The Influence of Xenocentrism on Purchase Intentions of the Consumer: The Mediating Role of Product Attitudes

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Abstract: Globally, xenocentrism has emerged as a significant concept to understand consumer behavior regarding local and foreign products. In this context and based on a sample of Colombian customers, this investigation aims to analyze both the direct and indirect effects of xenocentrism on the consumer purchase intentions of imported products through product attitudes and perceived product quality. Xenocentrism was measured using the XSCALE, and the research model was analyzed with partial least squares structural equation modeling. The result indicates that xenocentrism has a positive direct effect on purchase intentions, perceived product quality, and product attitudes. The analysis also shows that product attitudes will partially mediate the effect between xenocentrism and purchase intentions. In light of these findings, xenocentrism in Latin America arises as a solid construction to explain consumer behavior, mainly when individuals’ beliefs generate a positive appreciation of the purchase of imported products that compete in local markets. Moreover, these results permit designing sustainable marketing strategies that are more suited to the xenocentrism of Latin American consumers.

Keywords: Xenocentrism; product attitudes; purchase intentions; Latin America; XSCALE

1. Introduction

The study of global consumer behaviors is a challenging area. On the one hand, globalization has led to an improvement in the trade of services and goods beyond national borders. As a result, consumers around the globe have had additional opportunities to access more products from many other places than ever before. The need to understand consumer behavior in specific target markets has encouraged companies to improve their segmentation process, paying close attention to the cultural variables associated with their customers [1,2]. On the other hand, the commercial community has been required to discover how to efficiently address the Sustainable Development Agenda endorsed by the United Nations and, in particular, concerning its marketing strategies [3]. Therefore, marketers need to understand foreign market consumer behavior to be capable of designing practical sustainable marketing strategies.

The international marketing discipline has shown an in-depth interest in explaining differences in customer behavior. In fact, and beyond globalization, entering the mind of consumers and understanding their purchasing behavior are two of the biggest challenges for marketing researchers [4]. The literature indicates that new trends related to color, packaging, raw material, and environmental protection, among others, have affected customers’ perceptions of quality, durability, and benefits [5].
Authors point out as well that social, individual, time, financial resources, and attitudinal variables have affected consumer decisions [6].

Notwithstanding the above factors, there is growing globalization in many product sectors, but it seems that in other categories, the effects of globalization are null. Given this fact, research focused on the development of perceptions toward the purchase of domestic and foreign items is a relevant issue [7], and therefore scholars have shown interest in the subject [1]. In this line of work, several studies on the preference for domestic products indicate that internal bias can play a decisive role in purchasing behavior [8]. However, consumer segments in different countries have generated a propensity to prefer imported products regardless of quality, accessibility, warranties, and price. This tendency for foreign products can be found in developing and emerging countries as well as in developed countries [9,10]. Also, the preference for foreign products over local is not restricted to a single product category, even when a high antagonism toward a country exists [11]. In this context, examining the development of attitudes toward buying domestic and foreign items is a relevant topic. In particular, the current study approaches this consumption phenomenon through the concept of xenocentrism. While experiments have been conducted in order to analyze xenocentrism in the field of social science [12,13], little research in consumer behavior has been carried out to analyze this concept and its effect on consumer purchase intentions [14]. Although in international marketing researchers and marketing practitioners have paid close attention to consumer ethnocentrism, it is necessary to explain how preferences toward foreign products prevail beyond the comparison between those products and domestic products [15,16]. However, the analysis dedicated to detailing the attitudinal variables which display an indifference toward or maybe a preference for international purchases is mostly disregarded. This research shortage has persisted, although empirical evidence indicates that several groups of people are empathic towards purchasing foreign goods and services. Reference [17] stated that consumer xenocentrism could explain those preferences. Given this scenario, the purpose of this investigation is to analyze both the direct and indirect effects of xenocentrism on the consumer purchase intentions towards imported products through product attitudes and perceived product quality.

In general, the study of xenocentrism is related to two dimensions within the domain of sustainability. The first dimension is related to global identity. Global identity refers to the mental representations of consumers about the functional effects of globalization, their understanding of similarities and differences between people around the world, and how much these people are interested in world events [18]. Individuals with a global identity will not only be concerned about local problems but also their duty in communities and groups worldwide [19]. The acceptance of global identity is connected with the preference towards international products at the expense of local products, defined by pure xenocentrism. The second dimension is related to sustainable consumption. In Latin American countries, society is increasingly aware of the challenges associated with sustainable consumption, that is, the use of services and products that cover basic needs and provide a better quality of life, while minimizing environmental impacts, so that the demands of the coming generations will not be endangered. In that sense, when a consumer prefers to buy local products, it generates at least two effects: on the one hand, not benefiting unsafe or unfair working conditions, and on the other, reducing the environmental impact of its consumption. Thousands of imported products are currently traveling thousands of kilometers from their producer to the consumer, and therefore, the purchase of local products minimizes the generation of emissions associated with transport. If we can better understand the effects of the preference for imported products in Latin America, then we can generate better incentives to stimulate sustainable consumption. This study is oriented to the exploration of this concept through the consequences of xenocentrism.

The main contribution of this study is twofold. First, explaining the effect of xenocentrism on the intention to purchase using a scale explicitly proposed for developing countries enables improving the way of measuring the phenomenon. Second, assessing the mediating effect of the attitude toward foreign products between xenocentrism and the purchase intentions permits designing
sustainable marketing strategies more suited to the representation of the national identity of the Latin American consumers.

The remaining text is structured as follows. The next section presents an overview of this study’s conceptual framework and research model. Then, the research methodology is discussed, including the research design, the operationalization of the constructs, and the fieldwork. The following section presents the data analysis and the results, which leads to the discussion and conclusion set out in the final section.

2. Conceptual Framework and Research Model

2.1. Xenocentrism

In the context of consumer behavior, social identity refers to any category label with which an individual associates him/herself to achieve a positive self-image, accentuating similarities with a desirable reference group and contrasting differences with other reference groups that are considered to be detrimental. This social category of the consumer is represented at the level of national identity through ethnocentrism, cosmopolitanism, and xenocentrism [20].

In particular, xenocentrism (XEN) was developed and discussed in the sociology literature and was initially considered as a counterpart to the ethnocentrism concept that describes people who like a society different from their society and who evaluate everything using that different society as a reference [12]. According to reference [21], a xenocentric person is someone who expresses a preeminent aversion for a nation’s government strategies and political activities. Ethnocentric propensities are unavoidable in all social orders, and reference [12] contends that among social orders that have contact with unique gatherings, certain people are inclined to display emotions which are somewhat contrary to ethnocentrism. Such xenocentrics are focused on a remote gathering and may even have a robust aversion for their sort. Intangibility is a fundamental piece of the emotions of ethnocentrism and xenocentrism. An ethnocentric individual perceives ethics where it is not present. On the other hand, an individual who expresses xenocentric behavior perceives deficiencies where none exists. According to reference [21], ethnocentrism results in a predisposition toward the local, and XEN results in an inclination against the household, inferring a relative predisposition for the outside.

Based on previous ideas, in the context of consumption, XEN refers to the inclination of consumers for goods or services from a society other than their own, a tendency to evaluate and accept foreign goods and services instead of those coming from their society [14]. In this way, consumer xenocentrism establishes the general preference of consumers for foreign products and the rejection of products from their own country [22].

Measuring a consumer’s xenocentrism is a first step to empirically study its effects. In that sense, two recent proposals must be mentioned. On the one hand, reference [10] developed the multi-item scale (C-XENSACLE) and, based on exhaustive empirical analysis, demonstrated that this measure is capable of explaining negative preferences for domestic goods and optimistic preferences for international items. On the other hand, reference [23] structured a conceptual framework of xenocentrism. Based on this framework, they developed the XSCALE, assessing its dimensionality, reliability, and validity. Their results showed that, for consumers, XEN is an explanation of both positive attitudes toward foreign cultures and negative attitudes toward their own culture, in terms of their social behavior and their consumption preferences. The XSCALE includes two dimensions of domestic rejection and foreign admiration. Because the design and validation of XSCALE was designed to measure the phenomenon in developing countries, the current study adopted this scale.

Based on what has been mentioned above, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H1.** The higher the XEN, the greater the intention to buy imported products.
2.2. Perceived Product Quality

Perceived quality is a multidimensional entity, a result of the convention between producer and consumer, and can be seen differently by different research schools of thought [24]. In the marketing context, perceived quality refers to how a consumer interprets the general quality of a product or service and the way he/she chooses this good instead of some alternative [25]. In her classic article, Valerie Zeithaml indicates that perceived quality is the consumer’s judgment concerning a product’s overall excellence or maybe superiority [26]. Frequently, consumers use various types of product-related information to assess product quality.

Several researchers have demarcated the idea of perceived product quality (PPQ). According to reference [27], product quality is a type of connection that influences brand associations in most contexts, and it has been empirically proven to influence profitability. Besides, product quality is that which satisfies consumers’ needs and may include different features that enhance product performance [28]. Consequently, to understand and measure the requirements of the consumers is a prerequisite of product quality [29]. Before making a purchase decision, consumers have several perceptions about product quality, styles and price. After consumption, purchase intentions will increase or decrease, since there are immediate relations that impact one another. If the quality is high, the consumer’s purchase intentions is high.

Additionally, in the present study, XEN has been conceptualized as a representation of social identity. Some authors have proposed that social identity influences the perception of a product [30–32] and particularly the perception of the quality of a product [33]. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H2. The PPQ positively mediates between XEN and the intention to buy imported products.**

2.3. Product Attitudes

Attitude is defined by reference [34] as the calculated evaluation of feelings of a bad or good nature about a particular object or maybe concept. Fishbein and Ajzen [35] classified attitude as covering two notions: 1) the attitude toward concrete action, for instance, using social networking sites for fun; and 2) the attitude toward an object, for example, organizations, issues, or products. In this sense, product attitudes (PA) have a direct role in the intention and purchase of the product. PA complement the determinants of the purchase action alongside the effects of the opinion of the people important to the consumer and the facilities delivered for this action. The intention to buy a specific product grows significantly when, in addition to a demand for the product, the consumer has a favorable attitude towards a product [36].

Authors have indicated that consumers will be more favorable to purchasing a product if they have a better attitude toward the items [37,38]. Furthermore, in the current study XEN is a representation of social categories at a national level. The recent literature indicates that social variables (e.g. status, subjective norm) can influence the attitude toward buying in different product categories [39,40]. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H3. The PA positively mediates between XEN and the intention to buy imported products.**

2.4. Research Model

Figure 1 shows the research model of the present study. In the model, XEN explains, directly and indirectly, the purchase intentions of imported products (PI).
3. Materials and Methods

The questionnaire design was based on scales developed in previous studies. The XEN scale was adopted from reference [23], who proposed the XSCALE; the PPQ scale was adopted from [41]; the PA scale was adopted from reference [42]; and finally, the purchase intentions scale was adopted from reference [43]. XEN consisted of ten items, like “I tend to prefer foreign products as opposed to national ones”. To assess PPQ, five items were used (e.g., “Imported products have long durability”). Also, PA was measured with five items by the questionnaire; for example, “Buying imported products is a wise idea”. Lastly, the purchase intentions were measured with eight items, such as “I will buy imported products this year”. The response format was a 5-point Likert-type, where the answers range from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

A pilot test with 65 respondents was conducted to ensure semantic equivalence of the translation of the scales from English to Spanish. The final questionnaire was divided into five sections: XEN, PPQ, PA, purchase intentions, and demographics.

Students from two campuses of a large university in Colombia participated in order to collect the data. The campuses are located in Bucaramanga and Bogota. After obtaining permission from the business division, the questionnaires were distributed by email to the entire business student’s population. The email explained the scope of the study and requested participation in an anonymous online survey. Every other week, a reminder email was sent to all potential participants. The data collection process lasted fourteen weeks and took place in the first half of 2019.

Of the 550 questionnaires sent, the researchers received 325, and after an exhaustive review, 84 were eliminated due to a lack of essential data for this study. 241 surveys were accepted, resulting in a response rate of 43.81%. Regarding the participants’ age, 56.4% reported being 18-20 years old, and 32.4% who were 21-29 years old. Concerning gender, 59.8% of the participants were female and 40.2% were male. In terms of the level of education, 63.1% reported college studies, but without a tertiary degree, 15.8% had secondary education and 7.9% a graduate degree (see Table 1).
| Demographic Variable | Frequency | Percent | Colombia |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|----------|
| Gender               |           |         |          |
| Female               | 144       | 59.8    | 51.2     |
| Male                 | 97        | 40.2    | 48.8     |
| Age                  |           |         |          |
| 17 or younger        | 18        | 7.5     | 1.8      |
| 18–20                | 136       | 56.4    | 5.4      |
| 21–29                | 78        | 32.4    | 15.5     |
| 30–39                | 6         | 2.5     | 14.9     |
| 40–49                | 2         | 0.8     | 12.2     |
| 50–59                | 1         | 0.4     | 11.1     |
| Education            |           |         |          |
| Less than high school degree | 32    | 13.3    | 29.2     |
| High school degree or equivalent | 78  | 32.4    | 39.2     |
| Some college but no degree | 71  | 29.5    | 2.2      |
| Associate degree     | 3         | 1.2     | 8.1      |
| Secondary education  | 38        | 15.8    | 10.2     |
| Graduate degree      | 19        | 7.9     | 2.8      |

Notes: 1 https://www.dane.gov.co/.

To explore the proposed relationships of the research model, we chose the Partial Least Squares (PLS) technique. PLS is acknowledged in the marketing discipline [44] and is appropriate for testing models with multiple mediators [45]. Following the guidelines established by reference [46], the measurement model and the structural model were evaluated, then we estimated the multiple mediation effects according to reference [47]. For this purpose, the software SmartPLS 3.0 was utilized [48].

4. Analysis and Results

4.1. Assessment of the Measurement Model

The model’s overall goodness-of-fit is the initial test in the evaluation with PLS. In this study, and as Table 2 shows, we use adjustment indexes to assess the overall fit of the model, including the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) for the estimated model. The SRMR value of 0.10 allows us to give moderate support to the overall fit of the model.

| Fit Criteria | Value |
|--------------|-------|
| SRMR         | 0.100 |
| dULS         | 0.904 |
| dG           | 0.278 |

Notes: Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Unweighted Least Squares Discrepancy (dULS), Geodesic Discrepancy (dG). All the values of these tests are under the bootstrap-based 99% percentiles.

The appropriateness of the measures was assessed by evaluating the reliability of both individual measures and variables, as well as the convergent validity and discriminant validity of all the variables of the model. The individual reliability was evaluated by examining individual loads of the measurements with their own variables in the model. All the values of the loads associated with the indicators in the model are greater than 0.5 and mostly greater than 0.7; the literature indicates 0.5 as the lowest acceptable value. XEN was considered a hierarchical component with two dimensions of the reflective-reflective type, while the guidelines indicated by reference [46] was followed for its calculation. Table 3 shows the cross-loadings of the variables.
Table 3. Discriminant validity—Cross loadings.

| Indicator | PA   | PI   | PPQ  | XEN |
|-----------|------|------|------|-----|
| PA1       | 0.787| 0.331| 0.374| 0.370|
| PA2       | 0.774| 0.420| 0.455| 0.373|
| PA3       | 0.713| 0.359| 0.446| 0.354|
| PI1       | 0.408| 0.759| 0.487| 0.518|
| PI2       | 0.209| 0.591| 0.042| 0.238|
| PI3       | 0.438| 0.703| 0.212| 0.319|
| PI4       | 0.316| 0.763| 0.242| 0.408|
| PI5       | 0.311| 0.727| 0.275| 0.270|
| PPQ1      | 0.392| 0.316| 0.806| 0.375|
| PPQ4      | 0.442| 0.251| 0.758| 0.343|
| PPQ5      | 0.469| 0.344| 0.749| 0.332|
| XEN1      | 0.457| 0.401| 0.476| 0.368|
| XEN2      | 0.338| 0.477| 0.262| 0.797|

Notes: Values in bold are loadings for each item that are above the recommended value of 0.5.

Composite Reliability (CR) was used as the reliability index of the variables. The values of this index vary between 0.802 and 0.836, well above the cut-off value of 0.7 suggested by the literature. To assess convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was calculated for each variable. Since the values are above the minimum required level of 0.50, it can be concluded that all these variables have convergent validity. Table 4 shows the coefficients of the variables.

Table 4. Variable coefficients.

| Latent Variable | CR   | AVE   |
|-----------------|------|-------|
| PA              | 0.802| 0.576 |
| PI              | 0.836| 0.506 |
| PPQ             | 0.815| 0.595 |
| XEN             | 0.820| 0.695 |

Notes: Composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE).

The discriminant validity of the model was confirmed using the Fornell–Larcker test, by examining whether the square root of the AVE from each construct was above the correlation coefficients with the other constructs. Additionally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio shows scores below the threshold of 0.9. These results support the existence of discriminant validity between the variables of the model. Tables 5 and 6 show these results.

Table 5. Discriminant validity—Fornell-Larcker criterion.

|       | PA   | PI   | PPQ  | XEN |
|-------|------|------|------|-----|
| PA    | 0.759|      |      |     |
| PI    | 0.490| 0.711|      |     |
| PPQ   | 0.562| 0.397| 0.771|     |
| XEN   | 0.483| 0.520| 0.454| 0.833|

Notes: Square roots of average variances extracted shown on the diagonal.

Table 6. Discriminant validity—Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio.

|        | PA   | PI   | PPQ  | XEN |
|--------|------|------|------|-----|
| PA     | 0.675|      |      |     |
| PI     | 0.871| 0.493|      |     |
| PPQ    | 0.799| 0.758| 0.724|     |
| XEN    |      |      |      |     |
4.2. Multiple Mediation Analysis

The characteristic that defines a mediating effect is that it requires a third variable that intermediates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Since this study intends to analyze two relationships between an independent variable, two mediating variables, and a dependent variable, it should be considered as a multiple mediation analysis [45].

Following the procedure for multiple mediation analysis indicated by reference [47], the mediating effects indicated in the research model were evaluated. We use the Variance Accounted For (VAF) value to evaluate the strength of mediation. A VAF over 80% indicates a full mediation, between 20% and 80% a partial mediation, and less than 20% that there is no mediation [46]. Specifically, the values and level of significance of the beta coefficients for the direct relations \(a_1, b_1, a_2, b_2,\) and \(c'\) were calculated. In turn, the values and significance of the indirect effects \(a_1b_1\) and \(a_2b_2\) were determined. Finally, VAF values were calculated for indirect effects. A bootstrap procedure was used to determine the confidence intervals of the beta values. Table 7 and Figure 2 show the results of this procedure.

| Direct effect | Coefficient (Sig.) | Bootstrap 95% CI |
|---------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| \(H1: c'\)   | 0.350 (***)         | 0.237           |
| \(a_1\)      | 0.454 (***)         | 0.370           |
| \(a_2\)      | 0.483 (***)         | 0.397           |
| \(b_1\)      | 0.083 ( ns )        | −0.037          |
| \(b_2\)      | 0.275 (***)         | 0.140           |

| Indirect effect | Estimated Point (Sig.) | VAF |
|-----------------|------------------------|-----|
| \(H2: a_1 \times b_1\) | 0.038 ( ns )         | −0.017 |
| \(H3: a_2 \times b_2\) | 0.133 (***)         | 0.066 |

Notes: confidence interval (CI), bias corrected (BC), variance accounted for (VAF), non-significant (ns), \(p < 0.001(***)\).

Table 7. Results of the tests of mediating effects.

[Figure 2. Summary of PLS Results.]

A total of 35% of the variance of the purchase intentions of imported products is explained by xenocentrism and product attitudes, and the latter variable partially mediates the relationship between xenocentrism and the purchase intentions of imported products (VAF between 20% and 80%). These results support hypotheses \(H1\) and \(H3\) but do not support hypothesis \(H2\). Finally, the direct effects of a similar magnitude of xenocentrism in perceived product quality and product attitudes are highlighted as 20% and 23%, respectively, of these two variables being explained.
5. Discussion and Conclusion

This investigation aimed to analyze both the direct and indirect effects of xenocentrism on the consumer purchase intentions of imported products through product attitudes and perceived product quality.

The results partially support the model developed to conduct this study and also allow theoretical and practical implications for future studies related to consumer behavior, and specifically for the role of xenocentrism on consumer inclinations. First, the findings provide evidence that the XSCALE developed by reference [23] is a well-established consumer xenocentrism construct. Moreover, we have provided empirical evidence that the XSCALE can explain perceptions and attitudes related to the way of assessing and interpreting quality in domestic and foreign products. An analysis of the results shows that XEN has a direct impact on PI and a positive relationship with PI when PA acts as a mediator. These findings are consistent with reference [11]. Second, the significant relationship between XEN and PPQ is consistent with both reference [21], regarding the predisposition toward local products, and reference [10], concerning the conviction of the mediocrity of local items. Third, these results play an essential role in corporations participating in international business since the appreciation of foreign products may provide an extra opportunity to drive and intensify commercialization. For marketing practitioners, it is essential to understand that consumers find foreign product quality to be higher than that of local products, and this could have an enormous effect on domestic industries, especially in emerging and developing countries. Fourth, xenocentrism emerges as a strong concept in consumer behavior, particularly when individuals perceive that the best quality is powerfully related to imported products that compete in local markets. In this sense, electronic commerce amplifies the adverse scenario described before. Also, the results show that xenocentric individuals have high expectations about quality and factors such as durability, environmental protection, and price. This concept is highlighted by reference [26] when stating that quality is the consumer’s overall judgment regarding a product.

This research makes two contributions to knowledge about consumer behavior. The first is to test the XSCALE in order to explain consumer purchase intentions through perceived product quality and product attitudes. Xenocentrism in marketing is emerging, and there is not sufficient theoretical and empirical research for an in-depth analysis of all the implications that the new phenomenon brings. The second is related to assessing the mediating effect of the attitude toward foreign goods in the relationship between xenocentrism and the purchase intentions. This result permits designing sustainable marketing strategies that are more suited to the xenocentrism of Latin American consumers.

Specifically, we believe it is necessary to deepen the second contribution of this study. Within the domain of sustainable consumption, there is a call to explore consumer attitudes and behaviors. Concerning consumer behavior, attitudes towards products can change over time, and therefore, an essential contribution of this study is to quantify how the change in a favorable attitude towards sustainable consumption affects the intention to purchase. In fact, according to reference [49] among research opportunities in the field of sustainable consumption, the analysis of sustainable consumer behavior emerges as key, and the study of consumer purchasing behavior in response to sustainable practices is proposed as a particular area of opportunity. The results of this study contribute by shedding light on how the attitude towards an imported product mediates the strength of identity characteristics that limit minimizing the environmental impacts of consumption. Moreover, at the same level of xenocentrism, a reduction in the favorable attitude towards imported products will diminish the intention to buy them. Accordingly, we can argue that advertising campaigns that explain the positive effects of buying local products will reduce the purchase of imported products and, consequently, the generation of emissions associated with transport will be minimized.

For domestic producers, this research offers information to adjust their products to the consumer’s demand, paying extra attention to quality and features that foreign products offer naturally. It is crucial to exhibit international appeal to influence local markets. Technology is a critical element to
develop a global or international image, and new generations are strongly influenced by technology and social media.

This work has three limitations which allow opportunities for future research. First, the research did not consider product categories and industries. Evaluating and comparing the effects of XEN among different types of products, services, and industries would be useful for marketers and international business professionals. Second, the empirical research was conducted in Colombia, and it is not possible to generalize these results. New studies related to XEN comparing two or more countries will bring substantial opportunities for this topic. Nevertheless, the use of a non-representative sample in this study is related to the early stage of research surrounding the topic of xenocentrism. Finally, the respondents were college students. The study results must be taken with caution due to younger responders possibly being more inclined towards foreign products than older generations. Therefore, the results may show stronger relationships between the studied variables than what would be observed in a representative sample. Future research could incorporate a more diverse sample of individuals.

The conclusion of this study can be summarized in the idea that xenocentrism explains the intention to purchase foreign products and a positive attitude toward those products enhances their effect. Therefore, xenocentrism in Latin America, as a representation of social identity at the national level, arises as a solid construction to explain consumer behavior, mainly when those of individuals’ beliefs generate a positive appreciation of the purchase of imported products that compete in local markets.

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