

Article

The Influences of Humorous Advertising on Brand Popularity and Advertising Effects in the Tourism Industry

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Abstract: With a diversity of promotional channels and ever-increasing numbers of participants, the tourism industry in Taiwan faces keen competition. Along with the direct cross-strait flights policy, groups like Eastern Multimedia Group, Tsann Kuen Enterprise Company Limited and Want Want China Times Group have founded travel agencies for the purpose of increasing their market share in the tourism industry. Therefore, the formulation of marketing strategies has become a critical issue for all travel agencies that wish to ensure their prominence in the market. The frequent use of humorous materials and appeals has been the main tendency in advertising. However, no consistent conclusions regarding the actual effects of humorous advertising have been determined. The subjects of the current study were users of the Lion Travel website. Online questionnaires were sent to and collected from random respondents. One hundred questionnaires were delivered, and 512 valid questionnaires were collected. Each collected questionnaire represented a valid sample. The study generated the following five results: (1) humorous advertisements may partially influence brand awareness; (2) humorous elements may partially influence advertising effects; (3) brand awareness has significant positive effects on the advertising attitude of advertising effects; (4) brand awareness has significant positive effects on the brand attitude of advertising effects; (5) brand awareness has significant positive effects on the purchasing intention of advertising effects. Eventually, it is anticipated that the results

of this study can serve as a reference and provide suggestions for humorous advertising strategies in the tourism industry.

Keywords: humorous advertisements; brand awareness; advertising effects; tourism industry

1. Introduction

The upgrading of people's living standards, together with the continuous promotion of international tourism and of traveling Taiwan by the government, has increased Taiwanese people's interest in traveling abroad and attracted numerous foreign tourists. In recent years, the government has been dedicated to promoting the tourism industry. Consequently, the number of people traveling abroad in these years has risen abruptly; meanwhile, the number of foreign tourists to Taiwan has also increased. With the advancement of technology, advertisers consider that advertising is the most direct channel for enterprises to introduce their services or products to consumers. It is thus a powerful mechanism for product promotion. The frequent use of humorous materials and appeals has become the primary tendency in advertising. Humorous materials have been widely used in advertisements and most enterprises believe that humor is effective in attracting consumers' attention and influencing their preferences.

Advertisements for traveling abroad were rather rare in Taiwan; however, this phenomenon is quite visible today. In addition, to reinforce tourists' impressions of tourist spots, many humorous elements are utilized in promotional advertisements. Moreover, entertainers, experts or celebrities have often been invited as spokesmen—this creates a persuasive effect by using humorous material in advertisements and has increasingly positive effects on consumers' purchasing quantity and product quality. To put it simply, via the manipulation of advertisements, the messages may be effectively delivered to the target group and thus help to achieve the communication goal of spreading and promoting the products. Therefore, humor is an absolutely essential element in advertisements. Yet, previous research has presented a variety of viewpoints on the effects of humorous advertisements and a complete theoretical framework has not been introduced to explicate how humorous elements function in advertisements. Besides, academia has not reached a consensus on the typology of humorous advertisements and has usually confused the operational definitions. It should be noted that the advertising industry often considers the cases of humorous advertisements in academic fields to be applicable for all types of humorous advertisements. Even though the variety of different humor types is not great, their effects differ significantly. As a result, it is important to differentiate among humorous advertisements with different humor types. In advertisements, by using humorous elements, consumers' attention can be aroused, their feeling of resonance can be stimulated, and thus formed better advertising attitude. Brand awareness exercises much influence on consumers' decision making. To sum up, in combination with the expertise of spokesmen and brand awareness, if the types and functions of humorous advertisements can be clearly differentiated, we can thus create better advertising effects.

2. Theories and Deductive Assumptions

2.1. Humor Advertisements

In 1902, the British philosopher James Sully described humor as: “the word which is the hardest to define yet familiar to people across all languages” [1]. Greiner & Wang [2] argued that humor belongs to individual, affective, exciting, aesthetic and cognitive perspectives; Jean [3] defined humor as lexicons, utterances and behaviors which can arouse pleasing, funny, exciting, whimsical and humorous feelings.

Kotler [4] formulated the basic definitions of humorous advertisements by judging whether the advertisements included puns, satire, jokes, slapstick, irony, and incongruities. This typology and set of definitions, however, does not reflect the obvious links between humorous elements and persuasive effects in humorous advertisements; instead, this typology is useful for “creating” humor. Also, during the process of research, the approaches used by advertisements may not necessarily produce humorous effects. We may define humor as audiences’ responses to specific messages in advertisements. If an advertisement can make audiences smile, laugh or feel happy, it can thus be considered a humorous advertisement [5]. Besides, we may define humor based on audiences’ subjective feelings—by directly ascertaining the cognitive humorous level of respondents by using a questionnaire survey rather than physical responses measured by instruments. Measuring the humorous level based on audiences’ subjective feelings enjoys higher reliability and validity than physical and behavioral indicators [6].

The present study used the typology based on Soderlund & Julander’s research [7] and introduced by Yang *et al.* [8], which classified humorous advertisements according to three mechanisms: (1) Emotion-oriented: Humor is a mechanism for letting out suppressed emotions. Therefore, emotion-oriented humorous advertisements tend to provide some cliffhangers in the beginning and then end with soothing and relaxed plots. In this way, audiences can ease their nervous emotions and have pleasant and humorous feelings afterwards; (2) Cognition-oriented: Humor refers to a cognitive mechanism derived from humor. The process of dealing with paradoxes or realizing inconsistent messages can result in the effects of humor, which is based on incongruity-resolution theory. The conception of cognitively humorous advertisements usually includes incongruous factors. When audiences’ cognitive experiences are inconsistent with their expectations, they will attempt to find answers from the advertisement. When audiences figure out the answers, the feeling of humor can appear; (3) Society-oriented: This type of humor is grounded on superiority theory, which means that the social mechanism resulting from humor will make individuals realize that they are superior to others. The target audiences of society-oriented humorous advertisements are often people with feelings of superiority, and the advertisements include assaults, irony and derision, rendering humorous effects by laughing at others.

2.2. Brand Awareness

When consumers choose and estimate products, brand awareness plays a critical role. In the process of promoting and marketing products, various enterprises employ “brand strategy” as their main focus to effectively increase their market share and establish consumers’ brand loyalty for repetitive purchase. Keller [9] pointed out brand awareness as the stronger brand tie strength in a consumer’s

memory, reflecting the confirming ability of brand differentiation, *i.e.*, the stronger brand tie or mark in a consumer's memory, and considered brand knowledge including brand awareness and brand image.

Chou and Lien [10] pointed out that brand awareness was the primary consideration for consumers. In addition, Hsieh & Chen's research [11] suggested that brand awareness was of great significance when consumers made decisions over purchasing unfamiliar products: leading brands (with higher popularity) were more likely to enjoy positive feedback from consumers than nameless ones (with little popularity). Berry [12] indicated that brand awareness allowed consumers to more easily recognize products and meanwhile provided product value with guarantee. High awareness referred to a consumer associating with a certain brand name when thinking of certain product. A brand of which was easily thought of reveals the higher brand recognition and awareness of consumers.

Johnson, Podratz and Dipboye [13] considered that popular brand names helped consumers to mitigate their cognitive risks and to form positive appraisals. Kuisma *et al.* [14] stated that brand awareness showed stronger links between brands and consumers' memories. Their findings reflected consumers' capability in discerning differences between brands, which indicates stronger connections or traces in consumers' memories. Li and Song [15] regarded brand awareness as an approach for measuring the strength of the impression made in consumers' minds. Shahani *et al.* [16] reported that brand awareness exercised great impact on consumers' decisions, suggesting that brand awareness was often the foremost consideration in decision-making. Significant impacts consumers' their marketing products, Strasser *et al.* [17] believed that brand awareness may influence consumers' perceptions, attitudes, or even affect their decisions and brand loyalty. We can thus easily realize the significance of brand awareness. Jean's study [3] revealed that consumers would hold positive attitudes towards unfamiliar products with high brand awareness. On the contrary, in the cases of products with low brand awareness, because consumers were unfamiliar with the brand names, extra information on this product type was required for assessment. Aaker [18] considered the effects of brand awareness on consumer perception and attitudes as well as the brand selection and brand loyalty. The importance of brand awareness was therefore apparent.

The present study adopted the two main constructs of brand awareness introduced by Zhou [19]: brand cognition and brand memory. Brand cognition refers to clues for consumers to find out how to clearly recognize brand names, whereas brand memory refers to customers' ability to recover their memories of brands when being offered certain products or services.

2.3. Advertising Effects

The principal function of advertisements is to convey information about products or brands to consumers by media, achieve the communicative goal of advertisements, and thus create advertising effects. Hence, if we can measure the effects before and after broadcasting advertisements, it may facilitate the planning and control of advertisements and make the best use of advertisers' resources. Eisend [20] suggested using sales volume increase as a standard for measuring advertising effects. In practice, the most frequently adopted experimental method is "to compare the different ratios of the current and past advertising expenditure to sales volume". The utmost objective of advertising is to offer services and to sell products. Therefore, what advertisers would like to clearly know is the actual sales volume after broadcasting advertisements. In Hsu's [21] view, if consumers detect the intentions

of advertisements, it will affect their decision-making process, which will eventually be reflected in their purchasing behaviors. Laroche *et al.* [22] contended that advertising attitude is also a variable that affects advertising effects, differing from the previous viewpoints that brand attitude is only dependent on brand awareness. Li [23] claimed that attitude showed consumers' preferences on products. If consumers held positive advertising attitudes and needed certain products, this would result in a need variable and form an intention to purchase. Without hindrances from other exterior situation variables, the purchase behavior of consumers would naturally occur.

To sum up, the present study primarily employed three constructs of advertising effects proposed by Khushaba *et al.* [24], including advertising attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention. Where advertising attitude denoted consumers' views towards advertisements after they received the stimuli from advertisements, brand attitude referred to consumers' assessments of the brand, and purchase intention stood for consumers' willingness to purchase.

2.4. Research Hypotheses

Advertisements with humorous elements can draw more attention compared with those without humorous elements. In previous literature, it was discovered that humorous advertisements either in magazines or on air indeed had positive effects on attracting consumers' attention [25]. Based on the study of Huang and Kuo [26], it was suggested that advertisements using humorous materials would result in persuasive effects, increased sales volume, and products quality. Therefore, humorous advertisements had a positive impact on brand awareness and the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: Humorous advertisements influence brand awareness.

Koo and Ju [27] claimed that advertisements using humorous elements scored higher in persuasive effects than the average. Adopting humorous materials could increase consumers' attention and prevent it from being diverted [28]. According to Nazari *et al.* [29], by playing advertisements with and without humorous materials and measuring audience's instant attention, subsequent attention, focus attention, and integral attention afterwards, it was found that humorous elements in advertisements could draw more attention in the attention types mentioned above. Shen *et al.* [30] said that humorous advertisements could enhance consumers' preferences for the advertising sources. Vanden *et al.* [31] discovered that humorous advertisements played between non-humorous programs would have better recall effects. Also, it was pointed out that humorous advertisements imparted better advertising effects to products than those without humorous elements [32]. The following hypothesis was thus proposed:

H2: Humorous advertisements influence advertising effects.

Johnson, Podratz and Dipboye [13] claimed that brand awareness and brand cognition may play a significant role in consumers' decision-making over buying unfamiliar products—leading brands (with high popularity) were more likely to enjoy positive feedback from consumers than nameless ones (with little popularity). Khushaba *et al.* [24] and Laroche *et al.* [22] both considered that popular brand names helped to decrease consumers' cognitive risks and to yield positive appraisals. Kotler [4] believed that brand awareness would affect consumers' cognition and attitude and further influence their choices and brand loyalty. According to Kuisma *et al.* [14], products with higher brand awareness would

upgrade consumers' intentions to purchase. In summary, the higher the brand awareness of a brand, the greater influence it had on consumers. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H3: Brand awareness has significant positive effects on the advertising attitude of advertising effects.

H4: Brand awareness has significant positive effects on the brand attitude of advertising effects.

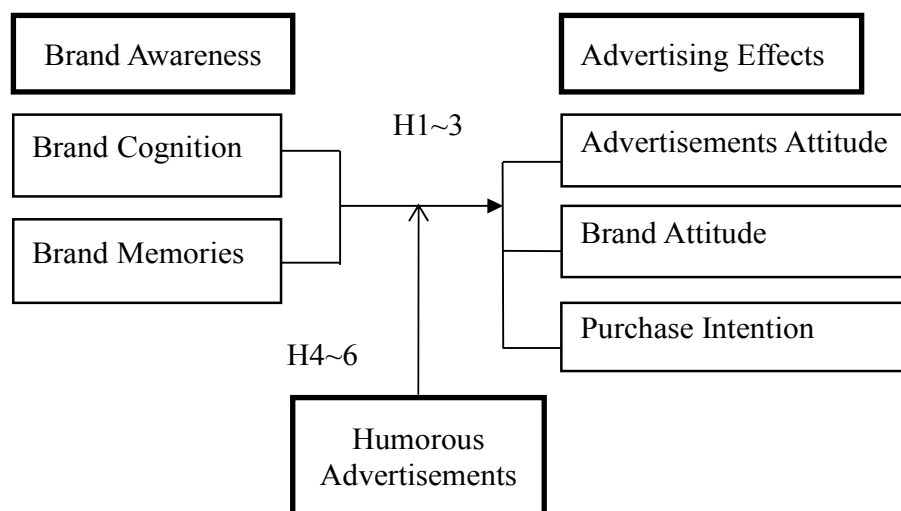
H5: Brand awareness has significant positive effects on the purchasing intention of advertising effects.

3. Research Method

3.1. Research Framework

In light of the above literature review, this study developed a conceptual framework (Figure 1) for exploring humorous advertisements, brand awareness and their relationship to advertising effectiveness.

Figure 1. Research framework.



3.2. Research Variables

3.2.1. Brand Awareness

The constructs and related items of this aspect were based on Zhou [19]: (1) Brand recognition allows consumers looking for clearer clues to recognize the brand; (2) Brand recall indicates that consumers are capable of recalling certain brands when provided with certain product or service categories, *i.e.*, to recall a specific brand from their memories.

3.2.2. Advertising Effects

The constructs and related items of this aspect were based on Khushaba *et al.* [24], including: (1) Advertisement attitudes show a consumer's opinion about the advertisement after being stimulated by advertising contents; (2) Brand attitudes refer to a consumer's evaluation about the endorsed brand after being stimulated by advertising copy; (3) Purchase intention presents a consumer's purchase intention to the advertising product after being stimulated by advertising contents.

3.3. Research Subjects and Sample Data

The subjects of the present study were users from Lion Travel website. The brand of Lion Travel was founded on 6 June 1985, with total capital up to 600 million New Taiwan Dollar (NTD) and with 2021 employees. It has been awarded the top service prize by Next Magazine and has been selected as the best travel agency for eight consecutive years (2005–2012) by the readers of Next Magazine. As the leader in Taiwan's tourism industry, Lion Travel was one of the top 2000 enterprises according to Common Wealth Magazine in 2013. Its website was ranked first among all the tourism websites in Taiwan (the service of Alexa.com was used to measure website traffic by random survey) and on the list of "top 20 enterprises that the 2013 graduates want to work in". The present study adopted a questionnaire survey method by delivering and collecting online questionnaires from random users of the Lion Travel website, the visitors to the web site are randomly selected when the screens "jump out" a small window asking for the willingness to participate in the survey. When a visitor presses on "Yes", the online survey is started. Total 1000 copies of questionnaires are distributed. Having deducted invalid ones with incomplete answers, 1000 questionnaires were sent and 512 valid questionnaires were collected, rendering a questionnaire response rate of 51%. Each collected questionnaire represented a valid sample. After the questionnaires were collected, the statistical software SPSS was employed to analyze the data and various statistical methods, including factorial analysis, reliability analysis, regression analysis, and ANOVA analysis, were utilized to test all the hypotheses mentioned above.

3.4. Analysis Method

The study adopted ANOVA analysis to examine the different effects of humorous advertisements on brand awareness and advertising effects and further used regression analysis to study the relationship between brand awareness and advertising effects.

4. Analysis Results

4.1. Reliability and Validity Analysis

Via factor analysis, the two extracted factors of brand awareness for the current study are shown below: the first one is "brand cognition" (feature value = 1.237, $\alpha = 0.84$) and the second one "brand memories" (feature value = 1.237, $\alpha = 0.84$). The common cumulative explained variances of the two factors amount to 73.556%.

Via factor analysis, the three extracted factors of advertising effects for the study include: first, "advertising attitude" (feature value = 3.446, $\alpha = 0.87$), second, "brand attitude" (feature value = 2.915, $\alpha = 0.81$), and third, "purchase intention" (feature value = 2.362, $\alpha = 0.86$). The common cumulative explained variances of the three factors amount to 82.732%.

4.2. The Impacts of Humorous Ads on Brand Awareness and Advertising Effects

4.2.1. The ANOVA Analysis of Humorous Advertisements on Brand Awareness

In this section, ANOVA analysis is adopted to investigate the variances of humorous ads on brand awareness. Humorous advertisements were analyzed and illustrated from three angles, *i.e.*, emotion-orientation, cognition-orientation, and society-orientation. Table 1 shows the results of brand awareness—different humorous advertisements differ significantly between their brand memories, recognition perspectives (4.16) and social perspectives (4.03) humorous advertisement reveal higher brand recall than emotional perspectives (3.27) humorous advertisement.

Table 1. ANOVA Analysis of Humorous Advertisements on Brand Awareness.

Variables		F Value	P Value	Scheffe Post-Hoc Tests
Humorous Advertisements	Brand Cognition	7.162	0.362	
	Brand Memories	11.531	0.012 *	Cognition-orientation (4.16) and Society-orientation (4.03) > Emotion-orientation (3.27)

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

4.2.2. The ANOVA Analysis of Humorous Advertisements on Advertising Effects

In this section, ANOVA analysis is used to study the variances of humorous ads on advertising effects. Humorous advertisements were analyzed and illustrated from three angles, *i.e.*, emotion-orientation, cognition-orientation, and society-orientation. Table 2 presents results of advertising effects—different humorous advertisements differ significantly between their advertising attitude and purchase intention, distinct humorous advertisement shows significant differences on advertisement attitudes; recognition perspectives (3.96) humorous advertisement present higher advertisement attitudes than social perspectives (2.06) and emotional perspectives (2.75) ones. Distinct humorous advertisement appears notable differences on purchase intention; recognition perspectives (4.25) humorous advertisement show higher purchase intention than social perspectives (3.46) and emotional perspectives (3.63) ones.

Table 2. The ANOVA Analysis of Humorous Advertisements on Advertising Effects.

Variables		F Value	P Value	Scheffe Post-Hoc Tests
Humorous Advertisements	Advertising Attitude	15.416	0.026 *	Cognition-orientation (3.96) > Emotion-orientation (2.75) and Society-orientation (2.06)
	Brand Attitude	22.738	0.583	
	Purchase Intention	37.163	0.000 *	Cognition-orientation (4.25) > Emotion-orientation (3.63) and Society-orientation (3.46)

Note: * $p < 0.05$.

4.3. The Correlation Analysis of Brand Awareness and Advertising Effects

(1). The Correlation Analysis of Brand Awareness and Advertising Attitude

The analysis results are shown in Table 3. Hypothesis 3 (H3) was examined and the results demonstrated that brand cognition ($\beta = 1.836 *$) and brand memories ($\beta = 1.617 *$) significantly impacted advertising attitude. Therefore, H3 is held.

(2). The Correlation Analysis of Brand Awareness and Brand Attitude

The analysis results are shown in Table 3. Hypothesis 4 (H4) was examined and the results presented that brand cognition ($\beta = 2.175 **$) and brand memories ($\beta = 2.051 **$) significantly impacted brand attitude. Therefore, H4 is held.

(3). The Correlation Analysis of Brand Awareness and Purchase Intention

The analysis results are shown in Table 3. Hypothesis 5 (H5) was examined and the results showed that brand cognition ($\beta = 2.324 **$) and brand memories ($\beta = 1.913 *$) significantly impacted purchase intention. Therefore, H5 is held.

Table 3. The Correlation Analysis of Brand Awareness and Advertising Effects.

Dependent Variable → Independent Variables ↓	Advertising Effects					
	Advertising Attitude		Brand Attitude		Purchase Intention	
	β	Beta	β	Beta	β	Beta
Brand Awareness						
Brand Cognition	1.836 *	0.174	2.175 **	0.206	2.324 **	0.224
Brand Memories	1.617 *	0.155	2.051 **	0.197	1.913 *	0.182
F Value	20.753		26.818		37.449	
P Value	0.000 ***		0.000 ***		0.000 ***	
R ²	0.312		0.378		0.423	
Adjusted R ²	0.026		0.033		0.041	

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$; Source: Prepared by the study.

5. Conclusions

Based on the results of the current study, humorous ads indeed have significant influences on brand awareness. The brand awareness and brand memories of cognition-oriented and society-oriented humorous ads are both stronger than those of emotion-oriented humorous ads, among which brand memories reached a significant level. The study concluded that the main purpose of emotion-oriented humorous ads relied on the tension and relaxation of consumers' emotions. However, overemphasizing humorous stimuli resulting from the interplay of emotional tension and release may weaken the appeal of products—when reacting to the emotions stirred by humorous ads, consumers' attention may be diverted from the products.

In effect, humorous ads indeed generate better advertising effects. The advertising attitude, brand awareness and purchase intention of cognition-oriented humorous ads were all higher than those of emotion-oriented humorous ads. Among these, the advertising attitude and purchase intention both reached significant levels. The study results demonstrated that cognition-oriented humorous ads necessitated more thinking and imagination to understand the incongruous elements and that using a

central path would lead to better advertising effects. Regarding the impacts of brand awareness on advertising effects, the study discovered that the ads of famous brands may leave better impressions on consumers and hence have better advertising effects.

Based on the research results, three suggestions are presented below:

- (1) Effects of humorous advertisement on brand awareness. The research findings show the significant effects of humorous advertisement on brand awareness, where the brand recognition of humorous advertisement from recognition perspectives and social perspectives and the brand recall are higher than from emotional perspectives. Tourism businesses therefore are suggested to focus on the recognition of humorous advertisements and allow consumers to thoroughly consider and understand the advertising contents and appeals through expert endorsement so as to enhance the brand awareness. On the other hand, when a general person is used as the advertisement endorser, an advertiser can simply attract consumer attention and enhance the brand awareness by broadly using humor as the advertising topic, rather than particularly sticking to certain humorous types of advertising contents.
- (2) Effects of humorous advertisement on effects of advertising. The research results actually present the stronger effects of humorous advertisement and advertising attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intention, as the effects on recognition perspectives are stronger than on emotional perspectives. In this case, tourism businesses are suggested to utilize advertising contents with appeals to humor. Advertisement with appeals to humor could enhance the persuasion and attention of consumers' brand attitudes. Especially, the recognition of humorous advertisement shows the function of Incongruity-Resolution and that the product-related information should be emphasized so that the audience could search for answers from the advertisement when they recognized experiences and expectations are distinct. This could be an effective way to engage with consumers and further assist in the effects of advertising.
- (3) Effects of brand awareness on effects of advertising. From the research results, brand awareness would affect consumer perceptions and attitudes. Products with high brand awareness could better acquire positive responses of consumers. For this reason, tourism businesses are suggested to include the product characteristics or brand in the humorous materials when applying humorous advertisement so that the humor has an effect on the use of the brand product. In this case, the advertising information would impress consumers more and present the humorous information by emphasizing the emotional connections to distinguish between the content appeal and the product.

6. Research Limitation

- (1) Research on different advertising media

Being restricted to time, finance, and manpower, print media, which reveal lower obstacles, are selected for the advertisement. The development of humorous materials is restricted to print media that it is suggested that future researchers, with sufficient finance and capability, could try various types of media to make the better effects of humorous advertisement.

(2) Including other independent variables or dependent variables

Since this research merely explores brand awareness, types of humorous advertisement, and effects of advertising, there are various factors in the effects of advertising. The successive research could include other independent variables or dependent variables in order to understand the effects of consumers on the effects of advertising.

Author Contributions

Wan Yu Chang and I Ying Chang have involved in conceived and designed the experiments and analyzed the data. Wan Yu Chang performed the experiments and wrote the paper. I Ying Chang contributed research materials and analysis tools. I Ying Chang also participated in literature review research and giving thought of the conclusions. Both authors have been involved in the preparation and have approved the submitted manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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