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STRATEGICAL IMPACTS ON GLOBAL BRANDING

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ABSTRACT

Coca-Cola, Microsoft, IBM, GE, Nokia, Toyota, Intel, McDonald's, Disney and Mercedes- all these brands have something in common. They are internationally acclaimed top 10 global brands (2007) in that order, as per the report by Interbrand. Today globalization is transforming the world in a way which was never imagined a century ago. Some companies have operations in more than 100 countries, sell products in twice as many and boast global revenues larger than the GDPs of many countries! Ideally, the global branding strategy consists of one product formulation, one package design, one advertising program, one pricing schedule, one distribution plan, and so on that would turn out to be the most effective and efficient possible option for each and every country in which the brand is sold. Global branding is, thus, a complex subject because of the many cultural, political and economic challenges involved with it. This paper tries to explore what are the key drivers for global branding. Second, why have the companies started going for global branding strategy. Third, what makes the 'successful' global brands 'successful'? Fourth, what are the challenges faced by global brand marketers. Subsequently, how can a global brand marketer communicate and deliver value to the emerging global consumer. It concludes with the discussion about the future of global branding and its implications for global brand marketers.

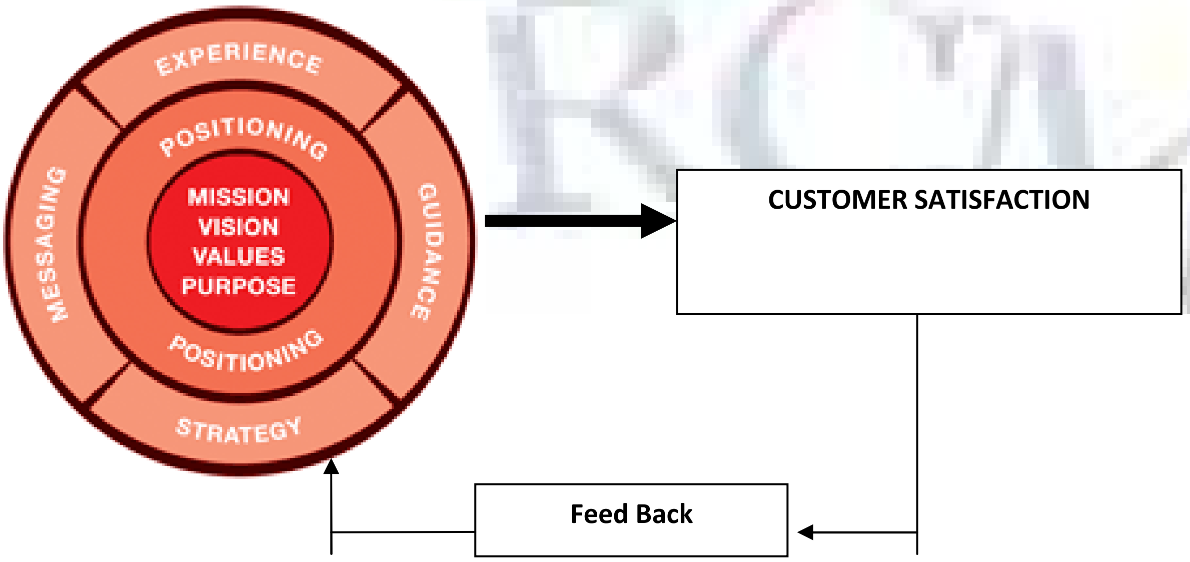
KEYWORDS
Brand, Strategy, Marketers.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of globalization was first verbalized by Harvard's Theodore Levitt in the 1980s. When Levitt first proposed "globalization", the marketers said the concept of "global" – having a unified, consistent presence around the world-was only a theory, a pipedream that could never happen in the actual market place. Cultures, local customs, government regulations, distributions, communication channels, they claimed, were just too locally developed to ever permit global brands to exist. So they argued for a "multinational" perspective, i.e., the development of brands on a national market basis, sold locally through a market-by-market implementation approach. Those were the days when governments controlled the flow of goods into and out of their countries. Even in Europe, France and Belgium (Schultz and Schultz, 2004) were separated by the "invisible border" of customs, duties regulations, and even communication systems. Almost every large marketing organization was based on developing a national or tightly defined regional unit, one for Germany, one for the United Kingdom (UK), one for Scandinavia, and so on. Therefore, the country manager was king, and he or she did not recognize anyone or anything outside their own borders, except may be the CEO when he arrived for annual visit. So, when Levitt was writing, there were "multinational marketers and brands", that is, organizations that marketed in multiple countries but practically none in a global way. It was just not possible. But, technology, communication systems and most of all, diplomacy and the need to develop relevant markets forced governments and marketers to create global alliances such as the European Union, MERCOSUL, NAFTA, APEC and so on. Today, globalization is real although some marketers and some theoreticians still don't recognize it. All this has led to the emergence of global brands. Moreover, the economic growth powered with the emergence of internet has made the world shrink into a much smaller place than what it used to be in the yesteryears. Marketers, whether big (Coca-Cola, Microsoft, IBM, etc.) or small (Samrat Namkeen from Ahmedabad, Haldiram's Namkeen from Nagpur, Alphonso Mangoes from Ratnagiri, etc.), too, have started identifying this potential that can be tapped in the consumer markets and hence, making their brands go global.

THE GLOBAL BRAND STRATEGY

Ideally, the global branding strategy consists of one product formulation, one package design, one advertising program, one pricing schedule, one distribution plan, and so on that would turn out to be the most effective and efficient possible option for each and every country in which the brand is sold (Keller, 2003). However, it is difficult for a brand marketer to adopt such a uniformly optimal brand strategy. Thus, the global brand marketer is posed with a challenge of making a trade-off between two strategies – standardization and customization. Global branding is, therefore, a complex subject because of the many cultural, political and economic challenges involved with it.



KEY DRIVERS FOR GLOBAL BRANDING

The pressures of international competition, worldwide availability of technology, shifting markets, and increasingly mobile customer bases are forcing companies to review their structure and business practices from a global perspective (Randall, 2003). Companies going global are also called upon to rethink their corporate brands and implement changes needed to reflect global reality.

The major parameters that can be considered as key drivers for marketers to go for global branding:

LIVING UP TO THE EXPECTATIONS OF EMERGING GLOBAL CONSUMERS

"Ultimately brands are all about trust," Mukul Pandya writes in the Wall Street Journal. "The reason consumers flock (Gregory and Wiechmann, 2002) to some brands and ignore others is that behind the brand stands an unspoken promise of value. Consumer audiences are now more aware, savvier and have realized that they have a great many more choices."

THE NEED TO KEEP PACE AND MOVE AHEAD OF COMPETITION

In today's high-technology, knowledge-based economy, the global brand is considered as the most valuable intangible asset. As companies move rapidly into fast-moving e-commerce terrain, brand building becomes even more crucial. Increasing number of dot-com startups have been investing in millions of dollars, obtained from venture capitalists, in an attempt to build brands overnight – one because internet makes it so easy for competitors to enter into the territory and second because brand building on the internet can be remarkably fast. As an example, traditional corporations like Avon, Coca-Cola, and General Electric took decades to build global brands, while it has taken as little as five years for Amazon.com to accomplish the same thing. In the 1990s organizations started realizing the need for effectively managing the brand asset in an increasingly global marketplace.

RISING ECONOMIES OF SCALE

Consolidation and globalization of the retail trade are some of the key drivers that have created a strong interest for global branding in the minds of the marketers. As global markets turn more and more competitive, it becomes more and more expensive for a company to achieve a meaningful marketplace advantage. Rising costs of research and development for product differentiation, along with production cost advantages that necessitate the plant capacities that exceed local demand, call for companies to globalize their brands in order to amortize these and other costs across local markets.

EXPLOITATION OF EXPERIENCE CURVES AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFERS

As a firm competes in local markets, it learns through experience how to best create a viable brand position and how to mount successful brand advertising and promotional campaigns. Such knowledge may then be transferable to other markets. Some local brands gain global exposure without any benefit of any active corporate support. To a great extent this is due to the ongoing spread of global communications – especially the internet- greater international level for both business and pleasure, and the globalization of the news and entertainment industries.

SEEKING NEW GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

In order to achieve the revenue growth demanded today, many brands must enter new markets that offer high growth opportunities or relatively week competition. This is especially true of those mature brands with growth potential limited by national markets.

Another important trend is towards retail trade consolidation, often resulting in global mega chains. These derive critical market advantages from sharing information and technology, refined logistic systems, and greater negotiation power over manufacturers. A case in point is the global retail giant, Walmart.

THE NEED TO CULTIVATE BRAND PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

One of the key reasons for this is the need for short-term profit and generally risk-averse society that we now live in. Board directors who have been successful in shaping a new business realize that it is easier and more efficient to merge with or acquire an ailing competitor and turn it around than to go for organic growth. This is symptomatic of saturated western markets and the lack of real innovation in the marketplace. The core of this issue is that what these companies are buying is not necessarily the technology or the product, but the goodwill of another large group of consumers towards that brand. Often the offer price for the business is made up from a majority percentage for the goodwill or brand, and a minority of the capital and goods.

WHY GLOBALIZE?

Going global is always going to be expensive and difficult, but seems a prize worth aiming for. The main arguments in favour of globalization centre on the view that the world is not only getting smaller psychologically, but that it is also getting more similar. Other substantial reasons for the company to global are:

A NECESSITY FOR SURVIVAL

In some markets, global scale is a prerequisite for competing at all. The United States market is one such example which has an array of competitors. In these arenas, such as pharmaceuticals and cars, economies of scale or scope are paramount in bringing costs down low enough or spreading high investment over large enough sales.

GLOBAL CLIENTELE

For many service firms whose clients are international – advertising agencies, accountants, consultants – a global network is becoming a necessity. A firm that wants to serve the biggest clients has been forced to set up local offices around the world, or to develop alliances with other firms to provide a global reach.

COMPETITION

The fact that competitors are going global is undoubtedly a spur. A firm may have to compete on a global scale, either to defend its turf from the domestic market against global competitors with scale advantages or to take advantage of new opportunities in new markets before competitors establish themselves.

PROFIT OPPORTUNITIES

If successful brands cannot be transferred rapidly to as many markets as possible, profit opportunities are foregone. P&G found that, without central control, some successful brands that were not introduced into major European markets for up to 12 years after their initial launch. The first mover advantage may also be lost, leaving the firm playing catch-up in too many important countries.

SIMILARITY IN PREFERENCES OF THE GLOBAL MARKET SEGMENT

People are basically the same and are becoming even more like each other all the time. A world culture is developing, formed by global communications, travel, films, television and the activities of multinational firms. In the three areas that make up the so-called 'triad' – the United States, Europe and South Asia – this is arguably true to an extent. It is most true of younger people, and in many markets the tastes of the under-30s are probably very similar at least in most developed countries. Although, there are worldwide standards for some products to be accepted in world markets - like America dominates most computer and software markets, Japan automation and earth-moving equipment markets, German engineering, but the markets are essentially the same everywhere. Given this, there will be a segment within each market that will be essentially similar to the segment found everywhere else. Thus there will be a segment that responds to Rolex, Dunhill and Gucci similarly in every country, for example. The size of the segment will vary considerably, but it will exist. The extent to which this is true of markets outside the obvious luxury products is unclear but it certainly could be: there will be a segment that wants a particular type of car or toothpaste, in every country, but the size will vary.

GLOBAL ECONOMIES OF SCALE OFFER A DEFINITE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Global branding offers huge economies of scale. The cost advantage so obtained can be used either to offer unbeatable value or to invest in product development or promotion. There can also be possible savings in marketing costs such as advertising.

Moreover, there are some markets that need to operate on a global scale. As an example, it is hard for local firms to compete in civil aircraft, cars or pharmaceuticals. Theodore Levitt, one of the fiercest proponents of global branding, argued that economies of scale could actually overcome local market preferences. If a manufacturer ignored current differences in consumer preferences and offered a common product at an unbeatable price, consumers would tradeoff preferences for value. For example, there have traditionally been differences in what European countries demand in washing machine: some want automatic, others do not, some prefer front-loading and others top- loading, and so on. Levitt argued that making a single, standardized model on a European

scale would offer such value for money that consumers would abandon their traditional views and buy it anyway. Even service firms can usually find some economies, particularly in back-office processing – but every few hundred thousand pounds of costs are useful.
Strategically, these are all very real pressures. Firms risk being left behind caught in a cycle of increasing threats and decreasing opportunities, facing only decline. But going global has also become an imperative in the face of intense competition and shrinking of the world into a smaller place.

THE 'SUCCESSFUL' GLOBAL BRANDS

COCA-COLA

Coca-Cola, Microsoft, IBM, GE, Nokia, Toyota, Intel, McDonald's, Disney and Mercedes have all emerged to be the internationally acclaimed top 10 brands for the year 2007 as per the report published by Interbrand. These are the brands which followed stakeholders' journeys to provide effective, consistent and appropriate messaging throughout the service. Let us see how some of these brands managed to be what it requires to be one of the world's best brands.

NOKIA

The brand Nokia which is valued at $33.3bn this year with an increase of 12% from last year has been able to do so by rediscovering the theme of demand creation by focusing on simple, easy-to-use handsets that are sleek and stylish. The brand's 'bounce back' this year has been driven by a reinvigorated focus on product design and feature innovation. For example, the Nokia N95 was hugely successful, integrating mail, web and music in a single handset. It has become the equivalent of the Blackberry for the consumer.

MCDONALD'S

Another case is that of McDonald's which has moved up from its number 9 position in 2006 to number 8 position in 2007 with a 7 % increase in brand value. The secret behind the success of the brand is that it's focus on quality, value and convenience. There are several reasons behind the success. Firstly, it has tried to focus itself on being a single brand company which is clearly evident from its consistent use of the global advertising theme 'I'm loving it'. Secondly, it continues to reinvent itself in the face of changing consumer preferences towards healthy eating. It has shown that being responsive to customers is critical to success. McDonald's is providing healthier alternatives and the nutritional profile of everything it offers. The introduction of new sandwiches, salads and fruit items to the menu has created a 'halo' effect that augments the traditional McDonald's offering. These items add a healthy 'accent' to the McDonald's image and create demand. But the success is deeper than simply creating demand. The brand has been managed and planned well too. The broader menu, coupled with remodeled/more stylish restaurants, is helping McDonald's to shift traditional perceptions of the brand and encourage existing customers to engage with it more frequently. Rather than being a place where people go to grab a quick snack on the go, McDonald's is trying to attract diners who appreciate better quality, better tasting food and are willing to pay a premium for it. .

TOYOTA

Toyota at number 6 up from 7 last year is an example of how having foresight helps the companies' make informed choices about their brand and frees leaders up to make bold moves with full knowledge of the implications – essential to thriving in a competitive environment. A recent example is the confluence of environmental concerns and rising oil prices. Ten years ago any company talking about these two issues in the automotive industry would have largely been thought of as foolish or eccentric. SUV sales were growing, cars were getting bigger, engines less efficient, and gas was cheap. In the wider world, the political climate was stable; global GDP growth was moderate, the impact of China just emerging, and world oil supplies high. As forward-looking brand managers, Toyota considered these factors and built a scenario that now differentiates them from the pack. Recognizing the value of leading the 'green' agenda, it positioned itself to capitalize on this significant driver of demand that has been accelerated by, and conjoined with, the rapid rise in gasoline prices. Brands cannot lead through reaction. They must anticipate the needs of the future and be ready for it when it arrives. The Toyota Prius has become a statement of environmental care, as well as achieving staggering sales in its own right. But better still for the Toyota brand, it casts a 'green halo' across its entire portfolio.

GENERAL ELECTRIC

Taking one more case of brand GE, which has been able to maintain its number 4 position in 2006 in 2007 too, even with a diversified brand portfolio in the face of intense competition. Four principles that have guided GE through the years have contributed to its success. First, only one corporate brand has been used on virtually all products. The corporate brand thus has been the driver of the customers' link to the brand. Second, a single idea – better living from electricity/technology- has provided a core identity and a basis for a relationship with the customer for a long time period. Third, the focus has always been on customer benefits rather than on the products. It is the customers who are living better and enjoying good things in their lives. Fourth, the GE identity has been allowed to evolve while still being true to its heritage. Positioning and execution, particularly of the company's symbol and slogan played a key role in the evolutionary process.

In summary, the focus on quality, clarity in communications, continuous innovation, rich customer experiences through quality services at each touch point makes the brand stand out. In addition, the ability to plan and allocate the resources and foresee the future demand also gives the global brand a competitive edge over others.

CHALLENGES FACED BY GLOBAL BRAND MARKETERS

As many companies are finding out, doing business globally is not simply taking a basic set of operations and applying them from one country to another. Many factors including corporate strategy and performance, mergers and acquisitions, accounting and reporting, and the growing scrutiny of corporate, legal, and cultural behaviours around the world, contribute to a highly complex global perspective. So, for companies that look to globalize, it's important to study and understand each market and its people carefully considering both similarities and differences in the markets they wish to serve.

DIFFERENCES IN CONSUMER NEEDS, WANTS, AND USAGE PATTERNS

Coke which is one of the most preferred and ubiquitous brand across the world is not preferred by people of Myanmar, Cuba and Syria.

McDonald's India offers products developed especially for the Indian market, specifically vegetarian customers. It serves only mutton, chicken, fish and vegetable products, not beef, pork, or their by-products. Big Mac™ thus becomes Maharaja™, which consists of two all-mutton patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles and onions on a sesame seed bun. Israel has some kosher McDonald's restaurants, while Saudi Arabia has a restaurant which closes five times a day for Muslim prayer.

Pizza Hut in China has a far different menu, with wider choices and a much higher level of service than in its US home market.

Holiday Inn represents a much higher level in hostelry in Europe and Asia then in the US. Each of these brands has been extensively adapted to take advantage of local customs, tastes, expectations, and opportunities.

DIFFERENCES IN CULTURES

L'Oreal is certainly one such French company that has been able to successful to cater to different markets by conveying the allure of different cultures through its many products by making a conscious effort to diversify the cultural origins of its brands. Whether it's selling Italian elegance, New York street smarts, or French beauty through its brands, L'Oreal is reaching out to a vast range of people across incomes and cultures. Its products range from Redken hair care to Ralph Lauren perfumes to Helena Rubenstein cosmetics.

DIFFERENCES IN COMMUNICATION

The differences in language may pose a serious communication problem, at times necessitating changes or modifications in the brand name or marketing designs.

In Japanese, for instance, 3M's slogan, "sticks like crazy," translates as "sticks foolishly." Chevrolet's brand name Nova in Spanish means "it doesn't go". In Chinese Pepsi's slogan, "Come Alive," translates as "come out of the grave."

Also, the laws affecting brand communications vary considerably from country to country. In Canada, if the information does not appear in both French and English, the goods may be confiscated. Superlatives like 'best coffee' are illegal in Germany, tobacco advertising is less subject to legal restrictions in the Far East and no alcohol at all may be advertised on French television. In West Germany, the Government controls drug advertising and prohibits comparison advertisements. In Italy, too, the Government controls pharmaceutical advertising and advertisements for several personal items.

DIFFERENCES IN DISTRIBUTION

Kentucky Fried Chicken, Japan, is a joint venture between KFC Inc. and Mitsubishi Corporation while Sears Roebuck and Company has a joint venture with Seibu Stores Inc., Japan because it is a culturally and/or difficult market to penetrate.

A number of devolved production sites producing different products for different consuming markets may be required. Sony France produces in-car hi-fi, video cassettes and audio tapes for its home market as well as for the UK and the rest of Europe. While Sony UK produces televisions for France and its home market, Sony Japan produces clock radios for France, the UK and the Far East.

DIFFERENCES IN LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

Although the brand may be global, each of the local companies in the network might be restricted by the limits of local registration. Ciba Specialty Chemicals, for instance, is registered in at least 30 countries around the world. In the US, the corporate name is Ciba Specialty Chemicals Inc., but in France it's Ciba Specialty Chemicals SA; and in the UK it's Ciba Specialty Chemicals Ltd., and so forth. Also company may encounter a slew of currency transactions, valuations and fluctuations.

DIFFERENCES IN ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS AND REQUIREMENT OF SKILLED TALENT

The rapidly changing environment is bringing about changes in organizational structures which impact upon the management of brands internationally. Increasing competition, particularly when globally fuelled by recessionary pressures, has forced companies into more disaggregated and financially accountable structures. Such pressures have also given rise to an increase in mergers and acquisitions as well as the formation of networks and alliances to take advantage of synergies within brand portfolios and to gain access to new markets. McDonald's has adopted a standardized structure globally whereas Nestle focuses on locally adapted structure.

Finding talent that is knowledgeable, experienced in technical details of business, sensitive to cultural and other local differences, and competent to carry out the assignment is today's real global challenge.

DIFFERENCES IN THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Markets, whether global or domestic, require purchasing power as well as people. The available purchasing power in an economy depends on current income, prices, savings, debt, and credit availability. This creates a strong impact on business, especially for companies whose products and brands are geared to high-income and price-sensitive customers. Thus, there is a vast difference in acceptability of the products in developing markets and developed markets. For example, unable compete effectively in developing markets, Unilever offered one-rupee sachets of detergent and shampoo which have been a big hit in rural India.

The challenges for the global brand marketer are thus, as manifold as the opportunities and he needs to consider the disparities and similarities of a particular market for serving it fruitfully and successfully.

COMMUNICATING AND DELIVERING VALUE TO THE GLOBAL CONSUMER

The importance of brands keeps growing apace all over the world. Faced with a confusing array of competing offerings and marketing messages, consumers and business customers alike rely increasingly on brands to guide their buying choices. Thus, the global market place, where the cultures, values, languages, and traditions change so drastically when the borders are crossed, requires the global brand market to have more sophisticated communication skills to advance the brand and the corporate vision. So, communicating to the global consumer requires that the communication efforts match the business plan at the global, regional and country levels. Global training and staffing as well as innovative internal communications between all corporate levels is also essential. A mix of communications media coupled with a combinations of promotional areas can help build brand recognition both internationally and country by country. Internet and technology pays a quintessential role for the success of global branding strategy of any brand marketer. In addition government relations, community relations and media relations are critical to success of a global brand.

The global brand can have a sustainable competitive advantage over its competitors by delivering values to the global consumer in terms of service, quality, professionalism, competitiveness and a will to win, growth and development of all employees, continuous improvement in productivity, growing profit for stakeholders, continuously updating technology.

FUTURE OF GLOBAL BRANDING

Building a global brand will be definitely one of the key challenges for global brand marketers. Competition will intensify and the brand will have to carve its own position in the mind of the consumer not only for competing but also for its survival.

The greater market segmentation across industries and larger, more varied customer groups will pose a bigger challenge to the global brand marketers. They will have to find out new ways of cost cutting and innovation to solve the problems while making every effort to plan, execute and communicate a powerful, clear-cut global brand strategy.

The crucial role of technology cannot be understated for the global brand to win and survive. Multitasking and multidisciplinary tasks would be the order of the day for the leaders as the global market expands and interconnectivity increases throughout the world.

Cultivating brand partnerships will be required by the global brand marketers in some form for strategic entry into the market.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL BRAND MARKETERS

Kevin Roberts, Saatchi & Saatchi CEO, has written in Advertising Age:

"Brands will become more important as trust marks-sources of identity for people, stories people choose to believe in and that help make sense of a chaotic world."

Branding codifies a company's identity and can fix its position not only in the global market place but also in the mind of the global consumer. Thus, it becomes imperative for the growth seeking company to:

1. Develop its own distinct, global branding strategy which once established, to communicate and nurture its brand.
2. Balance standardization and customization
3. Develop a clear strategic vision for the road ahead
4. The need to implement one correct strategy at one point in time
5. The need to develop globally competent and skilled pool of talent
6. The need to understand the emerging global consumer
7. Continuous innovation and technology up gradation to stay ahead of competition

8. Plan efficiencies in manufacturing, production, marketing and distribution
9. The need to understand the economic, political, legal, socio-cultural environment of different countries and the ability to respond to fast-changing environments
10. Building brand partnerships through strategic alliances with competitors and businesses will help develop synergies between the global brand marketers.

CONCLUSION
To conclude, global brands are here to stay in the emerging global markets, which are shrinking in terms of distances and differences, provided the global brand marketers are ready to face the challenges posed by them to survive intense competition.

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