Influence of Online Review Attributes on Customers' Choice of Restaurants

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Abstract

Digital technology has transformed customer behavior, particularly in the hospitality sector, with online reviews significantly influencing restaurant choices. However, there remains a lack of empirical evidence on how online reviews influence customer choice of restaurants in Nepal. Therefore, drawing on the information adoption model, this study aims to examine the attributes of online reviews influencing customers' choice of restaurants in Pokhara, Nepal. Using a cross-sectional descriptive design, data were collected from 209 respondents via convenience and snowball sampling. The multiple regression analysis demonstrated three online review attributes (descriptiveness of reviews ($\beta = 0.252$, $p < 0.05$), service quality ($\beta = 0.202$, $p < 0.10$), and ambience of the restaurant ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.05$) influencing customers' choice of restaurants. However, online review attributes such as overall ratings, number of reviews price, and food and beverage image had no significant effect on customers' choice. These findings suggest that when choosing restaurants, customers place greater emphasis on qualitative aspects like review content, service experience, and dining atmosphere.

Keywords: online review, customer decision-making, restaurant choice, information adoption model

Introduction

The increasing accessibility of the internet and social media has significantly transformed hospitality and restaurant industry (Gomez-Suarez & Veloso, 2024). This transformation has given rise to the increasing use of online reviews as a form of electronic word- of-mouth, which has become an important tool for customers to make

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informed decisions (Ngo et al., 2024). In particular, the hospitality and restaurant industry has undergone a significant shift as customers increasingly rely on digital platforms to make informed choices about where to dine (Gopal et al., 2024). These reviews, often posted on platforms such as Google, Yelp, and TripAdvisor, provide both positive and negative feedback that significantly shapes the reputation of dining establishments (Pocchiari et al., 2024). As a result, the effect of online reviews on customers' choice of restaurants has become a topic of growing interest for researchers, marketing specialists, and restaurant owners (Bao & Zhu, 2025).

The significance of online reviews in shaping customer decisions is emphasized by the widespread prevalence of user-generated content and the growing departure from conventional marketing approaches (Pocchiari et al., 2024). Studies indicate that customers increasingly rely on shared experiences and peer recommendations rather than conventional advertising. For instance, research by Bigne et al. (2020) highlights that online reviews play a crucial role in customer decision-making, reflecting a paradigm shift in how individuals evaluate dining options. This trend is further supported by findings that approximately 65% of customers consult online reviews when selecting local eateries, with 78% trusting these reviews as much as personal recommendations from friends or family (Mafe et al., 2020). The influence of online reviews extends beyond mere ratings; the quality, valence, and emotional tone of reviews significantly affect customer perceptions and intentions. Positive reviews have been shown to enhance visiting intentions and improve attitudes toward restaurants, while negative reviews can detrimentally impact customer choices (Abdullah et al., 2023). Additionally, the rise of online platforms has also transformed the way customers engage with reviews (Watson & Wu, 2022). This active engagement enhances the perceived reliability of the information presented, as customers place greater weight on reviews that include specific details about menu offerings, ambience, and service quality (Abdullah et al., 2023). Similarly, effective reputation management strategies such as monitoring review platforms, responding to feedback, and proactively engaging with customers, have become essential for cultivating a positive image and influencing customer preferences (Aureliano-Silva et al., 2021). The competitive nature of the restaurant industry further accentuates the need for businesses to manage the multifaceted landscape of customer perceptions.

Numerous studies in Nepal have extensively examined various dimensions of customer behavior, including the impact of online reviews on purchase intentions (Sharma et al., 2024), factors influencing brand choice behavior in laptop purchases among university students (Rai & Budhathoki, 2023), perceptions of online shopping (Devkota et al., 2021), behavioral intentions toward online food delivery (Pokhrel & Shah, 2022),

impact of online customer reviews on purchase intentions of cosmetic products from e-commerce platforms (Pudasaini & Dangol, 2024), and the impact of social media marketing on customer behavior (Shrestha et al., 2023). However, very few studies have examined the effect of online reviews on customer's choice of restaurants. For instance, Shah et al. (2023) revealed a strong correlation between positive social media feedback and customer decisions, underscoring the importance of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in enhancing a restaurant's appeal. Likewise, Sharma and Pokharel (2024) highlighted that the online restaurant evaluations significantly influence customer behavior, with the quantity, quality, and recency of reviews being key determinants of dining choices. Despite having some studies, there remains a significant gap in understanding the effect of online reviews on customers' choice of restaurants, particularly in Nepal. In this context, this study aims to examine the influence of online reviews on customers' choice of restaurants in Pokhara, Nepal, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how online reviews influence customers' choice of restaurants and dining preferences in a developing country context.

Information Adoption Model (IAM)

Developed by Sussman and Siegal (2003), the IAM identifies key factors such as information quality, source credibility, and perceived usefulness as critical determinants of an individual's intention to adopt information. The IAM is closely aligned with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo,1986) which elucidates how both the credibility of information sources and the appeal of content influence user adoption behaviors. For instance, Shen et al. (2015) explored the integration of social factors into the IAM, particularly how herd behavior dynamics affect customers' adoption of information. The results highlighted that users often emulate the information-seeking behaviors of their peers, underscoring the significance of social influence in online review adoption. Similarly, Sun et al. (2019) extended the IAM by examining the effects of individual characteristics and information types, revealing how context and information diversity shape adoption behaviors, particularly within social Q&A platforms. Accordingly, the research framework of this study is based on IAM to examine the relationships between overall rating, number of reviews, descriptiveness of review, price of food items, taste and beverage image, service quality, ambience of restaurant, and customer's choice of restaurants.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model
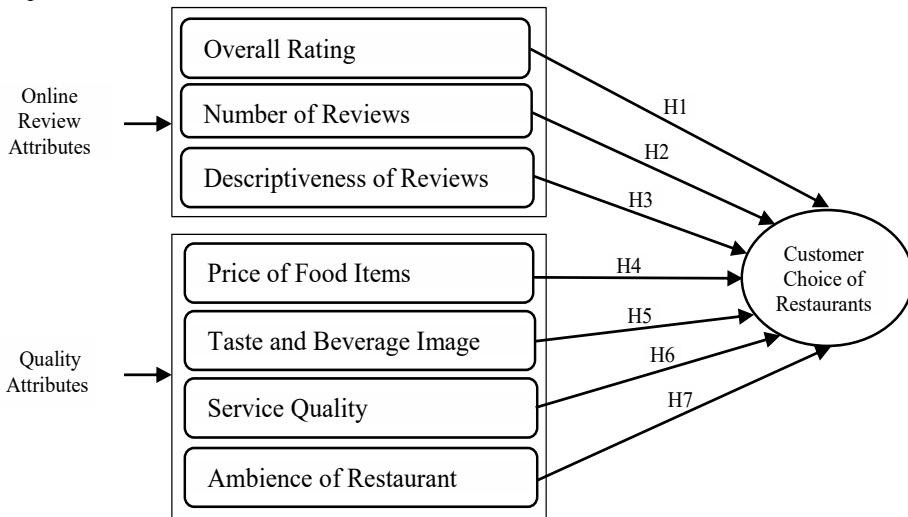
Hypothesis Development

Overall Rating and Choice of Restaurant. The extant empirical literature has demonstrated that online review attributes such as overall rating, number of reviews, descriptiveness of review, price of food items, taste and beverage image, service quality, and ambience of restaurant play a significant role in shaping customer decision-making, particularly in the context of choice of restaurant. Abdullah et al. (2023) revealed that while review sentiment is influential, the quantifiable aspects of overall ratings generally hold more significance in driving profitability for restaurants. Similarly, Aureliano-Silva et al. (2021) found that positive online ratings are directly linked to increased intentions to visit restaurants, underlining the importance of perceived quality derived from overall ratings. Additionally, Shambour et al. (2022) highlighted how reviews and ratings shared by previous diners inform potential customers in their decision-making process. Based on the empirical evidences, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: *Overall rating positively influences customer's choice of restaurants.*

Number of Reviews and Choice of Restaurant. The influence of a number of reviews has also been a well-established phenomenon in the empirical context of consumer decision-making in the choice of restaurants. For instance, Azman and Majid (2023) demonstrated that positive word-of-mouth is correlated with increased customer spending, emphasizing that familiar restaurants are more likely to attract repeat customers due to positive associations generated through reviews. Furthermore, Patil et

al. (2023) indicated that customer reviews significantly differentiate one restaurant from another, enhancing their attractiveness to new customers when positively perceived. Based on these discussions, this study hypothesizes the following:

H2: *Number of reviews positively influences customer's choice of restaurants.*

Descriptiveness of Reviews and Choice of Restaurant. Numerous studies have demonstrated a strong positive relationship between the descriptiveness of reviews and customers' choice of restaurants, highlighting that customers increasingly rely on detailed and informative reviews when making dining decisions. For instance, Azman and Majid (2023) revealed that customers are not only attracted to well-prepared food but also to how these aspects are effectively communicated through descriptive reviews. User-generated content and detailed reviews (Patil et al., 2023) composed with high readability and professional language not only differentiate restaurants but also enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty and their overall perception of dining decisions. Likewise, elucidated that. Furthermore, Zhao et al. (2023) emphasized that the quality of online reviews is crucial for customer perceptions and choices, positing that thoroughness and relevance are significant factors, as customers seek comprehensive insights that can affirm their dining choices. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: *Descriptiveness of review positively influences customer's choice of restaurants.*

Food Price and Choice of Restaurant. Several studies have revealed a positive relationship between price of food items and customers' choice of restaurants. For instance, Noble et al. (2022) highlighted that menu prices significantly influence customers' restaurant choices, particularly among low- income consumers. Moreover, Tumati et al. (2023) contributed to this discourse by noting that factors such as price and promotion are integral to understanding customer selection within restaurant settings, indicating that aspects like food quality, price, and customer service are essential considerations among diners. With these premises, the study proposed:

H4: *Price of food items positively affects customer's choice of restaurants.*

Taste and Beverage Image and Choice of Restaurant. Azman and Majid (2023) emphasize that customers are more inclined to select restaurants that offer fresh, high-quality food with appealing tastes. Similarly, Premordia and Gal (2023) highlighted that customers searching for ethnic dining prioritize authenticity in taste and beverage offerings. Furthermore, the preference for restaurant menus that align with certain styles, such as wine lists organized by taste rather than origin, further illustrates how consumer choices can be subtly influenced by the presentation of flavors and beverages (Staub & Siegrist, 2022). Accordingly, following hypothesis is formulated:

H5: *Taste and beverage image positively impacts customer's choice of restaurants.*

Service Quality and Choice of Restaurant. Interpersonal dimensions of service are as critical as the tangible elements in shaping customer experiences. Friendly and attentive staff behavior directly enhances customers' perceptions of service quality (Azman & Majid, 2023). Similarly, Clemes et al. (2018) emphasize that service quality significantly impacts customer satisfaction, suggesting that diners often value the experiential elements of dining, such as the quality of service, as much as the tangible aspects like food. Based on these premises, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: *Service quality positively affects customer's choice of restaurants.*

Ambience and Choice of Restaurant. According to Kement et al. (2021), a well-curated ambience can make customers more inclined to pay premium prices for dining experiences, illustrating a direct link between the perceived quality of the physical environment and consumer spending behavior. Cheng et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of ambience as a critical factor in determining customer choice within the diverse restaurant industry, correlating impactful atmospherics with improved dining experiences. Azman and Majid (2023) found ambience as the primary characteristic customers consider when deciding where to eat, highlighting the direct connection between a pleasing atmosphere and customer return rates. Accordingly, this study assumes the following hypothesis:

H7: *Ambience of restaurant positively influence customer's choice of restaurants.*

Methods

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design to investigate the determinants of online review attributes on consumers' choice of restaurants in Pokhara, Nepal. The target population comprises individuals aged 18 and above who have visited restaurants in Pokhara, influenced by online reviews. Respondents were selected from various locations within the Pokhara Valley, with a specific focus on individuals who rely on online reviews for restaurant selection. Pokhara was chosen as the study site due to its emergence as a major tourist hub, accompanied by a significant expansion of the restaurant industry to meet growing demand. The study employed convenience and snowball sampling techniques to recruit participants. The convenience sampling technique was chosen due to the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame of the target population, making it challenging to identify all potential participants. This method is both cost-efficient and time-saving, as it allows data collection from readily available individuals. The sample size for the survey was 209 respondents, encompassing a diverse range of restaurant types, including fine

dining establishments, fast-food outlets, and cafes. Respondents were initially selected based on accessibility and were then encouraged to forward the questionnaire to their social circles, including friends and family, to ensure a broader reach. Data were collected using a self-reported questionnaire and distributed to respondents via email and social media platforms. To enhance participation, the survey was distributed both online (via social media platforms) and offline (at restaurants and public venues). The online data collection process was facilitated through a Google Docs survey administered in English. The study adhered to ethical guidelines by obtaining informed consent from all participants. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the survey at any point if they no longer wished to continue. Data collection took place between July and September 2024.

The survey instrument comprised three sections. Section 1 collected information on participants' demographic profiles. Section 2 included questions related to participants' restaurant preferences. The final section focused on questions pertaining to the characteristics of online reviews. Participants' responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A pre-test was conducted with a sample of 10 respondents to evaluate the effectiveness of the measurement instrument. Feedback was gathered on the clarity and appropriateness of the scale used. Additionally, to ensure the validity of the content and language structure of the questionnaire, recommendations were sought from three research experts in the field of consumer behavior. The final survey consisted of 38 items pertained to six online review attributes. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Table 1), with values for each online review characteristic.

Table 1

Reliability of Measures

Constructs	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Overall Rating	5	0.788
Number of Reviews	5	0.774
Descriptiveness of review	4	0.816
Price of Food Items	4	0.797
Service quality	5	0.845
Taste and Beverage image	4	0.736
Ambience of Restaurant	4	0.733
Customer's selection of restaurant	7	0.913

Descriptive analysis was employed to profile respondents, while inferential analysis, including regression analysis and hypothesis testing, was conducted to examine the relationships between variables.

Respondent's Profile

Table 2 depicts the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample population.

Table 2

Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	N	Percent	Characteristics	N	Percent
Gender			Occupation		
Male	134	64.11	Student	83	39.71
Female	75	35.89	Employee	17	8.13
Age			Business	86	41.15
18 to 30	183	87.56	Social Service	23	11.01
31 to 40	26	12.44	Income Level (Rs)		
Marital Status			Less than 25000	27	12.92
Unmarried	110	52.63	25,001- 40,000	52	24.88
Married	99	47.37	40,001- 60000	42	20.1
Educational Qualification			60,001- 75,000	18	8.61
SEE or below	6	2.87	Rs 75,000 above	70	33.49
Intermediate	33	15.79			
Bachelor	92	44.02			
Masters or above	78	37.32			

Note. N = 209.

Gender distribution revealed a higher proportion of females (64.11%). A significant majority of respondents (87.56%) are within the age group of 18 to 30. A slight majority of respondents (52.63%) are unmarried. The largest proportion of the respondents holds a bachelor's degree (44.02%), followed by those with a master's or higher qualification (37.32%), intermediate education (15.79%) have completed, an SEE or below (2.87%). A substantial portion (41.15%) of respondents are engaged in business while 39.71% are students, 11.01% are in social services, and 8.13% are employed in other sectors. The largest group (33.49%) earns above Rs. 75,000, followed by those earning between Rs. 25,001 and Rs. 40,000 (24.88%).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 demonstrates the distribution of respondent preferences and selection process regarding restaurant visits, meal preferences, media influence, and online review

engagement. The table indicate that a significant proportion (32.54%) of respondents visit restaurants on a monthly basis, accounting for of the sample. Weekly visits are reported by 22.97% of respondents, while 16.74% dine out multiple times per week. Less frequent visitors are also well-represented, with 14.36% dining every two weeks and 10.52% visiting restaurants every three months. A small segment of the sample, comprising 2.87% of respondents, visits restaurants every six months or less frequently.

Table 3

Frequency Distribution of Response

Response Criteria	N	Percent	Response Criteria	N	Percent
Restaurant Visit			Modes of Media		
Multiple times a week	35	16.74	Online Reviews	99	47.37
Every Week	48	22.97	Restaurant's Website	37	17.70
Every Two Weeks	30	14.36	Google Search	9	4.31
Every Month	68	32.54	Word of Mouth	60	28.71
Every Three Months	22	10.52	Television Adverts / Shows	4	1.91
Every Six Months or More	6	2.87	Newspaper/Food Critics	0	0.00
Meal Preference			Checking Online Reviews		
Breakfast	41	19.62	Never	18	8.61
Lunch	68	32.54	Sometimes	129	61.72
Dinner	44	21.05	Most of the Time	28	13.40
Combination Meal	29	13.88	Always	18	8.61
Drinks	12	5.74	About Half of the Time	16	7.66
Snacks	15	7.17			

Similarly, lunch is the most preferred meal among respondents, with 32.54% selecting it as their top choice. Dinner follows at 21.05%, while breakfast is preferred by 19.62% of respondents. Combination meals and snacks are less favored, chosen by 13.88% and 7.17% of respondents, respectively. Drinks are the least preferred option, selected by only 5.74% of the sample. Likewise, online reviews are the most influential medium for consumers, with 47.37% of respondents citing them as a key factor in their decision-making process. Word of mouth is the second most influential source, impacting 28.71% of respondents. The restaurant's website is also a notable source of information, though significantly less influential, with 17.7% of respondents relying on it. Google search (4.31%) and television advertisements or shows (1.91%) play a minimal role in shaping consumer decisions. Notably, newspapers and food critics have no reported influence in this sample, as no respondents indicated their relevance. Moreover, a majority of respondents (61.72%) report checking online reviews

occasionally. Smaller segments of the sample check reviews more consistently, with 13.4% checking most of the time and 8.61% always consulting reviews. Conversely, 8.61% of respondents never check online reviews, while 7.66% check them approximately half of the time.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4 depicts the results of a regression analysis. The multiple regression analysis examining predictors of customer choice of restaurant revealed several significant findings. The model explains 28.4% of the variance in CCR, with an overall significant fit (F-stat = 12.791, p < 0.001). Three variables emerge as statistically significant predictors: descriptiveness of reviews ($\beta = 0.252$, p < 0.05), service quality ($\beta = 0.202$, p < 0.10), and ambience of restaurant ($\beta = 0.198$, p < 0.05). These positive coefficients indicate that more detailed reviews, better service quality, and superior ambience significantly enhance customers' likelihood of choosing a restaurant. However, neither overall rating ($\beta = 0.053$, p > 0.10) nor taste and beverage image ($\beta = -0.011$, p > 0.10) demonstrate significant predictive power, challenging conventional industry assumptions. The negative, non-significant coefficient for number of reviews ($\beta = -0.008$, p > 0.10) suggests review quantity alone does not influence choice.

Moreover, the standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.053$, t = 0.520) indicates that the overall rating of a restaurant does not have a statistically significant influence on customers' selection of restaurants. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is rejected. Similarly, the relationship between the number of reviews and customers' selection of restaurants was found to be insignificant ($\beta = -0.008$, t = -0.075). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is rejected. Likewise, the descriptiveness of reviews demonstrated a significant positive relationship with customers' choice of restaurants ($\beta = 0.252$, t = 2.320). Consequently, Hypothesis 3 is accepted. Moreover, the price of food items did not significantly influence customers' choice of restaurants ($\beta = 0.009$, t = 0.099). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is rejected. Furthermore, the relationship between service quality and customers' choice of restaurants was positive, and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.202$, t = 1.851). Thus, Hypothesis 5 is accepted. Additionally, the taste and beverage image did not have a significant impact on customers' selection of restaurants ($\beta = -0.010$, t = -0.124). As a result, Hypothesis 6 is rejected. Finally, the ambience of the restaurant showed a significant positive relationship with customers' selection of restaurants ($\beta = 0.198$, t = 2.109). Therefore, Hypothesis 7 is accepted.

Table 4

Regression Model Summary for Factors Influencing Customer's Choice of Restaurant

Variables/Hypothesis	B	SE	t-stat	VIF	Hypothesis Result
Constant	1.406	0.268	5.237		
H₁: Overall rating	0.053	0.102	0.52	2.406	Not supported
H₂: Number of reviews	-0.008	0.11	-0.075	3.062	Not supported
H₃: Descriptiveness of reviews	0.252**	0.108	2.32	3.069	Accepted
H₄: Price of food items	0.009	0.095	0.099	2.001	Not supported
H₅: Service quality	0.202*	0.109	1.851	3.086	Accepted
H₆: Taste and beverage image	-0.011	0.092	-0.124	2.017	Not supported
H₇: Ambience of restaurant	0.198**	0.094	2.109	2.067	Accepted
R-squared =0.308, Adjusted R-squared = 0.284, F-stat =12.791 (p<0.001)					

$*p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.10$.

Discussion

This study examined various online review attributes influencing customers' choice of restaurants in Pokhara, Nepal. The findings demonstrated a significant positive effect of three key online review attributes (descriptiveness of reviews, service quality, and ambience of restaurants) on customers' choice of restaurants. Firstly, the strong positive relationship between the descriptiveness of reviews and customers' choice of restaurants highlights that customers increasingly rely on detailed and informative reviews when making dining decisions. This result is consistent with previous findings (Azman &Majid, 2023; Patil et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2023). Secondly, service quality has been identified as another significant predictor of customers' choice of restaurants. This finding corroborated with several existing studies (Azman & Majid, 2023; Clemes et al., 2018). Thirdly, the relationship between ambience and customer choice of restaurants is found significant. This is supported by various studies highlighting how atmospheric elements positively influence consumer preferences and satisfaction levels (Azman &Majid, 2023; Cheng et al., 2020; Kement et al., 2021).

Unexpectedly, this study found no significant effect of overall ratings on customers' choice of restaurants. The reason for this unexpected result lies in the fact that customers consider subjective evaluation of various restaurant attributes over ratings (Steffens et al., 2021). Other key attributes such as food quality, ambience, and service quality are preferred by the customers over ratings (Sahin et al., 2021). Moreover, initial sensory experiences take precedence over overall ratings (Kwok & Lin, 2023). Furthermore, the current study also found no significant effect of number of reviews on

customers' choice of restaurants. This concurs with numerous studies (Ji et al., 2023; Shambour et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2020). Additionally, this study found no significant effect of price on customers' choice of restaurants. This coincides with studies of Premordia and Gal (2023) and Webb et al. (2022). Finally, the present study also found that taste and beverage image also demonstrated no significant effect on customer's choice of restaurants. This aligns with prior studies of Premordia and Gal (2023) and Staub and Siegrist (2022).

Conclusion

The study aimed to examine the influence of online review attributes on customers' choice of restaurants. The study aligns closely with the Information Adoption Model (IAM), which highlights the importance of perceived usefulness and perceived credibility in shaping customer decisions. Descriptive reviews, for instance, strongly influence restaurant choices by providing detailed and insightful information about food quality, service, ambience, and overall satisfaction. Similarly, service quality is critical in the Information Adoption Model (IAM) for restaurant choice because it acts as a trust anchor, customers prioritize credible, experience-based signals (e.g., descriptions in reviews) over generic ratings, ensuring the adopted information aligns with real-world expectations. Moreover, ambience-related information is critical for customers seeking specific dining experiences, and its credibility is reinforced when multiple reviewers consistently describe similar aspects, further solidifying its role in the adoption process. Therefore, restaurant managers and marketers should prioritize descriptive, experience-based reviews that highlight service strengths and consistently deliver quality service and ambience. By focusing on these actionable insights, restaurants can enhance their appeal and competitiveness in an increasingly digital and customer-driven market.

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