

A COMPARATIVE RESEARCH TO IDENTIFY THE FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE BRANDING IN ELECTRONIC COMMERCE IN VIEW OF THE CUSTOMERS AND THE FIRMS

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ÖZET

Günümüzde pazarlama kavramına köklü değişiklikler getiren, yeni bir yön veren ve geleceğini belirleyen bazı ciddi oluşumlar yaşanmaktadır. İşletmelerin pazarlama programlarını, strateji ve uygulamalarını değiştiren trendlerin başlıcaları; bilgi teknolojilerindeki gelişmeler, internetin ticari amaçla kullanımı, küreselleşme sonucu değişen dünya ekonomisi, iş hayatında müşterinin artan değeri ve müşteri beklentilerinin değişimidir. Bu makalede, sözkonusu köklü değişimin en önemli unsuru olan internetin ticari amaçla kullanımı kapsamında, işletmelerin elektronik ortamda markalaşmaya yönelik çabalarının ve elektronik ortamda markalaşmayı etkileyen faktörlerin karşılaştırmalı bir araştırma sonucunda analizi amaçlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler : Marka, Elektronik Marka, Elektronik Ticaret

ABSTRACT

Today, some changes that affect the meaning of marketing and a new concept of marketing are experienced. The trends that change the marketing plans of the firms, strategies and applications are; developments in the information technologies, use of internet for the commerce, the world economy that has changed because of globalization, the increasing value of customers and changes in the expectations of the customers. In this article, using of internet for the commerce that is the most important effect of this radical change, the analysis of branding of firm in the electronic commerce and the factors that affect the branding in electronic commerce are examined based on data collected by questionnaires.

Keywords: Brands, Electronic Brands, Electronic commerce

Introduction

One of the most important changes we have been experiencing recently is the introduction of internet that has changed our lives especially the way we do business and the way we shop. Besides these changes, internet provides a new platform for marketing and commerce, in turn, branding has become more important for the firms than before.

In our study, we attempt to find the factors that affect branding from consumers' and firms' point of view. In this paper first, general information about brand and brand management is presented, then information about electronic commerce and electronic brands are given. The research in this paper is based on two questionnaires, one of which is applied to the customers using

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internet and another one which is applied to the firms that carry out their operations on the electronic media.

1. Brand

Brand can be defined as a value-adding process that increases the value of a product by packaging, naming, and positioning and promoting it in the customers' mind. The American Marketing Association describes the brand as follows; "brand is a name, a term, a sign, a symbol or a combination of these to determine and distinguish the products of a firm from the others."

A brand essentially includes a promise. This promise consists of continuously submitting some properties, benefits and services to the customers. A strong brand guarantees that this promise is fulfilled. A general branding process involves three steps: In the first step, customers are offered a brand, which is useful for them. In the second step, firms attempt to persuade their customers to try the brand. In the third step, the firm makes the customers who try and see the benefit of the brand, decide to buy it. Firms practice different promotion methods to make their customers buy their products for the first and repeating times (Tsiames and Siomkos, 2003:8). A firm having a strong brand will gain high market penetration, less risk, more sale and more profit. Besides these properties, a brand is a marketable intangible asset and has a market value.

According to Kotler (2000:406) firms reduce marketing costs by means of their brand. Because they are stronger against the wholesalers and retailers stemming from customer loyalty, they do not compete on price and can expand their product line.

2. Electronic Commerce

In the human history, few innovations have had potential benefit as much as electronic commerce. The global structure of technology, low costs, the possibility to reach the masses, interactive media, including many choices and innovations that assist electronic commerce present opportunities to firms, people and society. Today we can benefit from some of these opportunities and we are going to start to benefit from the other opportunities parallel to the expansion in electronic commerce. Accordingly, electronic commerce is buying, selling and exchanging knowledge, products and services over computer networks using internet.

According to Kalakota and Whinston (1997), electronic commerce is, in terms of communication, a transfer of knowledge, goods and services over telephone wires, computers and other electronic instruments. It is, in terms of work process, technology applications for the work process automation, and in terms of services, an instrument to satisfy the expectations to decrease the costs, to improve product quality, and to accelerate the delivery of services.

On the other hand, electronic commerce decreases the cost of production, delivery, inventory and etc. compared to the classical methods. Electronic commerce allows the innovation of extremely specific works. For example,

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internet pages that just sell dog toys are designed (www.dogtoys.com). In electronic commerce, it is possible to work without any inventory, decreasing operating costs. Depending on this change, firms gain an important competitive advantage. Electronic commerce, renewing the organizational process, increases the efficiency. Electronic commerce, carrying the communication to the internet, decreases the communication costs. Furthermore, electronic commerce improves customer services, creates new business opportunities and partnerships, eases the processes, shortens the delivery periods, reduces transportation costs, eases to reach to the information, and increases the elasticity.

When electronic commerce is examined from the point of view of the customers, it is possible to shop from any place at any time and at any hour. It is possible to shop in www.amazon.com at any time, 24 hours a day and from any place around the world. As electronic commerce becomes more popular, the number of people working at home and shopping from home increases every day and as a result this prevents traffic jams and air pollution. Living standards of people with low income increase with electronic commerce since the price of the products decrease. The people living in underdeveloped countries can reach to new products in the developed markets. Public services, protective health services, education services are delivered with less cost and more quality (Turban and others, 1999:15).

3. Electronic Brands

Printed press, television and radio developed the brands in classical markets. However, the increasing number of operations and potential of electronic commerce has made it necessary to plan new methods for electronic branding (brand of firms on internet) (Uslu and Bayraktar, 2000:2).

Electronic commerce increases the similarities of firms compared to the classical markets and there is only one way left for the firms to differentiate from the others, which is electronic branding. Electronic branding process requires disciplined efforts as in classical markets. Electronic brand is a value that can be gained after proper planning, practicing, introduction and continuity in the virtual world.

What the customers want from the electronic markets is not different from what they want from the classical markets. Some of the questions that must be answered by the electronic brands are what they sell, how the customers can trust them and why customers must buy (Pentilla, 2001:12). First, an electronic brand must satisfy a customer need, which occurs now or will occur in the future. While the proper product or service is offered, electronic brand must target a position with a form, properties, function, suitability, resistance, reliability, repairing, style and design which distinguishes it from the others. An electronic brand does not need any selling staff, but needs experienced staff that guides and helps customers while they are visiting the web page. In electronic commerce, the customer cannot check-out the product at the cashier and walk out of the shop. The product sold must be delivered to the customer

at the right time and with the best service (Öncü, 2002:39).

Electronic brands must find ways to reach the customers successfully. It is accepted that the value of the brand is proportional to the number of customers who are willing to pay the price to purchase it. The key criteria in electronic branding are the value of the benefit offered, communication strategies, different characteristics, online experience, strategic partnerships, focusing on the customers, promises, openness to innovation and content (Tsiames and Siomkos, 2003:5).

As it is mentioned above, the most important point of branding is communication. Classical marketing used one sided communication that was from firms to the customers; in electronic media communication is two sided and much more interactive (Ersoy and Karalar:2004:9). In electronic branding, this property must be considered and used in communication.

3.1. The Elements of Electronic Branding and Electronic Brand Name

An electronic branding has a direct effect on the buying decision of customers from the web page. As in classical firms, electronic firms try to be different, to be distinguished, to be known and to be searched by the name. The distinguishing characteristic of the electronic brand must be mentioned every instance and must be made known.

Chiagouris & Wanslet (2003:10) describe the electronic branding process in four steps; informing the customers about the electronic brand, adding value to the electronic brand by communication, creating a positive image of electronic brand and gaining the trust of the customers to decide to buy, deliver and provide after sale services as promised.

Another subject which is as important as the elements of electronic branding is what the name of the electronic brand will be. In electronic branding process, first of all, a name that is parallel to the aim, easy to be remembered and easy to find must be decided. Keeping in mind that internet is an international market, the possibility that the name has a negative meaning in other languages must be considered. Having a name in a foreign language might be an advantage for the firms. Studies show that the brands having a name in French give more pleasure to the customers than the brands having name in English. Using a name in a foreign language can be labeled as an advantageous action in terms of brand positioning (Leclerc and others, 1994:269).

Al and Raula Ries states that the name must be, in addition to being special, short, simple, denoting about the product or the service, unique, personalized, pleasant-sounding and striking (Ries, 2000:70).

4. Research

Besides the improvements in technology, use of internet in commerce has deeply changed marketing studies. Since internet decreases the differences among firms, competition becomes difficult and the value of branding in electronic media becomes much higher than classical markets.

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In this study, the factors that affect electronic branding are examined comparatively from the viewpoints of the firms and the customers.

4.1. The Scope and Method of Research

Data is gathered by sending questionnaires via electronic mail. In the study, two questionnaires have been used to collect data. One for the customers using internet, other for the firms conducting commerce in the electronic media. Both questionnaires contain multiple choice questions and prepared according to the Likert scale. While the questionnaire for the customers contains 31 questions, the questionnaire for the firms contains 27 questions.

4.2 The Target Group, Sample Size, and Data Collection Method of the Questionnaire for the Customers

The First Questionnaire was sent to 250 customers via electronic mail. 204 customers, 81.6% of participants, answered the questionnaire.

The questionnaires were structured to collect data easily. So, easy to answer questions that are not very complicated are selected. In analyzing period of the results, first of all the general profile of the participants were determined. Analyses includes, calculating percentages, means, and standard errors. Based on 95% confidence level, chi-square test was applied. All the statistical processes were conducted by using SPSS.

4.3. The Hypothesis of the Questionnaire for the Customers

The questions in the questionnaire for the customers are formed depending on the subjects in the references. The data are examined to find out the accuracy of the hypothesis.

1. The service in internet page effects the electronic branding positively.
2. Gaining the trust of customers eases electronic branding.
3. Internet users are interested in the advertisements on the net.
4. A membership system for the users facilitates the electronic branding by helping to the communication between electronic brand and users.
5. The effect of personalization of web pages is important for electronic branding.

4.4 The Findings and Evaluations of Questionnaire For Customers

The data about demographic properties such as age, education, earning are important to classify the customers.

- 4.9% of are 15 – 25 years old, 53.9% are 26 – 30 years old, 35.3% are 31 – 40 years old and 5.9% are 41 – 50 years old.

- 6.9% are high school educated, 74.9% university educated, 16.6% are master degree educated, 2% are doctorate degree educated. 110 of the group are women, 94 are men.

- 32 of the participants earn 0 – 1.000 YTL, 164 earn 1.001 – 2.000 YTL, 8 earn 2.001 – 5.000 YTL per monthly.

- 1% use internet for 1 – 6 months, 2% for 6 months – 1 year, 16% use for 1 – 3 years, 81% use for 4 and above years.

- 45% of the participants have not shopped on the net yet, 5% have shopped once 37.3% have shopped twice or three times, 12.7% are shopping periodically.

The answers to 12 – 31 questions in customer questionnaire, that are prepared by 5 scale Likert are analyzed. This analysis shows that the subject the customers most agree is that there must be technical characteristics of the goods sold on the net besides price.

Table 1. 12 –31. Questions of Customer Questionnaire

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Not Sure		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Question 12 : The branded goods have what I want.	4	2,0	26	12,7	42	20,6	104	51,0	28	13,7
Question 13 : When I buy a branded good, I feel much more comfortable.	10	4,9	26	12,7	30	14,8	110	53,9	28	13,7
Question 14 : I think shopping on the net is safe enough.	14	6,9	58	28,4	68	33,3	58	28,4	6	3,0
Question 15 : I use the net for reaching to knowledge more than shopping.	4	2,0	8	3,9	2	1,0	94	46,0	96	47,1
Question 16 : I easily find the goods or services I am looking for on net.	4	2,0	12	5,9	58	28,4	108	52,9	22	10,8
Question 17 : The goods on web must be put into order by the criteria such as the most sold, the most searched, the cheapest, and the newest.	4	2,0	28	13,7	22	10,8	110	53,9	40	19,6
Question 18 : In the web page, there must be technical information in addition to price information.			4	2,0	10	4,9	72	35,3	118	57,8
Question 19 : I want to know how many people checked the item I am looking at.	16	7,8	60	29,4	22	10,8	84	41,2	22	10,8
Question 20 : It will not be easy to return the product I bought on net.	14	6,9	26	12,7	82	40,2	70	34,3	12	5,9
Question 21 : I am not sure that the my private information will be secure.	16	7,9	14	6,9	68	33,3	84	41,1	22	10,8
Question 22 : The pages I am going to shop must be a tested one.	6	3,0	6	3,0	8	3,9	76	37,2	108	52,9
Question 23 : The good I buy on net will meet its cost.			14	6,9	94	46,1	80	39,2	16	7,8
Question 24 : I would like to be able to change the color, design and content of net page.	26	12,7	104	51,0	32	15,7	34	16,7	8	3,9
Question 25 : If the page I shopped before offers promotions this will lure me to shop again.	8	3,9	4	2,0	16	7,8	124	60,8	52	25,5

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Question 26 : The advertisements on the net are usually misleading.	6	2,9	42	20,6	110	53,9	34	16,7	12	5,9
Question 27 : There are too many advertisements on the net.	8	3,9	32	15,7	44	21,6	84	41,2	36	17,6
Question 28 : I am not interested in the advertisements on the net.	12	5,9	54	26,5	44	21,6	64	31,3	30	14,7
Question 29 : Net pages requires too much private information for registration.	8	3,9	34	16,7	32	15,7	100	49,0	30	14,7
Question 30 : The electronic mail sent by the electronic brand that I registered will be safer than the electronic mails sent by other electronic brands.	8	3,9	12	5,9	38	18,6	104	51,0	42	20,6
Question 31 : Brands are tools firms use to mislead the customers.	36	17,6	104	51,0	48	23,5	12	5,9	4	2,0

Table 2. Answers Of Questionnaire For The Customers

	Frequency	Average	Standart Deviation	Standart Error		Frequency	Average	Standart Deviation	Standart Error
Question 12	204	3,6436	0,90970	0,06401	Question 22	204	4,4592	0,71852	0,05132
Question 13	204	3,6400	0,97733	0,06911	Question 23	204	3,6100	0,71586	0,05062
Question 14	204	2,9010	0,96201	0,06769	Question 24	204	2,4300	0,98486	0,06964
Question 15	204	4,3564	0,78015	0,05489	Question 25	204	4,1111	0,71089	0,05052
Question 16	204	3,9433	0,78682	0,05536	Question 26	204	3,0396	0,83363	0,05865
Question 17	204	3,7822	0,95265	0,06703	Question 27	204	3,6061	0,99561	0,07075
Question 18	204	4,5050	0,67099	0,04721	Question 28	204	3,2700	1,13292	0,08011
Question 19	204	3,1782	1,20030	0,08445	Question 29	204	3,6162	0,97384	0,06921
Question 20	204	3,2400	0,93099	0,06583	Question 30	204	3,8119	0,93269	0,06562
Question 21	204	3,4747	0,95952	0,06819	Question 31	204	2,2079	0,83835	0,05899

Chi square test is applied to see whether there is relation between the age, gender and education and the answers and it is found that there is a statistically meaningful relationship 5% level of significance.

When answers given by women and men are analyzed by chi-square test, meaningful differences are found for the questions 12 – 13 – 14 – 18 – 25. Men believe more than women that branded goods have what they want; they feel satisfied when they use branded goods and find it safe to shop on net. On the other hand, women want more than men that there must be technical properties of the goods besides price; promotion make it easier to shop again.

When education and the answers to the questions 3 – 20 – 21 – 23 – 29 and 31. are analyzed by chi-square test, statistically meaningful differences are found. High school educated participants are much more undecided than other groups that branded goods have what they want, university educated participants think that it will be easy to return the goods bought on the net. Participants that have Ph.Ds are not sure that giving personal information is not safe, but high school educated participants are sop much concerned about this issue.

High school and Ph.D graduates think that the goods bought on the net are what they want. Master and high school graduates think that excessive questions are asked when a purchase is made. Groups other than high school graduates say that brand is not a tool to confuse the customers.

When the gender is a variable, it is found that women give more importance to security than men.

4.5 The Sample, Target Group and Data Collection Method of the Questionnaire for the Firms

The Second Questionnaire prepared for the firms on the net includes 27 questions. It is sent to 150 internet pages working and updated via electronic mail. They are chosen from 1.000 pages. 52 firms, 34.6% of participants, answered the questionnaire.

4.6 . The Hypothesis Of The Questionnaire For The Firms

The data of the questionnaire for the firms are analyzed to verify the hypotheses below.

1. Firms on the net are trying to develop their brands as in classical markets.
2. Firms try different ways of branding on the net than the classical markets.
3. Firms have competitive advantage of price due to their electronic brands.
4. Firms give importance to communication for electronic branding.
5. While electronic brands are performing their works, they consider the suggestions and opinions of the customers.

4.7 The Findings and Evaluations of Questionnaire For Firms

- 53.8% of the firms get their names from classical markets and 46.2% have a special name for net.
- 67.3% of the firms choose their names from the advice of the owners/directors of the firms, 5.7% from personnel's advice, 5.7% by the opinions of customers, 21.3% are using the name in classical markets.
- 36.5% of the firms are part of the classical firm, 63.5% are a new firm.
- 25% of the firms sell service, 11.5% sell goods, 63.5% sell both service and good.
- In 86.5% of the firms registration is needed to shop, 13.5% of the firms is need not.
- 63.5% of the firms use electronic media to advertise, 5.7% classical media and 30.8 use both.
- 13.5% of the firms use net just for communication and 86.5% use net for sale.

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Table 3. The Answers of The Questionnaire For Firms

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Not Sure		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Question 8 : By making researches, meetings, questionnaires, we look for what is important for our customers.	5	9,6	3	5,8	7	13,5	28	53,8	9	17,3
Question 9 : We know what our customers think about our goods/services.	13	25,0	4	7,7	1	1,9	24	46,2	10	19,2
Question 10 : We give importance to how our goods seen to our customers and what the customers feel about the goods.	1	1,9	6	11,5	9	17,3	21	40,4	15	28,9
Question 11 : We follow the changing opinions and behaviors of our customers.	2	3,8	2	3,8	8	15,4	30	57,8	10	19,2
Question 12 : We don't need to discount to affect and have our customers.	5	9,6	26	50,0	12	23,1	7	13,5	2	3,8
Question 13 : Customers know why our brand is important for them.	5	9,6	16	30,7	11	21,2	16	30,8	4	7,7
Question 14 : Our communication plan includes every way we can communicate with our customers.	1	1,9	11	21,2	15	28,8	13	25,0	12	23,1
Question 15 : Our organization, operations and working plan are parallel to our brand value.	4	7,7	15	28,9	17	32,7	14	26,9	2	3,8
Question 16 : Our development program is planned to strong brand.	4	7,7	13	25,0	22	42,3	8	15,4	5	9,6
Question 17 : We know to which extent our brand differentiate us from other firms.	4	7,7	19	36,6	14	26,9	9	17,3	6	11,5
Question 18 : Everyone in our organization can tell what our brand is.	4	7,7	14	26,9	19	36,6	14	26,9	1	1,9
Question 19 : Our personnel from top to bottom everyone in our firm think that our brand is our most important value.	5	9,6	16	30,8	12	23,1	14	26,9	5	9,6
Question 20 : If our brand is not in the market, customers will notice its lack.	3	5,8	20	38,5	15	28,8	10	19,2	4	7,7
Question 21 : We try different branding methods in electronic market than classical markets.	2	3,8	7	13,5	15	28,8	24	46,2	4	7,7
Question 22 : What our brand name adds to our brand is important.	5	9,6	22	42,4	15	28,8	5	9,6	5	9,6
Question 23 : Our net page is designed specially to affect users.	1	1,9	3	5,8	10	19,2	22	42,3	16	30,8
Question 24 : Customers can reach us by telephone, fax, e-mail and mail.	1	1,9	4	7,7	3	5,8	30	57,7	14	26,9
Question 25 : The page is designed by the help of the opinions and suggestions of customers.	5	9,6	3	5,8	5	9,6	18	34,6	21	40,4
Question 26 : Customers can change the design, color of the page and personalize it.	17	32,7	23	44,2	3	5,8	6	11,5	3	5,8
Question 27 : We give importance to the safety of the private information of our customers.	1	1,9	6	11,5	5	9,6	24	46,2	16	30,8

When the data are analyzed, it is found that firms having electronic brands can also be reached by telephone, fax, e-mail and mail. Another important issue for the firms is that they pay attention to the suggestions and opinions of the customers. Firms protect the private information about their customers. Firms design their net pages in order to attract the customers and be easy to use. Firms are also interested in the customers' behaviors and changing opinions and needs.

Design and color of the net pages can be changed and personalized. The firms cannot have not benefited from advantage on internet sales yet, so they need to make discounts to influence the customers. What the brand name adds to the brand seems to be important. On the other hand, firms organize themselves and carry out their operations according to their brand values and they try different ways than classical markets.

Table 4.The Analysis Of Answers

	Frequency	Average	Standard Deviation		Frequency	Average	Standard Deviation
Question 8	52	3,634615	1,13809	Question 18	52	2,884615	0,963121
Question 9	52	3,269231	1,509647	Question 19	52	2,961538	1,170914
Question 10	52	3,826923	1,042643	Question 20	52	2,846154	1,055046
Question 11	52	3,846154	0,915758	Question 21	52	3,403846	0,955061
Question 12	52	2,519231	0,980004	Question 21	52	2,673077	1,097612
Question 13	52	2,961538	1,154047	Question 23	52	3,942308	0,958214
Question 14	52	3,461538	1,128274	Question 24	52	4,000000	0,907485
Question 15	52	2,903846	1,014785	Question 25	52	3,903846	1,272016
Question 16	52	2,942308	1,055582	Question 26	52	2,134615	1,172041
Question 17	52	2,884615	1,148808	Question 27	52	3,923077	1,026056

To analyze the answers chi-square test is performed at 5% significance level, but no statistically meaningful results are found.

Depending on the results of the research, electronic branding period is not a one-sided work; both the customer expectations and firm activities affect the results, but depending on the interactivity property of net in the market at the time of buying customers are stronger. The firms that will satisfy all the needs of the customers will gain an important advantage.

Result and Suggestions

The innovations in information technologies that have an impact on other disciplines have also affected marketing deeply. Especially, the use of net in marketing activities allows firms to gain a competitive edge. Commerce in electronic media has decreased the strength of the big firms in classical markets and started a new period in which small – big all firms will be stronger if they use the special properties of this new media. In this period, electronic branding will be the firms' most important competitive advantage.

The brands in classical markets are important since they play an important role in comparison and purchase decisions. Electronic media is substituting this role of brand. In this media, firms must solve the problem of buying a good without physically seeing and touching a product.

In the research, data are analyzed to evaluate the expectations of customers and the thoughts of the firms about electronic media.

The analyses of the questionnaires for the customers reveal that hypotheses 1, 2 and 4 accepted but hypotheses 3 and 5 are rejected.

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The analyses of the questionnaires for the firms reveal that hypotheses 1, 2, 4 and 5 hypothesis are accepted but hypothesis 3 is rejected.

When the results of both questionnaires are analyzed together, it is seen that customers are using net but it is difficult for them to shop on the net, security is a problem for firms trying to brand but they are at the beginning of the work and they have not gained anything from their electronic brands yet.

Results show that our firms passed the first step, learning about electronic brand, of the electronic branding process that is divided into four steps by Chiagouris&Wanslet and our firms are at the second step, providing more information for the customers. In third step next a positive image will be formed and the trust of the customers will be gained. In the last step, the buying and after buying procedures will be completed as promised.

In the future to answer the questions of the customers about electronic commerce, the facilities under the heading of PR will be useful; the news, articles, opinions of experts, conversation meetings, fairs, and exhibitions about electronic commerce will be helpful. Carrying electronic commerce out of electronic media to press, TV, radio and publicized advertisement will strengthen the communication with customers. Promotional activities to facilitate the first and subsequent shopping will have a positive effect on electronic commerce.

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