The Dual Effect of Social Media Information Disclosure on Consumer Purchase Decisions: Evidence from the Beauty Industry

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Abstract. This study is on the dualistic effect of social media information disclosure in the current consumer purchasing decision-making process. Focusing on the beauty and personal care industry, a sector heavily influenced by social media, the paper describes the current landscape of information disclosure, which includes user-called-out reviews, influencer endorsements, brand-generated content, and corporate sustainability communications. The analytical component develops into three main positive effects: enhanced trust through transparency, relational social proof, and improved consumer literacy. The analysis goes into three relevant issues: information overload, the proliferation of misinformation, and the reinforcement of algorithmic bias and filter bubbles. To tackle the challenges, the study proposed a strategic framework implementation of information curation systems that are user-centric, enhancement of multi-stakeholder verification and regulatory enforcement mechanisms, and promotion of algorithmic transparency. The conclusion restates some of the more critical points about the importance of a well-balanced approach towards the release of information to the health of the digital economy. The study has limitations, mainly the use of secondary data, so future research should be done empirically in the form of an experimental design and longitudinal research. This paper contributes to businesses, regulators, and consumers to drive a more trustworthy, efficient, and satisfactory digital marketplace.

Keywords: Social Media Disclosure, Consumer Purchase Decisions, Dual-Effect Mechanism, Beauty Industry, Information Overload

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

The architecture of global commerce has been altered by a seismic shift with the advent and proliferation of social media platforms, which have fundamentally reconfigured the pathways of consumer discovery, evaluation, and purchase. These platforms have expanded from simple digital environments for personal connection to complex, multifaceted commercial environments that effortlessly combine social connection, content creation, and transactional capabilities. This

transformation is quantified by projections that show that social commerce sales around the world are set to exceed $2.9 2.9trn by 2026, a number considered a monumental projection of the economic gravity of this channel. At the center of this commercial revolution is the phenomenon of information disclosure-a vast construct, including the voluntary or involuntary sharing of product specifications, user experiences, brand stories, corporate operational details, and influencer endorsements across social networks. This revealed information has become the primary fuel of decision-making engines for consumers, in effect replacing the unilateral power previously reserved for the traditional advertising and corporate-controlled messaging.

The consumer experience has entered a purchase journey where social proof is extensively mediated, in the form of peer reviews, the testimonials of not only micro and macro-influencers, but also live brand interaction in comment sections, and live-streamed shopping events. This paradigm change from a broadcast to a networked model of marketing communication requires critical and nuanced examination. The fundamental question that this paper seeks to address is not whether, but how the qualitative aspects (authenticity, credibility), quantitative aspects (volume, frequency), and presentational modes (video, image, text) of disclosed information on social media directly and indirectly impose their influences to the purchasing outcomes such as consideration, intent, conversion, and post-purchase satisfaction. A detailed knowledge of this impact is of utmost concern for various stakeholders. For businesses, it is critical to establish long-term brand trust, maximise marketing return on investment, and make it through the minefield of reputational risk. For regulators and policymakers, it is essential to find ways to write frameworks that will keep consumers from being manipulated in a fast-moving digital world and protect them from fraud. For the sake of society as a whole, it is essential to raise a population of digitally literate citizens who are able to recognise authentic information and alleviate broader failures in the market, as well as encourage ethical commerce. The commercial value of this piece of research is explicit in terms of informing strategy, while the social value is embedded in terms of advertising consumer welfare and market integrity.

1.2. Literature review

A large number of academic studies have paved the way for the understanding of the intersection between social media and consumer behavior with reference to information disclosure. Fundamental work has divided the landscape into significant areas of influence. Seppänen generated seminal findings about the importance of user-generated content (UGC), showing through empirical research that detailed, multimedia UGC, such as comprehensive unboxing videos or long-form written reviews, can be a powerful tool at reducing risk for consumers who might be considering making a high-involvement purchase [1]. Their work-built evidence for such content, helping to increase purchase confidence by providing vicarious, experiential knowledge, which cannot be obtained from static product descriptions.

Parallel research streams have gone into the emergence of the influencer economy. Chen did a more nuanced analysis, moving away from simple metrics such as the number of followers. Their findings underlined that perceived authenticity of an influencer and the strength of parasocial relationship, the one-sided, intimate relationship a follower perceives with a content creator, are much stronger determinants of purchase intent. This work moved the focus away from reach and towards relevance and relational depth of influencer marketing strategies [2]. Complementing this, there has also been scholarship on corporate disclosure practices. Brown & Lee examined the strategic disclosure of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) information on social media and determined that it is not a compliance exercise but that the strategic disclosure of ESG

information is a strategic asset. Their research showed that transparent and genuine communication of sustainability measures can positively improve brand equity and foster strong, established loyalty, particularly among the socially conscious Millennial and Gen Z cohorts [3].

However, in the academic dialogue, there are also some absolute acknowledgements of the potential downsides of this information-rich environment. Kim delved into what is called the "dark side" of social media commerce and found that all this information is potentially counter-productive. Too many choices, conflicting reviews, and the burden of social comparison have the potential to cause consumer confusion, anxiety, and decision fatigue, which can result in less-than-optimal choices or purchasing being abandoned altogether [4]. Collectively, these studies confirm that social media disclosure is a mighty and double-edged sword with complex, measurable impact on consumer cognition, affect, and behaviour.

1.3. Research gap

Despite the soundness of the current literature in looking at discrete components, UGC, influencer marketing, and corporate content, there remains a large gap of sorts. There is a dearth of integrated, holistic analyses considering the fact that the social media information ecosystem is a synergistic, sometimes contradictory, whole. Most extant studies take a siloed approach, examining either the positive impacts of authentic peer-review or the adverse effects of influencer deception, or the value that corporate disclosure can have strategically. Very few take a comprehensive and case-based approach to understanding how one consumer, at one point of their purchase journey, is simultaneously and sequentially exposed to these interwoven threads of information. How does a curated influencer partnership video interact with a thread of critical peer reviews and an official brand sustainability post in helping make the final decision? The absence of research that considers this doubling exposure restricts the amount of practical understanding of the consumer's lived, real-time experience that occurs within the context of the social media milieu. This paper identifies and attempts to fill this gap by offering a unified analysis, bringing together the combined force of these types of disclosure.

1.4. Research framework

To address this research gap, this paper will proceed with a clear three-phase analysis framework. First, it will provide a sufficiently concrete framework for study by providing an in-depth case description of social media information disclosure in the beauty and personal care industry. This industry is a perfect microcosm, characterised by its visual nature, significant dependence on subjective experience, and affluent online communities. Second, at the top of this case, the paper will implement a systematic analysis of the twofold impact. This section will not only list but will dissect the specific mechanisms through which disclosure not only establishes positive outcomes (e.g., trust-building, social validation) but also sows the seed for significant problems (e.g., overload, deception) simultaneously. Third, based on the identified issues, the paper will provide specific, actionable recommendations for platform designers, brands, and regulators. The logical flow is not haphazard: from describing what and how things are at present to critically discussing the so what consequences and finally proposing the next pathways to improvement.

2. Case study: social media information disclosure in the beauty and personal care industry

2.1. Industry overview and rationale for case selection

The global beauty and personal care industry, valued at over $500 billion, is a rich and compelling case study for examining disclosure information on social media. What makes it fertile ground for social media influence is its high visual appeal, reliance on subjective experiential qualities (e.g., texture, scent, efficacy on individual skin/hair types), frequent introduction of new products, and a keenly engaged and community-oriented consumer base. The situation regarding disclosure of information in this sector is a dynamic and multifaceted web woven by various information platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Pinterest, and specialised platforms such as Reddit.com/r/SkincareAddiction or MakeupAlley [5].

2.2. Types of information disclosure in the beauty industry

The categories of information that are made public are diverse, and these are used for different purposes in the consumer decision funnel:

User-Generated Content (UGC): This is the foundation of organic social proof. It involves "shelfie" photos of personal product collections, "empties" videos of completely used products, detailed blog or forum reviews of the ingredients and longer-term effects, as well as before-and-after shots of personal transformations. This content is usually very authentic due to its non-commercial nature.

Influencer-Generated Content: This is the range from macro-influencer celebrity endorsements to micro-influencer tutorials. Content includes professionally produced makeup tutorials ("GRWM" - Get Ready with Me), skincare routines ("10-step routine"), product comparison videos, and dedicated review channels. The one thing that is vital here is the disclosure (or lack thereof) of any commercial partnerships, which are governed by hashtags such as #ad, #sponsored, or #gifted.

Brand-Generated Content: Brands strategically utilise social media to disseminate information. This means launching new products with detailed ingredient lists, presenting manufacturing processes ("behind the doors") and publishing corporate sustainability reports or diversity reports, publicly answering customer questions, as well as offering educational leads from in-house experts.

2.3. Disclosure methods and transparency issues

Disclosure methods and transparency have a massive difference in these types. The transparency landscape varies significantly across these disclosure types, presenting distinct regulatory and ethical challenges. While regulatory frameworks, such as the U.S. FTC Endorsement Guides, mandate clear disclosure of material connections, compliance remains inconsistent. Influencers often bury #ad disclosures in lengthy captions, while UGC operates in a regulatory grey area where ethical standards are self-imposed. Brand disclosures, though more controlled, range from genuine transparency to 'greenwashing'—superficial claims unsupported by substantive action [6].

2.4. Consumer information-seeking behavior

Public reaction and consumer behavior within this ecosystem is, of course, characterised by sophisticated "crowdsourcing" of information. A consumer doing research on a new retinol serum, for example, will not go by one source. Their journey may include: watching a dermatologist influencer explain the science of retinoids on YouTube; seeing a paid promotion for a particular

brand on TikTok; reading dozens of negative reviews regarding purging effects on a blog; and finally, doing a search for before-and-after photos on Instagram using the product's hashtag. This is an ecosystem that produces a complex information environment in which marketing messages, non-marketing opinions from independent experts, and unflattering peer experiences are interwoven. The consumer's final purchasing decision is then a synthesis or, often, a battle between these competing flows of information disclosed, and makes the beauty industry an ideal lens through which to view the broader effect of social media disclosure on choice [7].

3. Dual impact analysis: benefits and challenges of social media information disclosure

3.1. Positive effects of information disclosure

3.1.1. Enhancing brand trust through transparency

In a time when consumers are increasingly sceptical of traditional corporate messaging, social media proactivity and comprehensiveness of information disclosure are strong instruments for creating perceived transparency and, consequently, trust. This process works by systematically reducing information asymmetry, the imbalance of the seller's knowledge of the product in favour of the buyer. When a brand uses the social channels to share detailed information not just for marketing purposes, but for discussing details about, for example, where the raw materials come from, how labour is treated ethically, details on environmental impact, or even candid discussions about how the product is limited, it communicates honesty, accountability, and the trust that the consumer has intelligence. This is especially powerful for lifestyle brands and value-driven brands. For example, a cosmetic company such as Lush heavily utilises social media to showcase its ethical purchasing practices, opposition to animal testing, and its "naked packaging" projects. This builds a narrative of integrity that is heard by its target audience and has a significant impact on the purchasing preference for the target monopoly over competitors who are not perceived by the public to be equally transparent. This fosters trust, which in turn leads to higher brand loyalty, a greater ability to withstand crises, and a willingness among consumers to pay a premium [8]. The disclosure is not a once-and-for-all thing but a dialogue about a continuous relationship where a sense of partnership is built between the brand and the consumer.

3.1.2. Facilitating relational social proof and community validation

Social media has transformed the concept of social proof to a level where it is no longer limited to local, word-of-mouth recommendations, but has become global, visible, and results from search. The psychological mechanism based on social learning theory suggests that people learn and make decisions by observing others. Platforms allow for a stage for this observation on a mass scale. Witnessing a user with the same skin tone successfully use a foundation, or reading a detailed review from someone of your age with similar hair concerns, offers a good source of tangible, credible proof that a generic ad cannot. This "relational" social proof is powerful because it is somehow personalised and authentic. For example, in the case of experience goods such as cosmetics, for which performance is not fully understood before buying, this vicarious experience is of invaluable value. It has a significant impact on reducing the perceived risk and psychological barriers to purchase. A consumer is more likely to trust the endorsement of a "skinfluencer" that they have been following for years than a glossy magazine ad. This validation streamlines the decision-making process because the consumer will feel supported by a community of peers, essentially

crowdsourcing confidence in the purchase [9]. This ecosystem also gives niche communities the ability to build around some regions of interest (cruelty-free beauty, skincare for melanin-rich skin, etc.), which advances the relevance and strength behind the social proof in those communities.

3.1.3. Support for the education of consumers and product literacy

Beyond marketing and validation, social media has developed as a formidable platform for consumer education, where product literacy has increased dramatically. A vast network of expert and enthusiast creators shares their content to demystify complicated topics. Board-certified dermatologists on YouTube explain the science of ingredients, such as hyaluronic acid, niacinamide, and SPF. Hairstylists on Instagram show the exact ways to do haircare routines. This educational disclosure gives consumers the power to be more informed, confident, and effective purchasers. They make a shift from purchasing products based on brand name or packaging to purchasing products based on understanding the ingredients list (a practice dubbed "skincaretainment" or " ingredient decoding"). This creates more power for the consumer to follow up with a better question or to be able to compare products in a more well-informed way, as well as the ability to select products based on their unique needs as opposed to generic trends. Brands themselves are part of this wave of education with 'how to' content and their own spotlight of ingredients, which not only help to educate, but to build brand authority and credibility. This increase in collective consumer literacy that is sparked by accessible social media disclosure leads to increases in market standards and pressures brands to innovate and communicate with greater substance [10].

3.2. Challenges and negative consequences

3.2.1. Information overload leading to decision paralysis

The democratisation of content creation, though an empowering force, has an essential negative parallel: crippling information overload. A consumer who wants to find a new moisturiser can easily find hundreds of 'best of' lists, thousands of conflicting review videos, millions of photos with the hashtag, and never-ending debates on forums. This avalanche of data, often contradictory, is so overwhelming to the cognitive processing capacity. The phenomenon of analysis paralysis sets in, where the fear of making a less-than-optimal choice impedes the ability to make any choice at all. The consumer gets stuck in a never-ending cycle of research, comparison, and second-guessing. This is exemplified in the "paradox of choice," where the more options a person has, the less satisfied they tend to feel. The cognitive weight and emotional energy required to wade through this noise can lead to decision fatigue, causing either decision abandonment (the path of least resistance) or a rushed, regrettable decision that concludes the stressful process. For businesses, this means lost sales and reduced conversion rates, despite having high engagement rates. The effect of high-level disclosure, originally intended to inform, can also have a contrary impact, creating an impediment to action and a poor consumer experience [11].

Survey data reveal the prevalence of these barriers (Table 1). Notably, over two-thirds of respondents cite conflicting reviews as a major obstacle, highlighting the challenges of navigating an information-rich environment.

Table 1. Consumer sentiment analysis on social media purchase barriers

Factor	Percentage of Respondents Reporting as a Major Barrier
Too Many Conflicting Reviews	68%
Difficulty Verifying Authenticity	55%
Overwhelming Volume of Options	62%
Pressure from Influencer Marketing	48%

3.2.2. Spreading of misinformation and deceptive practices in marketing

The low barriers to publishing one's opinion or message on social media, combined with the high stakes driving financial incentives, create a perfect breeding ground for misinformation and deception. The multifaceted problems are:

Exaggerated or False Claims: Products may be marketed with a "miracle cure" story for acne/ageing without any support from the scientific community.

Deceptive Visuals: The use of photo filters, special lighting, and photo editing software (e.g., FaceTune) can result in dramatically misrepresenting the results of products, making foundations appear poreless, or skincare results appear transformative overnight.

Fake Reviews and Engagement: The market for purchased fake reviews and followers distorts social proof, misleading consumers about the actual popularity and quality of a product or influencer.

Inadequate Sponsorship Disclosure: Despite guidelines, many influencers bury the #ad disclosure or use vague terms (#collab, #partner, #thankyou), which reduces the perception of a genuine endorsement and a paid advertisement.

The fact is that these practices are a fundamental violation of trust. Consumers who buy based on false disclosures often learn a lesson between the parties' expected' and 'got', and end up losing money, discarding goods, being disappointed, and cynical. On a macro level, this undermines trust in both individual brands and influencers, as well as in the social media platform as a source of credible commercial information, which could destabilise the entire social commerce model [12].

3.2.3. Algorithmic bias and perpetuating the filter bubbles

Social media platforms are based on proprietary algorithms that are used to curate and prioritise information disclosed to each user. While intended to be maximally engaging, such algorithms often have massive negative externalities. They have a basis of the logic of reinforcement, utilising what they have already interacted with by showing users more of the same. This can create filter bubbles or echo chambers where a consumer can homogenise their feed. For example, if a user shows an interest in a luxury skincare brand, the algorithm might constantly show them content about the brand and other similar, expensive products, rather than critical reviews or cheaper, equally effective alternatives. This limits the diversity of the information to which the consumer is exposed and may artificially narrow their consideration set.

Furthermore, the algorithmic bias can be used to increase the amount of extreme or emotional content (positive or negative) because it fosters greater engagement, skewing the overall view of a product's reputation. The consumer is no longer seeing an organic, balanced information landscape, but an algorithmically skewed one, with the potential to create biased, uninformed, or more expensive purchasing decisions [13]. The opacity of these algorithms ("black box" problem) often

makes consumers unaware of the way their informational diet is manipulated, which undermines their autonomy in the decision-making process.

This analysis reveals a fundamental tension: the same mechanisms that enable positive outcomes —abundant information, peer validation, and personalised content—also create the conditions for negative consequences when left unchecked. For instance, while relational social proof (3.1.2) enhances trust, algorithmic bias (3.2.3) can distort that proof; while consumer education (3.1.3) empowers informed choices, information overload (3.2.1) can paralyse decision-making. This duality underscores the need for balanced approaches to information disclosure that maximise benefits while mitigating risks.

4. Suggestions for optimisation

4.1. Intelligent, user-centric information curation system implementations

To help alleviate information overload and empower consumers, a paradigm shift in platform design is necessary, from engagement-maximising algorithms to user-empowering curation tools. Social media platforms and integrated retail websites should develop and deploy intelligent systems that enable users to efficiently and effectively navigate the vast amount of information. These systems need to go beyond the popularity measures of a one-size-fits-all approach.

Advanced Filtering and Sorting Options: Implement filters that permit a user to filter out reviews and videos by parameters, for example, "Verified Purchase Only," "Most Relevant to My Skin Type/Hair Type" (based on user-supplied profiles), "Content from Licensed Professionals" (i.e., dermatologist, cosmetologist), "Most Helpful Critical Review," etc.

Automated Consensus Summarisation: Use natural language processing, NLP, to read thousands of reviews and identify pros and cons that are most frequently mentioned to provide a neutral and bulleted summary of the most commonly cited positive and negative points, serving as an easy-to-read, balanced summary.

Personalised, Transparent Dashboards: Allow users to submit customised feeds to their users by weighting different types of information sources they prefer (e.g., 60% from experts, 30% from users with similar attributes, and 10% from brands). This returns hands to the hands that made them, and would be making information actively rather than passively. As a result, the cognitive load would be reduced, and decision paralysis would be avoided [14].

4.2. Strengthening multi-stakeholder verification and regulations enforcement

Problems such as misinformation and deceptive practices require a coordinated and multi-stakeholder approach to be treated and will require clear accountability.

Platform Accountability: Social media companies need more powerful detection and enforcement technologies. This includes AI tools to detect undisclosed sponsored content (billions of dollars are spent on this each year), as well as question and answer video testimonials and review networks, and to detect fake review networks. Penalties for violations should increase, progressing from demoting content to warning labels and ultimately suspending the accounts of egregious or repetitive offenders.

Regulatory Modernisation and Action: It is essential for governmental bodies, such as the FTC and its international counterparts, to create guidelines that are more specific to modern formats (E.g., requiring the use of on-screen verbal disclosures in videos, not just text) and allocate significantly more resources for enforcement and fines to be effective deterrents.

Independent Verification Badges: The creation of a trusted, third-party-audited verification system is crucial. This could include a universal "Verified Purchase" badge applied to reviews for which there is proof by use of purchase data, and a "Credential Verified Expert" badge for content creators who have evidence of a professional license [15]. This helps create a transparent and trustworthy tier of authentication within the platform ecosystem, allowing consumers to distinguish credible information from potential misinformation instantly.

4.3. Promotion of algorithmic transparency and more user control

To mitigate the negative impacts of filter bubbles and black box algorithms, it is essential to have commitments to transparency and user agency.

Algorithmic Literacy and Transparency Reports: Platforms should provide users with some basic and understandable depictions of how their feed and recommendations are generated. Publishing regular reports on transparency regarding the prevalence of misinformation and takedown can also create system accountability.

User-Controlled Algorithmic Preferences: Provide easy-to-use toggle switches or sliders within user settings, for example, and allow people to control their user's algorithmic experience. Options could be a pussy, listed as something like "Prioritise Diverse Viewpoints," or "Show Me More Critical Perspectives", or moreover, "Limit Repeated Content from the Same Source." This philosophy of design is called "algorithmic nudging towards well-being", being in tune with the mechanics of platforms and user autonomy [16].

Chronological or "Unranked" Feed Options: Always provide users the option to experience the content in a simple chronological order or "unranked", applying for specific searches, to strike the engagement algorithm and provide that user with a less curated stream of information.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Key findings

This study has made a full-fledged attempt to discover the multi-dimensional effect of social media information disclosure on the purchasing behaviour of consumers by taking the example of the beauty and personal care industry in detail. The analysis confirms the dualistic nature of disclosure as a powerful force. On the positive side it is an essential mechanism for bettering the perception of brand transparency and establishing important consumer trust in the industry; it is a powerful and relationally-based mechanism for social proof that reinforce choice in purchase decisions through community and peer observation; and it is an unprecedented medium for consumer education that increases dramatically the literacy in respect to products, and empowers more informed choices. On the other hand, the research has been capable of systematically identifying and expounding three serious systemic problems. The sheer volume of information being revealed may create a kind of cognitive overload and paralysis of choice, preventing the very transactions that social commerce is trying to facilitate. The phenomenon of misinformation and deceitful commerce processes, like false reviews and a lack of sponsorship disclosure, that affect the ecosystem from a lack of consumer confidence to poor outcomes, threatens the ecosystem. Finally, the black box algorithms regulating how the content is delivered can also lead to the creation of filter bubbles, limiting the diversity of information and possibly also influencing what consumers decide to consume without them being aware of it. The framework of strategies that are proposed, which would include intelligent curation, strong strengthening of verification, and algorithmic transparency, provides a coherent pathway to

offsetting these negatives and effectively recalibrating the social media marketplace to bring about more efficiency, trust, and user empowerment.

5.2. Research significance

The practical as well as the theoretical importance of the present paper is manifold. For marketing practitioners and brand managers, it provides a balanced and integrated approach to understanding the consumer journey in the social media age and notes that ethical and transparent disclosure is not only a legal requirement, but is an integral part of the competition value chain in a race to build long-term brand equity. For the policymakers and regulatory bodies, it flags some very specific areas to take action, ensuring their consumer protection aspect, as well as ensuring a fair digital market, from updating endorsement guidelines to ensuring platform accountability. For scholars, it fills an identified gap in the research literature by presenting a holistic analysis that acknowledges the simultaneous influence of multiple types of disclosure that will pave the way for more complex models of digital consumer behaviour that integrate clever. Ultimately, this study adds towards the greater societal effort towards creating a healthier digital marketplace, one which utilises the connective power of social media for commerce, while protecting against inherent risks in order to ensure more satisfying, efficient, and trustworthy exchanges for all participants.

5.3. Constraints & suggestions for further research

This research is not without limitations, and the following are also opportunities for future research. The main limitation is that it has utilised secondary data, primarily industry reports, academic literature, and case studies that have already been published. While this is certainly a broad and integrative analysis, it has the disadvantage of lacking granular and empirical validation of primary data collection. The suggestions, although they reach a logical conclusion based on their analysis, remain theoretical until they are tested in a real-world scenario. Future research should build on this structure by employing empirical methods. Experimental designs could A/B test different information curation interfaces to determine how they impact decision speed, satisfaction, and accuracy. Survey and interview-based research can be used to gain a more in-depth understanding of consumer perceptions of algorithmic bias and the desire for control. Longitudinal research can monitor the effect of changes to legislation (e.g., a crackdown on FTC regulations) on the nature of influencer disclosures and consumer trust distributions after implementation. Furthermore, the ability to test the generalizability of this integrated analytical framework to other industries, such as fashion, travel, or consumer electronics, would reveal some of the nuances specific to these sectors regarding the impact of social media disclosure.

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