

Research Article

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The Influence of User-Generated Content (UGC) on Purchase Decisions of Local Culinary MSMEs

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Abstract: *The digital growth of social media has transformed how consumers obtain product information and evaluate culinary businesses. This study examines the influence of user-generated content (UGC) on purchase decisions among consumers of local culinary enterprises (MSMEs), with cultural and community closeness as a mediating construct and platform use as a comparison factor. A quantitative explanatory survey was conducted with 200 selected respondents, comprising 100 Instagram users and 100 TikTok users exposed to UGC about local culinary MSMEs. UGC was operationalized through review quality, source credibility, visual appeal, and user interaction. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), while cross-platform differences were assessed through Measurement Invariance of Composite Models (MICOM) and Partial Least Squares Multigroup Analysis (PLS-MGA). UGC positively affected cultural and community closeness ($\beta = 0.727, p < 0.001$) and purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.397, p < 0.001$). Cultural and community closeness also positively affected purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.387, p < 0.001$) and mediated the UGC–purchase relationship ($\beta = 0.281, p < 0.001$). Visual appeal showed the strongest reported contribution to UGC ($f^2 = 2.257$). PLS-MGA identified a significant platform difference in the UGC–purchase relationship ($p = 0.036$), with a stronger relationship among Instagram users.*

Keywords: *User-Generated Content; Purchase Decision; Local Culinary MSMEs; Cultural and Community Closeness; Social Media.*

Introduction

Digitalization has changed how market information is created, circulated, evaluated, and converted into consumer action. Social media platforms have become environments in which consumers discover products, compare alternatives, share experiences, and participate in market meaning. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as internet-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content, while Appel et al. (2020) and Dwivedi et al. (2021) emphasize interactive, networked marketing environments. Consumers therefore do not simply receive firm messages; they also produce reviews, photographs, videos, recommendations, comments, and narratives that can influence other consumers.

This transformation is particularly relevant for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including local culinary businesses. Culinary products are experiential, visually demonstrable, socially discussable, and closely associated with personal taste and local identity. A customer can transform a consumption experience into a public recommendation by posting a photograph, video, review, or comment. Such content may remain visible to prospective customers after the original transaction, reducing the distance between consumption, communication, and purchase consideration.

One of the most consequential manifestations of this transformation is User-Generated Content (UGC). UGC refers broadly to consumer-created material distributed through digital platforms, including reviews, photographs, videos, comments, recommendations, and experiential narratives. Daugherty et al. (2008) and Muntinga et al. (2011) show that consumers engage with brand-related social media content through different forms of consuming, contributing, and creating. From a marketing perspective, this means that the consumer is simultaneously an audience, information source, evaluator, and potential advocate. Kozinets et al. (2010) similarly explain that social media marketing increasingly involves networked co-production of narratives, while Schivinski and Dabrowski (2016) show that user-generated communication can shape brand-related outcomes, where market meanings are developed through consumer-to-consumer communication rather than being controlled entirely by firms.

UGC is closely connected to electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Cheung and Thadani (2012) conceptualize eWOM as an important form of digital interpersonal communication, while Erkan and Evans (2016) demonstrate that information quality, credibility, usefulness, and information adoption are relevant to purchase-related responses in social media environments. More recent evidence also indicates that information credibility and usefulness can shape information adoption and online purchase intention (Ngo et al., 2024). UGC is therefore not influential merely because it exists; its value depends on perceived quality, credibility, usefulness, and social context.

For local culinary MSMEs, UGC is important because prospective customers cannot fully evaluate food quality before consumption. They may therefore rely on the experiences of other consumers to reduce uncertainty. Filieri et al. (2018) found that the perceived helpfulness of online consumer reviews is related to consumers' evaluation processes and purchase intention. Similarly, research in social commerce shows that information quality, reputation, communication, and word-of-mouth can contribute to trust, which is associated with purchase-related outcomes (Kim & Park, 2013; Meilatinova, 2021). Consumer-created information can therefore become part of the evidence used in a decision.

The present study conceptualizes UGC through four dimensions: review quality, source credibility, visual appeal, and user interaction. Review quality captures the extent to which consumer-generated information is perceived as clear, relevant, informative, and useful. This dimension is consistent with the information-adoption perspective, in which consumers assess whether information is sufficiently useful to support judgment (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Filieri et al. (2018) further demonstrate that characteristics of online reviews influence perceptions of helpfulness, which can subsequently affect purchase-related evaluations. For culinary MSMEs, a review that describes taste, portion, price, service, location, and consumption experience may provide more decision-relevant information than a vague positive statement.

The second dimension is source credibility. In an environment characterized by abundant content, consumers must determine whether the person producing a message is believable. Source credibility may involve expertise, honesty, authenticity, and consistency. Kim and Park (2013) demonstrate the importance of trust-related characteristics in social commerce, while Ngo et al. (2024) highlight information credibility in eWOM-based purchase processes, while Saskara and Achmad (2024) similarly report a role for source credibility in social-media purchase interest. Research on influencer authenticity likewise shows that sincerity, truthful endorsement, expertise, visibility, and uniqueness can shape consumer responses (Lee, 2021). The underlying issue for UGC is whether consumers trust both the message and its source.

The third dimension is visual appeal. Visual content is particularly important for culinary products because food can be communicated through color, texture, presentation, portion size, atmosphere, and consumption context. Instagram, in particular, is strongly associated with visual communication, and Izzati

et al. (2024) report a relationship between Instagram visual content and purchase-related responses, while short-form video platforms provide opportunities to show preparation, serving, tasting, and reactions. Cahyono (2023) identifies Instagram as a potentially important social-commerce platform for local food transactions, and Philp et al. (2022) demonstrate that visual characteristics of food content are associated with social media engagement. Recent research on Instagram food content likewise suggests that visual appeal and information quality can contribute to consumers' purchase-related responses. Therefore, visual appeal deserves attention not simply as an aesthetic attribute but as a potential carrier of product information and experiential cues.

The fourth dimension is user interaction. Social media differs from conventional advertising because communication can continue through comments, replies, sharing, tagging, and other forms of participation. Customer engagement theory emphasizes customer participation in value creation through interactive behaviors (Brodie et al., 2011), and de Vries et al. (2012) show that vivid and interactive social-media characteristics can stimulate user responses. In social commerce, interaction can also contribute to trust and social support (Hajli, 2015; Liu et al., 2021). For local culinary MSMEs, interaction may include replies to comments, consumer-to-consumer recommendations, and community discussion, making products more socially visible and locally embedded.

The present research adds Cultural and Community Closeness as a mediating construct. Local culinary products are not simply functional objects; they may carry meanings related to locality, tradition, shared experience, neighborhood identity, family practice, and community participation. Consumers may therefore respond differently to content that communicates not only what a product is, but also what the product represents within a local social environment. This perspective is consistent with the broader view that social media content strategies operate within cultural contexts rather than in a culturally neutral environment. Li et al. (2026), using a meta-analysis of 148 empirical studies and 869 effect sizes, show that culture can moderate the effectiveness of social media content strategies. In the local culinary context, cultural and community closeness may therefore help explain how UGC becomes translated into purchase-related behavior.

The mediating role of Cultural and Community Closeness is theoretically meaningful because UGC can operate through both informational and relational pathways. On the informational pathway, consumers use reviews, photographs, videos, and recommendations to evaluate product attributes. On the relational pathway, the same content can communicate belonging, familiarity, local identity, and shared experience. Social commerce research has repeatedly emphasized the importance of social support, trust, and community interaction in shaping consumer behavior (Hajli & Sims, 2015; Liu et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022). This study therefore proposes that UGC may affect purchase decisions directly while also affecting purchase decisions indirectly through cultural and community closeness.

The platform comparison between Instagram and TikTok provides a second important dimension of the study. Pratama and Astarini (2025) likewise provide evidence from Indonesian Instagram and TikTok users that eWOM quality, quantity, credibility, and provider expertise are associated with purchase intention. Although both platforms enable users to create and consume content, their content formats and interaction patterns differ. Instagram has historically emphasized image-based presentation and curated visual profiles, whereas TikTok is strongly associated with short-form video, algorithmic discovery, and participatory remixing. Omar and Dequan (2020) demonstrate that TikTok use involves watching, sharing, and creating video content, highlighting its participatory nature. Cahyono (2023) also identifies Instagram as a relevant social-commerce environment for local food transactions. These differences raise an empirical

question: does the relationship between UGC and purchase decisions operate with similar strength across the two platforms?

Existing studies provide substantial evidence that eWOM, social commerce, content quality, credibility, trust, and engagement affect consumer behavior, but several gaps remain. Much of the literature emphasizes purchase intention or general social-commerce behavior rather than purchase decisions within local culinary MSMEs. UGC is also often treated as a single construct, while cultural and community closeness has received less attention as a mechanism. Platform differences are frequently discussed conceptually but less often tested through measurement-invariant multigroup analysis.

These gaps motivate the present study. It investigates whether UGC influences purchase decisions, which UGC dimension shows the strongest reported contribution, whether the UGC–purchase decision relationship differs between Instagram and TikTok users, and whether Cultural and Community Closeness mediates the relationship. The study uses 200 respondents, equally divided between Instagram and TikTok users, and applies PLS-SEM, MICOM, and PLS-MGA.

Laksono et al. (2026) further demonstrate the relevance of eWOM credibility and usefulness for purchase decisions in Indonesian online food delivery. The study contributes by integrating UGC, cultural and community closeness, and purchase decisions in one model and by combining measurement, structural, mediation, and multigroup analyses. For practitioners, the findings provide a basis for prioritizing content quality, visual presentation, interaction, and local cultural-community narratives.

Method

This study employed a quantitative explanatory design to examine the relationships among User-Generated Content (UGC), Cultural and Community Closeness (CCC), and Purchase Decision (PD). The model specified UGC as the exogenous construct, CCC as the mediating construct, and PD as the endogenous construct. UGC was operationalized through four dimensions: Review Quality (RQ), Source Credibility (SC), Visual Appeal (VA), and User Interaction (UI). The design followed the logic of variance-based structural equation modeling, which is appropriate for examining complex predictive relationships and latent constructs (Hair et al., 2019, 2022; Shmueli et al., 2019).

The population comprised Instagram and TikTok users who had encountered UGC concerning local culinary MSMEs. Purposive sampling was used. Eligible respondents were users of either Instagram or TikTok who had seen consumer-generated content about local culinary products and had obtained product information through reviews, photographs, videos, comments, or recommendations. A total of 200 respondents participated, consisting of 100 Instagram users and 100 TikTok users. Data were collected using a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire measured RQ, SC, VA, UI, CCC, and PD; PD contained ten indicators, while the other constructs were represented by three indicators each.

PLS-SEM was used to evaluate the measurement and structural models. The measurement model was assessed through outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, and HTMT. Discriminant validity was interpreted using HTMT, consistent with Henseler et al. (2015). Structural evaluation considered R^2 , Q^2 predict, path coefficients, and effect-size information. Indirect effects were examined to assess the mediating role of CCC. Finally, MICOM was conducted before PLS-MGA to establish measurement comparability across Instagram and TikTok groups (Henseler et al., 2016). PLS-MGA was then used to determine whether structural relationships differed significantly between the two platform groups.

Results and Discussion

Measurement Model Assessment

The measurement model showed satisfactory reliability and convergent validity. All outer loadings exceeded 0.70, ranging from 0.737 to 0.896. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.770 to 0.929, composite reliability from 0.867 to 0.940, and AVE from 0.609 to 0.748. These values indicate that the indicators consistently represented their respective constructs.

Visual Appeal had the highest loading range (0.840–0.896), followed by Cultural and Community Closeness (0.835–0.859), Review Quality (0.811–0.867), Source Credibility (0.804–0.843), User Interaction (0.787–0.882), and Purchase Decision (0.737–0.822). The results are consistent with prior research emphasizing information quality, credibility, and interaction in digital consumer environments (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Ngo et al., 2024; Brodie et al., 2011).

Table 1. Measurement Model: Validity and Reliability

Construct / Dimension	Indicators	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Review Quality (RQ)	3 (RQ1–RQ3)	0.811–0.867	0.794	0.879	0.709
Source Credibility (SC)	3 (SC1–SC3)	0.804–0.843	0.770	0.867	0.685
Visual Appeal (VA)	3 (VA1–VA3)	0.840–0.896	0.832	0.899	0.748
User Interaction (UI)	3 (UI1–UI3)	0.787–0.882	0.785	0.875	0.700
Cultural and Community Closeness (CCC)	3 (CCC1–CCC3)	0.835–0.859	0.801	0.883	0.716
Purchase Decision (PD)	10 (PD1–PD10)	0.737–0.822	0.929	0.940	0.609

Structural Model and Predictive Relevance

The model explained 53.1% of the variance in Purchase Decision ($R^2 = 0.531$) and 52.8% of the variance in Cultural and Community Closeness ($R^2 = 0.528$). All reported Q^2 predict values were positive, including 0.451 for Purchase Decision and 0.522 for Cultural and Community Closeness, indicating predictive relevance.

The R^2 result suggests that UGC and Cultural and Community Closeness jointly explain a substantial portion of Purchase Decision in the sample. It should nevertheless be interpreted as evidence for the specified model rather than as proof that UGC is the only determinant of purchasing. Price, availability, prior experience, service quality, perceived value, and other consumer characteristics may also contribute to purchase decisions.

Table 2. R^2 and Q^2 predict Values

Construct	R^2	Q^2 predict
Visual Appeal (VA)	0.693	0.688
User Interaction (UI)	0.557	0.549
Cultural and Community Closeness (CCC)	0.528	0.522

Purchase Decision (PD)	0.531	0.451
Source Credibility (SC)	0.582	0.579
Review Quality (RQ)	0.574	0.569

Hypothesis Testing

Four structural relationships were tested. UGC significantly affected Cultural and Community Closeness ($\beta = 0.727$, $t = 19.963$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a strong positive association. UGC also significantly affected Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.397$, $t = 5.959$, $p < 0.001$). The latter result is consistent with eWOM research showing that information quality, usefulness, and credibility can contribute to purchase-related responses (Erkan & Evans, 2016; Filieri et al., 2018; Ngo et al., 2024).

Cultural and Community Closeness significantly affected Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.387$, $t = 6.262$, $p < 0.001$). In a local culinary context, food can carry meanings related to locality, familiarity, shared experiences, and community identity. Thus, UGC may provide both product information and social-cultural cues. This interpretation is consistent with research on local food and social commerce, which highlights the relevance of social context and local-market characteristics (Cahyono, 2023; Syarif et al., 2025).

The indirect effect of UGC on Purchase Decision through Cultural and Community Closeness was also significant ($\beta = 0.281$, $t = 5.835$, $p < 0.001$). Because the direct UGC $\rightarrow$ Purchase Decision relationship remained significant, the pattern indicates complementary mediation in the estimated model. UGC is therefore associated with purchase decisions both directly and through a cultural-community pathway. This pattern is theoretically useful because it avoids reducing UGC to a purely promotional stimulus. Consumers can use UGC as an informational shortcut when formal product information is incomplete, while simultaneously interpreting the content as evidence of social acceptance and local relevance. The combination is particularly meaningful for MSMEs, where reputation may be developed through repeated consumer interactions rather than through large-scale advertising. The result also accords with social-commerce studies showing that trust, social support, and information characteristics can operate together in shaping consumer responses (Hajli, 2015; Liu et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Table 3. Structural Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	UGC $\rightarrow$ CCC	0.727	19.963	<0.001	Supported
H2	UGC $\rightarrow$ PD	0.397	5.959	<0.001	Supported
H3	CCC $\rightarrow$ PD	0.387	6.262	<0.001	Supported
H4	UGC $\rightarrow$ CCC $\rightarrow$ PD	0.281	5.835	<0.001	Supported

The Relative Contribution of UGC Dimensions

The four UGC dimensions showed different reported levels of contribution. Review Quality had outer loadings of 0.811–0.867 and $f^2 = 1.345$; Source Credibility had 0.804–0.843 and $f^2 = 1.393$; Visual Appeal had 0.840–0.896 and $f^2 = 2.257$; and User Interaction had 0.787–0.882 and $f^2 = 1.259$. Visual Appeal therefore showed the strongest reported contribution to the UGC construct.

Table 4. Relative Contribution of UGC Dimensions

UGC Dimension	Outer Loading	f^2
Review Quality (RQ)	0.811–0.867	1.345

Source Credibility (SC)	0.804–0.843	1.393
Visual Appeal (VA)	0.840–0.896	2.257
User Interaction (UI)	0.787–0.882	1.259

The result is relevant to culinary marketing because food is highly visual. Photographs and videos can communicate presentation, portion, texture, atmosphere, and consumption experience before physical trial. Research also shows that visual characteristics of food posts are associated with social-media engagement (Philp et al., 2022). However, Visual Appeal should be interpreted as the strongest reported contributor to UGC representation, not as proof that it is the strongest direct predictor of Purchase Decision.

UGC and Cultural and Community Closeness

The strongest structural relationship in the model was UGC → Cultural and Community Closeness ($\beta = 0.727$). This indicates that consumer-created content is strongly associated with perceived cultural and community proximity in the local culinary context. Food consumption is frequently embedded in places, traditions, family practices, celebrations, neighborhood networks, and shared memories. When consumers post their experiences, these local meanings can be reproduced in digital form. A photograph, review, recommendation, or comment may therefore communicate not only product attributes but also familiarity, locality, and social recognition.

This interpretation is consistent with social-commerce research emphasizing social support and trust. Hajli and Sims (2015) argue that social commerce can generate social support and influence consumer behavior, while Liu et al. (2021) show that social support can influence purchase intention through social trust. Wang et al. (2022) likewise report a positive overall relationship between trust and purchase intention in social commerce. The present study does not treat trust as a separate mediator, but Cultural and Community Closeness represents a related relational pathway connecting social communication with consumer action. For local culinary MSMEs, this relationship has strategic significance because the meaning of a product can be strengthened when consumer narratives connect the food with recognizable places, traditions, events, or community experiences. Such content may increase familiarity without requiring the business to control every message. The finding is also compatible with Li et al. (2026), who demonstrate that cultural context can condition the effectiveness of social-media content strategies. Thus, local cultural meaning can be considered part of the communication environment in which UGC is interpreted.

Cultural and Community Closeness as a Mediating Mechanism

The significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.281$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that UGC can be associated with Purchase Decision through Cultural and Community Closeness. A consumer may encounter a food post because of its visual appeal, then evaluate its review, comments, or recommendations, and subsequently perceive the product as familiar, locally meaningful, or socially recognized. That interpretation provides a plausible relational route from UGC to purchase decision.

This finding extends social-commerce research emphasizing information quality, trust, and social support. Kim and Park (2013) identify information quality, communication, and word-of-mouth referrals as trust-related factors, while Meilatinova (2021) finds that information quality and reputation contribute to trust and satisfaction in Indonesian social commerce. The present model adds cultural-community closeness as a mechanism within the local culinary setting.

Instagram and TikTok: Multigroup Analysis

MICOM results indicated that the requirements for measurement invariance were satisfied, allowing PLS-MGA to compare the Instagram and TikTok groups. The UGC → Purchase Decision relationship differed significantly between groups ($p = 0.036$), with a coefficient difference of 0.289 and a stronger relationship in the Instagram group. The other relationships did not differ significantly: UGC → Cultural and Community Closeness ($p = 1.000$), Cultural and Community Closeness → Purchase Decision ($p = 0.126$), and the indirect effect ($p = 0.170$).

Table 5. PLS-MGA Results: Instagram versus TikTok

Relationship	Coefficient Difference	p-value	Interpretation
UGC → CCC	0.002	1.000	Not significantly different
UGC → PD	0.289	0.036	Significantly different
CCC → PD	-0.196	0.126	Not significantly different
UGC → CCC → PD	-0.142	0.170	Not significantly different

The result should be interpreted as a sample-specific platform difference rather than evidence that Instagram is universally more effective than TikTok. The platforms differ in content format and user practices. Omar and Dequan (2020) highlight watching, sharing, and creating behaviors on TikTok, while Cahyono (2023) identifies Instagram as a relevant environment for local-food social commerce. Recent research on food UGC on Instagram also links content sharing with social connection and social-commerce processes (Lian & Wong, 2026). The present findings suggest that platform context affects the direct UGC-to-purchase pathway, while the cultural-community mechanism remains statistically comparable.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The findings support an integrated view of UGC in which review quality, source credibility, visual appeal, and user interaction jointly represent consumer-generated communication. The significant mediation pathway further suggests that UGC should be understood not only as information but also as a social and cultural process. The PLS-MGA result adds evidence that platform context can affect the direct translation of UGC into purchase decisions. From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that businesses should design conditions that make consumer participation easy and meaningful rather than simply asking customers to post content. Clear product presentation, accessible information, responsive communication, and recognition of customer contributions can support the creation of useful UGC. The objective is not to manufacture positive reviews, but to create satisfactory consumer experiences that naturally generate credible and informative content. This distinction is important because credibility is central to the usefulness of eWOM and to consumer trust.

For local culinary MSMEs, the practical implications are clear. Visual quality deserves strategic attention because Visual Appeal had the strongest reported contribution to UGC. Businesses should encourage authentic, clear, and attractive customer photographs and videos while ensuring that visual representations accurately reflect the product. Businesses should also facilitate useful reviews, respond to

comments, and encourage consumer interaction. Cultural and community elements can be integrated through stories about local ingredients, traditions, places, and shared experiences.

Finally, content practices should be adapted to platform characteristics without assuming that one formula works everywhere. The significant Instagram–TikTok difference in the direct UGC-to-Purchase Decision relationship indicates that platform context matters in the studied sample. However, the absence of significant differences in the cultural-community and mediation pathways suggests that local identity and community relevance may operate relatively consistently across platforms. Accordingly, platform strategy should combine adaptation with consistency: the format and presentation can vary by channel, while credibility, useful information, authentic interaction, and local relevance remain central principles. This approach is also consistent with contemporary social-media marketing research emphasizing customer journeys, engagement, eWOM, and context-sensitive content management (Appel et al., 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that User-Generated Content (UGC) is significantly associated with both Cultural and Community Closeness and Purchase Decision among consumers of local culinary MSMEs. The structural results show a positive and significant effect of UGC on Cultural and Community Closeness ($\beta = 0.727$, $p < 0.001$) and on Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.397$, $p < 0.001$). Cultural and Community Closeness also has a positive and significant relationship with Purchase Decision ($\beta = 0.387$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, the indirect effect of UGC on Purchase Decision through Cultural and Community Closeness is significant ($\beta = 0.281$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that UGC operates through both direct and relational pathways.

Among the four UGC dimensions, Visual Appeal shows the strongest reported contribution, with $f^2 = 2.257$ and outer loadings of 0.840–0.896. This result highlights the importance of visual communication in culinary marketing, while not implying that visual appeal alone is the strongest direct determinant of purchase decisions. Review Quality, Source Credibility, and User Interaction remain important components of the broader UGC construct.

The multigroup analysis provides additional evidence that platform context matters. After measurement invariance was established through MICOM, PLS-MGA identified a significant difference in the UGC–Purchase Decision relationship between Instagram and TikTok users ($p = 0.036$), with a stronger relationship in the Instagram group. No significant group differences were found for the cultural-community pathway or its mediated effect.

Overall, the findings suggest that local culinary MSMEs can strengthen digital marketing by encouraging credible consumer content, improving visual presentation, facilitating interaction, and communicating local cultural and community meanings. Future studies should consider larger and more diverse samples, additional platforms, longitudinal designs, and other determinants of purchase decisions such as price, perceived value, trust, service quality, and prior consumption experience.

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