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PAPERS PUBLISHED IN THE JOURNAL EXPRESS THE VIEWPOINTS OF INDEPENDENT AUTHORS.

STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING IN A HETEROGENEOUS AND UNCERTAIN BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT: INTEGRATED MODELS FOR ANALYSIS AND FORECASTING SVITLANA SUVOROVA, MAKSYM PYLYPENKO, ROMAN TOLPEZHNIKOV, OLENA KOVTUN, YANA TSEBRO	114
SYNERGISTIC APPROACHES TO STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT: MODELS AND IMPACT ON THE PERFORMANCE OF ORGANIZATIONS ALLA DOMYSHCHE-MEDYANYK, VIKTORIA ZELICH, MARYNA NOVIKOVA, TETIANA BIELSKA, DIANA RAIKO	120
THE DUALISTIC MYTHOMODEL OF S. CHERKASENKO'S DRAMA "THE PRICE OF BLOOD", PARTICULARLY IN ITS PHILOSOPHICAL, SPATIO-TEMPORAL CHARACTERISTICS MARIIA MOSHNORIZ, IRYNA ZOZULIA, NATALIYA RYMAR, SVITLANA KARPENKO, ALLA STADNII	126
THE MANAGEMENT OF FINANCES IN INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS: OPTIMIZING COSTS AND ENSURING SUCCESS THROUGH GLOBAL INVESTMENTS AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT TETIANA LOBUNETS, HALYNA VASYLEVSKA, HALYNA RIABENKO, OKSANA IVASHCHENKO, OKSANA KAZAK, SVITLANA KLIMENKO	131
THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE TOURISM BUSINESS: PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND IMPACT ON THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY NATALIIA CHORNA, NATALIIA KORZH, ALLA KIZIUN, NATALIA ONYSHCHUK, KATERYNA ANTONIUK	136
THE ROLE OF FINANCIAL AUDIT IN ENSURING THE RELIABILITY OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OLENA LYSCHENKO, LARYSA OCHERET'KO, IRYNA LUKANOVSKA, OLENA SOBOLEVATERESHCHENKO, INNA NAZARENKO	141
THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT LOGISTICS IN OPTIMIZING TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE ARCHITECTURES ANATOLII BOBRAKOV, HUANG XIAOYU, WU FEI, MYKHAILO KULIK, DMYTRO IVANENKO, OLEKSANDR GAVRYLOVSKYI	146
CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH MEDIA DISCOURSE: LINGUISTIC, PRAGMATIC, SOCIAL AND DIGITAL ASPECTS LIUDMYLA MIALKOVSKA, VITA STERNICHUK, VICTORIIA PETRUK, KATERYNA HONCHAR, TETIANA KNYSH, VICTORIA PANCHENKO, ANZHELIKA YANOVETS	151
ANALYSIS OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AS A BUSINESS MANAGEMENT TOOL OLHA PANCHENKO, OKSANA BALAZYUK, TETIANA PORTOVARAS, VITA ANDRIEIEVA, VOLODYMYR KOTKOVSKYY	157
ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATION CLUSTER LIUDMYLA HERMAN, OLEKSANDR FEDIRKO, YEVHENII KOSTYK, MARIANA SHKODA, INNA SOKHAN	162
CURRENT ISSUES IN THE CRIMINAL LEGAL PROTECTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN UKRAINE MYKHAILO AKIMOV, IRYNA POKHYLENKO, INNA CHERNIKOVA, BURYK ZORIANA	167
FEATURES, ATTRIBUTES AND CRITERIA OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL REGIMES (COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS) OLEKSANDR SKRYPNIUK, OLEKSII BURIACHENKO, VALENTINA ZGURSKA, NADIYA STOVOLOS, MYROSLAV BURYK	171
FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF FUTURE AND CURRENT SPECIALISTS IN THE LEGAL SPHERE, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AS A COMPONENT OF GENERAL PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OKSANA BALANAIEVA, OLENA MAMONOVA, NATALIA DYKHTA, OLENA ARDELIAN	177
LIABILITY FOR VIOLATION OF FAMILY RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS UNDER UKRAINIAN AND THE EU LEGISLATION VOLODYMYR VATRAS, ROMAN HAVRIK, MYKOLA STEFANCHUK, SERHII SABLUK, NADIJA BONDARENKO-ZELINSKA	181
PERFORMANCE STYLE OF A CONTEMPORARY CHORAL CONDUCTOR IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT ARTISTIC SPACE: FROM REHEARSAL TO MEDIA PRESENTATION YULIIA PUCHKO-KOLESNYK, ADRIANA SKORYK, LYUDMYLA SHUMSKA, IRYNA SHEVCHUK, INNA ANTIPINA	185
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE REPRESENTATIVE POWER OF UKRAINE IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES VALENTYNA GOSHOVSKA, LYDIIA DANYLENKO, IRYNA DUDKO, VOLODYMYR GOSHOVSKYI, IHOR REITEROVYCH	189
TRAINING TEACHERS TO WORK IN THE CONDITIONS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION TAMARA ANDRIICHUK, IRYNA SHOSTAK, RENĀTE INDRIKA, YULIIA BOTUZOVA, NATALIIA DONII	194

D EARTH SCIENCES

THE USE OF GIS FOR ECOLOGICAL AND LANDSCAPE LAND MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS SERHII SHEVCHUK, SVITLANA GAPON, VADYM CHUVPYLO, SVITLANA NAHORNA, ROMAN KURYSHKO	200
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THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE TOURISM BUSINESS: PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND IMPACT ON THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY

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Abstract: Digital tourism is becoming increasingly relevant due to global technological innovations and consumer behavior changes. Adaptation to the new realities caused by digital transformation requires in-depth study and analysis of both theoretical and practical aspects of this topic. The modern tourism industry is looking for ways of efficient use of digital technologies to ensure sustainable development and increase competitiveness. The study aims to analyze the impact of digital marketing on tourism development. Modern technologies and their application in the tourism sector are the subject of this research. The methodological framework is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. These methods allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the topic under the study. The paper revealed that the integration of digital tools can significantly improve the quality of tourism services and help to adapt to the changing needs of customers. The use of digital technologies in tourism fosters the creation of new business models, expansion of market presence, and optimization of customer interaction.

Keywords: digitalization of tourism, competitiveness, small and medium-sized enterprises, sustainable development, digital transformation, data protection.

1 Introduction

In the last decade, the digital revolution has led to profound changes in many sectors of the global economy. The tourism industry, traditionally characterized by stability and predictability, now faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities due to the proliferation of digital technologies. The main aspects of this industry, from instant hotel booking to personalized travel recommendations based on artificial intelligence, are undergoing revolutionary changes.

This article aims to explore the role of digital technologies in transforming the tourism business and to examine the potential impact of these changes on the country's economy. We will investigate how innovative technologies affect entrepreneurs' strategies, consumer opportunities, and the interaction of various market participants in the context of the new digital era.

It is important to note that the impact of digital technologies on the tourism business goes beyond simplifying booking processes or improving user experience. They also provide opportunities to create new business models, promote global integration, and foster interaction among market participants. These technologies can strengthen the positions of small and medium-sized enterprises.

On the other hand, digital transformation in tourism requires regulatory bodies to adopt a new approach to policymaking in this area, especially regarding competition, user data protection, and sustainable development. Thus, digital transformation in tourism has opened up numerous opportunities for the industry, from online booking services to virtual tours and the use of artificial intelligence for personalized recommendations. However, such rapid and profound changes also present new challenges for government regulation.

One of the key issues is ensuring competition. With the emergence of major online booking platforms that control a significant market share, there is a risk of monopolies or oligopolies forming. This can lead to increased prices for consumers and insufficient innovation. Therefore, government agencies must study market dynamics and make necessary adjustments to legislation.

Users' data protection is another crucial aspect. Online services collect a vast amount of information about their users. This

information can be used not only for personalizing offers but also for manipulating prices or violating user privacy. Governments need to establish strict rules and standards for the storage and processing of personal data and continuously monitor their compliance.

Sustainable development in the context of digital transformation in tourism requires special attention from the academic community. On the one hand, digital technologies can contribute to ecological and sociocultural development, mainly by promoting ecotourism or "slow" tourism. On the other hand, uncontrolled resource utilization can devalue tourist destinations. Governments should actively collaborate with local communities and businesses to create sustainable development strategies.

Additionally, it's essential to consider the environmental dimension of digital transformation. Digital technologies can play a crucial role in supporting sustainable tourism by optimizing resource usage and reducing environmental impact.

This study is based on several key hypotheses. The first hypothesis predicts that the adoption of digital technologies in the tourism business increases the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises. It allows them to occupy niches that were previously accessible only to large corporations. The second hypothesis suggests that digital transformation can promote sustainable tourism, especially in terms of resource optimization and reduced environmental impact. Finally, the third hypothesis assumes that active digitization of the tourism industry requires new approaches to regulation by governments, particularly concerning user data protection and ensuring competition.

We will try to verify/falsify the above statements in light of a critical analysis of the current literature on the subject of our study and other information available during the research.

2 Literature review

The issue outlined in the title of this article attracts the attention of many scholars from different continents. The analyzed literature can be conditionally grouped into the following four thematic blocks:

- The basics of digital tourism and its role in the future.
- Digital marketing and its impact on the tourism business.
- Social media, internet marketing, and new technologies in tourism.
- The impact of digital tourism on regional development.

We would like to emphasize that this classification is relatively nominal. All the materials that we have reviewed relate to a single common problem area, which is tourism in the era of digitalization. However, they differ in terms of topics, focusing on one or another side of the phenomenon under study.

2.1 The basics of digital tourism and its role in the future

According to the research by E. Happ and Z. Ivancsó-Horváth (2018), digital tourism emerges as a future challenge, indicating new approaches to the tourism industry. At the same time, K.O. Kayumovich (2020) explores the prospects of digital tourism development, emphasizing the strategic importance of digital innovations for the industry. Additionally, a team of researchers led by M. Watkins (2018) suggests that digital tourism can be a key driver of economic development in many countries. It's also important to mention the work of T. Pencarelli (2020), who examines the digital revolution in the travel and tourism industry. L. Caravan (2017) investigates contemporary trends in promoting tourism services in the digital age.

Thus, by emphasizing the central place of digital tourism in the modern world, all these researchers confirm its huge potential and impact on the future of the tourism industry.

2.2 Digital marketing and its impact on the tourism business

Digital marketing plays a crucial role in the tourism industry today. In particular, A. Hassan and R. Rahimi (2016) emphasize the significance of augmented reality as an innovative tool in digital tourism marketing. J. R. Saura, A. Reyes-Menendez, and P. R. Palos-Sanchez (2020) underline the importance of fundamental digital strategies and trends in the tourism business. Meanwhile, B. P. Kushwaha (2020) examines personalized digital marketing in the context of tourism. On the other hand, S. Hudson (2014) focuses on the challenges of tourism marketing in the digital global economy.

The study of the impact of digital marketing on tourism continues to gain momentum. V. Mathew and M. Soliman (2021) investigate how digital content marketing influences consumer behavior in tourism based on technology acceptance models. G. Gupta (2019) explores the comprehensive application of digital marketing in the tourism industry. The primary focus of S. K. Deb, S. M. Nafi, and M. Valeri's (2022) research is on promoting the development of the tourism business through digital marketing in the "new normal".

S. Maurer (2021) thoroughly studies digital marketing in tourism, while N. P. R. Dewi (2020) concentrates on digital marketing strategies for tourism companies in the era of Marketing 4.0. Meanwhile, S. Riyadi (2019) presents digital marketing strategies to support the tourism economy, particularly by examining the case of "Atlantis Land Surabaya". T. Florićić (2018) focuses on the promotion of digital tourism and electronic marketing.

S. Carvalho and J. V. Carvalho (2020) discuss the consequences of digital marketing and e-commerce for the growth of the tourism sector. M. P. Ratiu and I. M. Purcarea (2015) reveal the advantages of digital tourism on the path to success in digital marketing. J. D. Santos and O. L. Silva (2019) provide a comprehensive overview of digital marketing strategies for the tourism and aviation industries. In conclusion, I. V. Hristoforova et al. (2019) offer methods for improving digital technologies in marketing communications for tourism enterprises.

2.3 Social media, internet marketing, and new technologies in tourism

M. Tairova, O. Khurramov, and N. Odinaeva (2021) emphasize the vital role of Internet marketing in digital tourism. K. O. Kayumovich (2020) explores the specifics of using social networks in digital tourism. L. Tsourgiannis and S. Valsamidis (2019) examine the reasons why Greek tourists use digital marketing applications like Airbnb.

A. P. Kontis and S. Skoultos (2022) investigate the digital evolution in tourism marketing channels, especially the Greek tourism industry and online travel agencies. M. H. Dewantara, S. Gardiner, and X. Jin (2023) provide a literature review on the ecosystem of travel blogs concerning the development of digital marketing. K. Skagias et al. (2022) offer the latest developments and recommendations in digital and influencer marketing for Mykonos.

F. Goenadhi and D. R. Rahadi (2020) determine the target audience of digital Tourism 4.0. I. N. Sudapet et al. (2019) focus on researching Indonesia in the field of tourism and digital tourism. Finally, P. Li-Xin (2016) examines the application of virtual reality technology in digital tourism systems.

2.4 The impact of digital tourism on regional development

A. Preko, G. K. Amoako, R. K. Dzogbenuku, and R. O. Boakye (2020) explore digital tourism and its role in sustainable regional development in developed countries. Z. Chiteka, S. Moyo, and

T. Matiza (2020) study the impact of digital tourism on rural communities. J. Clarke (2019) examines the connection between digital tourism and the sustainability of economic development, as well as the challenges and opportunities that arise in this context. D. Gursoy, M. Saayman, and M. Sotiriadis (2021) focus on the role of digital tourism in regional development and economic sustainability. Finally, B. Maksimchuk and T. Bilozero (2021) argue that digital tourism is a crucial factor for the sustainable development of the industry in all tourist regions worldwide.

Digital tourism has become a key area of research as technologies increasingly permeate the tourism sector. It affects various aspects, from marketing to the sustainable development of regions. The scholars emphasize the importance of digital tourism for regional development, especially in developed countries (Preko et al., 2020). Special attention is given to the impact of digital technologies on rural communities (Chiteka et al., 2020) and the relationship between digital tourism and sustainability (Clarke, 2019; Gursoy et al., 2021).

Furthermore, new opportunities and challenges faced by the tourism industry in the digital age are explored. They include marketing strategies, the use of social media, and the influence of virtual reality on tourism. Such studies highlight the depth and complexity of digital transformation in tourism, emphasizing the need for adaptation and innovation to achieve sustainable development (Maksimchuk & Bilozero, 2021).

Therefore, studying tourism digitalization plays a crucial role in contemporary research. It shapes new directions for the industry and points to possible ways to optimize practices in a rapidly changing world.

3 Aims

In light of the aforementioned, the article aims to analyze the current state of the travel industry during the digitalization era and to identify strategic directions for its development. Our research focuses on identifying the opportunities and challenges faced by the industry. We also aim to develop recommendations for various market players to achieve long-term success within the new digital reality.

4 Methodology

The methodology of this research is based on a comprehensive approach towards analyzing the scientific literature on digital tourism. First of all, research publications from databases containing scientific papers in the field of tourism were systematically reviewed. There were chosen relevant sources covering various aspects of digital tourism, including marketing, sustainable development, technology, and other key elements.

Each publication was reviewed per its content, key concepts, research methods, and conclusions to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the analysis. The main goal was to identify general trends, benefits, and challenges, as well as to determine the main directions of digital tourism development.

After that, based on the collected data, all the information was aggregated and systematized. It allowed us to identify key topics and issues that arise in the context of digital tourism, as well as to develop a balanced approach to their understanding and interpretation.

The triangulation methodology was applied to confirm the reliability and validity of the results, which involves comparing findings from different sources. This approach helped to ensure the unbiased and scientific accuracy of the results.

5 Results

In today's world, where technologies are rapidly changing our lifestyles, the tourism sector has not stayed away from these transformations. Digital marketing has turned out to be one of

the key tools that has dramatically changed the approach to the promotion and sale of tourism products. Through interactive platforms and social media, travel companies can now interact directly with their target audience, receiving real-time feedback and adapting to changing customer needs. This has not only increased the effectiveness of marketing campaigns but also helped to build long-term relationships with customers based on trust and a personalized approach.

Virtual reality, smartphone apps, and other digital innovations have opened new horizons for presenting tourist destinations and services. Nowadays, a potential tourist can virtually visit a hotel, restaurant, or natural park before making a travel decision. However, such innovations have also added convenience for consumers. They have forced tour operators, hotels, and other tourism businesses to be more innovative, adaptive, and competitive. Digital marketing has become the key to attracting new market segments and expanding their geographical presence.

As a result, digital marketing has played a crucial role in shaping the modern face of tourism. It has made tourism more dynamic, accessible, and adaptable to the rapidly changing needs of the modern consumer.

Modern tourism is facing numerous challenges, including both competition and changing consumer habits, as well as the need to harmonize development with the principles of sustainability and conservation of natural resources. In this context, digital tourism has proven to be not only an innovative marketing tool but also a powerful means of supporting the sustainable development of the industry.

Thanks to technology, tourism companies have gained the ability to ensure the rational use of natural resources. For example, by using intelligent resource management systems, hotels can optimize the use of water and electricity, which plays an essential role in preserving the natural environment.

In addition, digital platforms allow for the study and analysis of tourist behavior. As a result, they can direct tourists to less famous but no fewer interesting places, thus distributing the tourist flow and reducing pressure on the most visited locations. Such decentralization helps prevent the overloading of specific tourist destinations and promotes the development of less favored regions. The introduction of digital technologies also contributes to the development of cultural and historical tourism. Through virtual reality or augmented reality applications, visitors can immerse themselves in the history of a place and its cultural and traditional features (Pomaza-Ponomarenko et al., 2020). All this enriches their experience and deepens their knowledge of the region.

Therefore, digital tourism opens up new opportunities for the tourism business. It also makes an essential contribution to the sustainable development of the industry by offering innovative solutions for the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Digital tourism, despite its numerous advantages, also faces a series of challenges that may impact its further development. One of the main issues is ensuring the confidentiality and security of user data. In a world where data is becoming the most valuable resource, providing its protection is the responsibility of all market participants (Mrykhina et al., 2020).

The increasing dependence on digital technologies can also lead to a sense of alienation and isolation among tourists seeking an authentic experience and direct contact with the local culture. Therefore, there is a need to find a balance between using digital tools and ensuring deep immersion in the real environment. Additionally, the industry must adapt to rapidly changing technological standards and constant updates to marketing tools. Tourism organizations should be prepared for the swift implementation of innovations and continuous education of their staff.

However, alongside these challenges, digital tourism offers numerous prospects. Automation and business process

optimization can significantly enhance the quality of services and make tourism more accessible to a wider audience. Integration with other technologies, such as artificial intelligence or blockchain, can open new horizons for personalizing offers and ensuring transaction security.

Considering all the challenges and opportunities, it can be said that the future of tourism digitization looks highly optimistic. Through the combination of technology, innovative solutions, and strategic planning, the industry can reach new heights of success, offering tourists unparalleled experiences and discoveries.

6 Discussion

Digitalization of tourism, like any new phenomenon or concept, not only draws attention to its advantages and possibilities but also sparks debates regarding its impact on the tourism industry and society in general. At first glance, digitalization in tourism appears as an undeniable positive step forward. However, could it lead to the disappearance of the authenticity of the travel experience? If everything is optimized and digitized, will travelers lose the opportunity to serendipitously wander through the streets of an old city and discover something truly unique that is not mentioned in any guidebook?

There are also ethical and privacy questions related to digitalization. If tourism companies collect data about their clients to enhance personalized services, what is the moral threshold for this database? Besides, how can we ensure that this data won't be abused or sold to third parties?

Additionally, the impact of digital tourism on local communities is worth considering. On one hand, promoting a location through digital platforms can lead to increased tourist flows and economic development for the region. On the other hand, it can lead to an overload of tourism infrastructure, rising prices for essential goods and services, and a decrease in the quality of life for the local population.

In conclusion, the discussion aspects of digital tourism are limitless and require ongoing analysis and debate among industry experts. Only through a critical examination and discussion can we achieve the optimal balance between the opportunities and challenges brought about by the digital era in the field of tourism.

7 Conclusions

This study examined various aspects of digital tourism. They reflect current trends in the industry in the context of rapid technological progress. The implementation of digital technologies in the tourism business leads to increased competitiveness for small and medium-sized enterprises. This has allowed many such companies to carve out niches in the market that were previously primarily accessible to large corporations. Digital platforms, such as online booking services and social media, help attract new customers, optimize resources, and interact with the target audience.

On the other hand, digital transformation indeed contributes to the sustainable development of tourism, especially in terms of resource optimization and reducing environmental impact. Digital technologies enable tourism businesses to operate more efficiently and with fewer resource expenditures. Additionally, digital tourism can stimulate ecotourism and other forms of responsible tourism that promote sustainable development.

The active digitization of the tourism industry requires new approaches to legal regulation by governments. This includes the protection of user data and ensuring fair competition in the market. With the deepening of digitization in the tourism sector, there is a need for more stringent regulation to ensure consumer safety and the preservation of their confidentiality.

Thus, in the modern world, digitization is actively penetrating all aspects of life, and tourism is no exception. Today's travelers can only imagine a trip with mobile apps for hotel bookings, transportation tickets, virtual tours, or navigation. These and other digital tools significantly simplify travel planning, allow for faster responses to changes, and find optimal accommodation and entertainment options. However, despite all the advantages and conveniences offered by technological progress, it is essential to maintain sight of the essence of tourism itself. Tourism has always been and remains a way to explore the world and interact with other cultures, traditions, and history. Human relationships, direct contact with the local population, and the ability to experience the atmosphere of a new place shape the unique travel experience that any technology cannot replace.

Cultural exchange, in particular, allows tourists not only to see landmarks but also to gain a deeper understanding of the values, customs, and way of life of local residents. This is where the main "magic" of travel lies – in the ability to broaden horizons, learn something new, and create unforgettable memories. Therefore, while technologies open up numerous new possibilities, it is vital to preserve the values of authentic tourism, where human interactions and discovery through direct experience play a central role.

A multitude of factors determines the prospects for researching digital tourism in the future. Integrating new technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and blockchain will enable the tourism industry to create innovative, more efficient, personalized solutions for users. This, in turn, will open up new horizons for the sector and contribute to its development.

The environmental component also plays a crucial role in the future exploration of the topic. In the context of global climate change and increasing attention to sustainable development, digital tourism can become a powerful tool in combating the negative consequences of climate change. Digital solutions can help minimize the environmental footprint of tourism, optimize resources, and promote more environmentally friendly travel.

Additionally, the role of sociocultural aspects in digital tourism is becoming increasingly prominent. Modern tourists seek not only comfortable travel conditions but also deep cultural exchange, an authentic experience, and the opportunity for in-depth exploration of new places. Digital technologies can help meet these needs by providing high-quality content, virtual tours, and interactive cultural programs.

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