buying as Brand Ambassadors for those that are engaged but hesitant to buy. Further, this schema will also help businesses identify white spaces (e.g., individuals that are not engaged and hesitant to buy) so that they can begin the process of moving these potentials to followers and ultimately buyers.

Study Limitations, Future Research, Conclusions

This study like all others is not without its limitations. The foremost of these limitations is that the sample population does not mirror the population of the United States as a whole. The authors specifically note that the majority of respondents were females under the age of 24. Consequently, the study results may not be generalizable beyond the sample population. However, it must be noted that this limitation in no way negates the contributions made by this study because females under the age of 24 are among the heaviest users of social media and are there predominant members of the buying group. The second limitation identified in this study arose from the fact that ethnic information was not collected.

Hence, additional research will have to be conducted to see if the proposed segmentation schema holds across ethnic groups and in a cross cultural setting as called for by Levens (2013). Additional research also needs to be done so that companies have a better understanding of how to demonstrate to social media users that they are acting in a socially acceptable manner in order to limit the consumer backlash when things go wrong. A third and equally important stream of research would investigate how businesses should respond to negative online feedback in order to build a better rapport with their customers.

This study contributes to both the field and practice by demonstrating that it is possible to segment social media users in a meaningful manner using information that many businesses currently have available to them. Study findings also find support for the continued use of a historic theoretical progression in order to adapt theory to present day phenomena.

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