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**Influence of Quality Control of Service Operations on Employees' Perceived Service Quality and Its Dimensions: a Cross-sectional Study of Barbeque Restaurants in Kiambu County, Kenya**

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**Abstract**

Outstanding service quality is vital to the success of service organisations, including barbeque restaurants. The current study examined the influence of quality control of service operations on perceived service quality and its dimensions (comprising tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) among barbeque restaurants in Kiambu County. Data were collected from 112 managers of barbeque restaurants using a self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarise the sample profile and respondents' responses about the study constructs. Inferential analysis comprising simple linear regressions was used to examine the influence of quality control of service operations on perceived service quality. Quality control of service operations was found to have a significant positive influence on the overall perceived service quality ( $\beta = 0.856$ ,  $t = 14.624$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Quality control of service operations was also found to significantly predict tangibility ( $\beta = 0.616$ ,  $t = 6.904$ ,  $p = .000$ ), responsiveness ( $\beta = 0.760$ ,  $t = 10.339$ ,  $p = .000$ ), assurance ( $\beta = 0.822$ ,  $t = 12.764$ ,  $p = .000$ ), empathy ( $\beta = 0.787$ ,  $t = 11.281$ ,  $p = .000$ ), and reliability ( $\beta = 0.706$ ,  $t = 8.795$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Operators and owners of barbeque restaurants need to focus on quality control of service operations as doing so will boost the overall service quality.

**Keywords:** Barbeque restaurant, Service quality, Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, quality control of service operations

## **1. Introduction**

Barbequing has long been a favourite way to enjoy food socially. The barbeque grill market size globally attained a value of USD 5.43 billion in 2022 and is even further projected to at a compound annual growth rate of 4.90% between 2023 and 2028, to hit a value of USD 7.16 billion by the end of 2028 (Statista, 2023). The force behind the exponential growth of the barbeque sector is the thriving food and beverage sector across emerging economies. Barbequed meat is undoubtedly one of the key features of Kenya's culinary culture (Shibia et al., 2017). This is evident in many establishments serving the highly popular barbecue meat delicacy within towns, along with the main highways and high-end malls (Nyanchama, 2019; Shibia et al., 2017).

The growth of barbeques across restaurants, street food outlets, roadside cafes, and hotels has resulted in increased competition forcing many outlets to become innovative and focus on improving service quality (Chikazhe et al., 2022). Undoubtedly, providing superior service quality is a vital ingredient of successful service organisations (Nasif et al., 2020). Moreover, providing outstanding customer service is a survival tactic in a modern business environment characterised by intense competition (Ekaabi et al., 2020).

Customers seeking great provision of services interchangeable with the worth of their spending is theorised as service quality (Khadka & Maharjan, 2017). The current study analyses quality control of service operations as a variable that may influence service quality to improve service quality output. Kenya's hospitality business has recently seen a modified sub-sector development incorporating fast-expanding barbeque restaurants near highways and densely populated middle-income neighbourhoods with ample parking (Nyanchama, 2019). Barbeque restaurant proliferation has been aided by active financial and strategic reorganisations, signalling a more promising and sustainable future (Shibia et al., 2017). The development has been supported and aided by a significant influx of revellers with middle-class income into corresponding barbeque restaurants, resulting in strong demand for relevant quality barbeque items and services (Khadka & Maharjan, 2017). Barbeque restaurants value service quality because it raises earnings, satisfies customers, and improves overall performance (Nyanchama, 2019). However, there appears to be a service quality difference among Kiambu County BBQ restaurants, with consumers' expectations exceeding actual service delivery (Kiambu County Development Report, 2021; Nyawira et al., 2023).

Various studies have been conducted within the services marketing sector to establish factors influencing service quality (Chikazhe & Nyakunuwa, 2022; Iqbal et al., 2018; Qalati et al., 2021). However, a closer look at the available literature shows a shortage of studies conducted to examine the influence of quality control of service operations on perceived service quality, especially in barbeque restaurants within the Kenyan context. Thus, on this background, the current study aimed to establish the influence of quality control of service operations on the perceived service quality of barbeque restaurants in Kiambu County, Kenya.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 The Concept of Service Quality*

Service quality is similar to perceived value, and according to Dumitrelea (2013, p. 169), it refers to “abstract concepts with varying meanings depending on the context”. In other words, service quality is the variance between customers’ perceptions and actual experiences of services provided by an organisation (Milana, 2018). Customer satisfaction is a product of service experiences which mirror customers’ perceptions (Iqbal et al., 2018). The effective route to ensuring customers are satisfied is providing outstanding service quality that meets their expectations (Qalati et al., 2021). According to Parasuraman et al. (1985), providing outstanding service quality means addressing important aspects comprising tangibility, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy.

Shin et al. (2019) argue that service quality is the driving force behind successful service-rendering organisations, restaurants not an exemption (Zeithaml et al., 2010). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has become increasingly important for service organisations to be innovative in delivering service quality to amass competitive advantage and, in achieving this goal provide consistent service quality and value to customers (Babin & James, 2010). Previous studies have underlined the importance of service quality, such as Shahzadi et al. (2018) and Chikazhe and Nyakunuwa(2022).

### *2.2 Relationships between Quality Control of Service Operations and Perceived Service Quality*

According to Suciptawati et al. (2019), quality control also includes planning, underscoring the ability of restaurants to set out the actual standards upon which quality will be measured. Lodorfos et al. (2015) carried out a descriptive study in Turkey to investigate quality control efficiency and its influence on service quality. Their study revealed that quality control encompasses both product and service offerings, and therefore, high-quality standards should be maintained while handling any product that customers will consume. Additionally, their study recommended the need to consider quality control measures to ensure service quality standards comprising functional and technical quality. Consequently, this study examined the influence of quality control measures on service quality in barbeque restaurants.

A study by Suciptawati et al. (2019) in India found that planning involves setting out the standard measuring procedures and educating the staff within the hospitality sector to interpret and utilise the standard measuring procedures to ascertain acceptable quality. Additionally, Suciptawati et al. (2019) study revealed the vital role of effective planning in enhancing services in the Indian hotel sector. However, the extent to which effective planning influences service quality has not been investigated in the Kenyan hospitality sector, especially in barbeque restaurants, thus underlining the need for the current study.

Moreover, Yadav et al. (2019) used correlations and regression analysis to ascertain how much continuous improvement affected service quality in hotels in the USA. Their study noted that having an appraisal system that checks the extent to which hotels adhere to quality standards leads to continuous operations improvement and eventually enhances service quality. A similar

study in the U.K. by Farrington et al. (2018) looked at continuous improvement and how it impacted service quality. Their study revealed that service quality resulted from continuous improvement of products and services. Despite the important role played by these studies, they were carried out in developed countries, and there is a need to investigate the same in the context of a developing nation like Kenya. Thus, this study sought to shed more light on the influence of quality control of service operations on perceived service quality among the barbeque restaurants in Kiambu County, Kenya. The current study was guided by the conceptual model illustrated in [Figure 1](#).

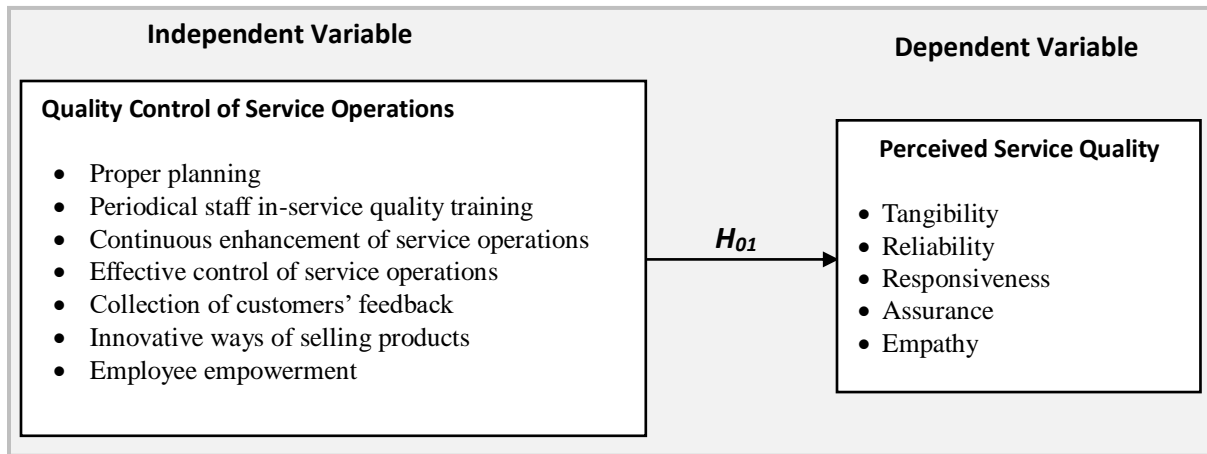


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

### 3. Research Methodology

The objective of the current study was to establish the influence of quality control of service operations on perceived service quality in the context of barbeque restaurants in Kiambu County—a county among the 47 counties in Kenya. The current study adopted a survey-based quantitative technique to accomplish its objective.

#### 3.1 Measurement scale

The survey was carried out using a questionnaire divided into three sections. Demographic characteristics of the sample of barbeque employees (gender, age, highest level of formal education completed, work experience in barbeque restaurants, and job tenure) were included in the first section of the questionnaire. The second and third sections of the questionnaire comprised measures of the constructs included in the conceptual model of the current study (*see Figure 1*). Quality control of service operations, the current study's independent variable, was measured using seven items adapted from the literature. Additionally, the current study utilised the 22-item service quality (SERVQUAL) instrument constructed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), consisting of five aspects of service quality, that is, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) to measure service quality. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) was used to measure the construct items.

3.2 Data Collection and Sample Profile

Two methods were utilised to distribute the questionnaires, where the first entailed a hard copy of the questionnaire, and the second consisted of an online version of the questionnaire constructed using Google Form® followed by generating the survey link, which was shared with consenting managers of the barbeque restaurants via email and WhatsApp. The sample comprised managers of barbeque restaurants who voluntarily participated in the current study. A total of 112 questionnaires were distributed; however, only 98 completed the survey. Out of this, 18 questionnaires were not complete. The remaining 80 questionnaires representing a response rate of 71.4%, were useful for data analysis and reporting of the findings. Details of the sample profile are reported in Table 1. The current study sample comprised predominantly male respondents (71.3%), with females making up 27.5% of the managers of barbeque restaurants that participated in the study.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Variable	Frequency	%	Variable	Frequency	%
<i>Gender</i>			<i>Age (years)</i>		
Male	57	71.3	18 to 25	5	6.3
Female	22	27.5	26 to 35	25	31.3
Prefer not to say	1	1.2	36 to 45	29	36.3
			46 to 55	16	20.0
			Over 55	5	6.3
<i>Education</i>			<i>Work experience</i>		
Primary school	1	1.3	Less than a year	5	6.3
Artisan	2	2.5	1 to 2	8	10.0
Secondary school	23	28.7	3 to 4	33	41.3
Certificate	25	31.3	5 and above	34	42.5
Diploma	21	26.3			
Undergraduate degree	5	6.3			
Post-graduate degree	3	3.8			
<i>Job Tenure</i>					
Less than a year	7	8.8			
1 to 2	42	52.5			
3 to 4	16	20.0			
5 and above	15	18.8			

Note: n = 80.

Most respondents (36.3%) in the current study were aged 30 – 45. Regarding the highest level of formal education attained, most respondents (31.3%) were holders of relevant certificate qualifications. Concerning work experience in barbeque restaurants, the majority (42.5%) had the experience of 5 years and above. On the other hand, the lowest number (6.3%) of respondents had less than a year of work experience in barbeque restaurants. Out of 80 managers

of barbeque restaurants that participated in the current study, most (52.5%) had a job tenure ranging between 1 and 2 years.

*3.3 Reliability test*

The reliability of the constructs in the conceptual model was examined using Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ (Table 2). Values of Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ for each construct were above the recommended level (i.e., 0.70), as Hair et al. (1995) suggested, demonstrating that the constructs in the current study had a satisfactory degree of internal consistency.

Table 2. Reliability test of the constructs

Dimension	Number of items	Cronbach’s alpha
Quality control of service operations	7	0.819
Service quality (SERVQUAL)	22	0.882
Tangibility	4	0.821
Reliability	5	0.879
Responsiveness	4	0.884
Assurance	4	0.870
Empathy	5	0.902

*3.4 Data analysis*

Descriptive statistics comprising frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviations were used to summarise the respondents’ demographic profile and establish patterns in the response related to the constructs. Additionally, the testing of the hypotheses adopted a linear regression analysis. All analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, SPSS® version 27.0 for Windows (IBM SPSS for Windows, version 27.0. Armonk, NY: IBM® Corp). Statistical significance of the linear regressions was established at a 0.05 significance level. In addition, the following 22 observable variables of each dimension of service quality and quality control of service operations were incorporated for the current study:

1. Quality control of service operations:

- The barbeque restaurant engages in proper planning of service operations
- The restaurant periodically conducts staff in-service training
- The management performs continuous improvements to service operations
- The restaurant performs effective control of every aspect of service operations
- Customers are requested to provide feedback on services provided
- The management ensures that all employees understand their roles and duties
- Employees are empowered to deal with customer requests and complaints

2. Tangibles:

- The barbeque restaurant has modern working equipment
- The physical facilities of the barbeque restaurant are visually attractive
- Employees wear appropriate and spotless uniforms
- The barbeque restaurant uses visually appealing service equipment (e.g., chopping boards, knives, tongs, turners)

3. Responsiveness:
  - Employees tell customers accurately when the services will be completed
  - Employees give customers prompt and quick services even during rush hours
  - Employees are consistently ready to assist customers
  - Employees are ready to reply to guests' enquiries
4. Assurance:
  - Employees instil confidence in customers
  - Employees make guests feel safe in their transactions
  - Employees always respect customers
  - Employees have the necessary information to answer guests' questions
5. Reliability:
  - Services are provided as promised
  - Employees are dependable in handling customers' service complaints
  - Barbeque restaurant provides services at the promised time
  - Guests are given accurate bills
  - Employees provide error-free services
6. Empathy:
  - Employees give guests distinct consideration
  - Employees deal with guests in a gentle way
  - The restaurant has convenient working hours
  - Employees have guests' best interests at heart
  - Employees recognise guest-unique needs

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1 Descriptive results of the constructs

Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations of the respondents' responses regarding quality control of service operations.

Table 3. Descriptive results of the constructs

Construct	M	SD	Mean Interpretation
Quality control of service operations	3.85	0.43	Agree
Service quality (SERVQUAL)	3.85	0.36	Agree
Tangibility	3.65	0.39	Agree
Reliability	3.71	0.49	Agree
Responsiveness	3.28	0.37	Neutral/Undecided
Assurance	3.93	0.42	Agree
Empathy	3.12	0.41	Neutral/Undecided

**Notes.** *N* = 80. *M* = Mean. *S.D.* = Standard Deviation. *Scale* [Range]: 1 = *Strongly Disagree* [1.00 – 1.80], 2 = *Disagree* [1.80 – 2.60], 3 = *Neutral/Undecided* [2.60 – 3.40], 4 = *Agree* [3.40 – 4.20], 5 = *Strongly Agree* [4.20 – 5.00].

As reported in Table 3, the mean values for each construct ranged between *M* = 3.12 and 3.93. Additionally, the standard deviation (*S.D.*) values for each construct ranged between 0.36

and 0.49, demonstrating a wide range of perceptions of respondents’ quality control of service operations concerning service quality provided by barbeque restaurants. The quality control of service operations mean value ( $M = 3.85, SD = 0.43$ ) suggests that respondents agreed that barbeque restaurants could control the quality of their service operations. In addition, the barbeque restaurants’ service quality mean value ( $M = 3.85, SD = 0.36$ ) suggests that employees agreed that barbeque restaurants provide service quality to customers. The other constructs’ mean values suggest that employees agreed that barbeque restaurants provide tangibility ( $M = 3.65, SD = 0.39$ ), reliability ( $M = 3.71, SD = 0.49$ ), and assurance ( $M = 3.93, SD = 0.42$ ). However, employees were neutral or undecided regarding the responsiveness ( $M = 3.28, SD = 0.37$ ) and empathy ( $M = 3.12, SD = 0.41$ ) dimensions of service quality provided by barbeque restaurants in the current study, demonstrating the uncertainty surrounding the provision of these important dimensions of service quality to customers.

4.2 Results of Hypotheses

Separate simple linear regression analyses were performed to establish possible causal effects between quality control of service operations and service quality and its dimensions in the context of barbeque restaurants in Kiambu County.

*H<sub>01</sub>: Quality control of service operations does not influence service quality provided by barbeque restaurants*

The results of the hypothesis (*H<sub>01</sub>*) are presented in Table 4. As can be seen from the results in Table 4, the overall regression model was statistically significant,  $F(1, 78) = 213.87, p = .000$ . Additionally, the regression model accounted for 73.3% ( $R^2 = .733$ ) of variation in perceived service quality. Moreover, as presented in Table 4, it was found that quality control of service operations significantly predicted perceived service quality ( $\beta = 0.856, t = 14.624, p = .000$ ). Consequently, a one standard deviation increase in quality control of service operations was associated with 0.856 standard deviations increase in perceived service quality.

Table 4. Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardised		Standardised	t	Sig.
	Coefficients				
	B	S.E.	$\beta$		
(Constant)	1.105	0.189		5.841	.000
1 Quality Control of Service Operations	0.715	0.049	0.856	14.624***	.000

**Notes.** a. Dependent Variable: Service Quality.  $R = .856, R^2 = .733, \text{Adj. } R^2 = .729, F(1,78) = 213.87, p = .000. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.$

Consequently, *H<sub>01</sub>* was not supported. Therefore, the fitted regression model is as follows:

$$\text{Perceived service quality of barbeque restaurants} = 1.105 + 0.856 \times \text{quality control of service operations}$$



4.3 Influence of quality control of operations on each dimension of service quality

The current study sought to examine the possible influence of quality control of service operations on each dimension of perceived service quality. Consequently, five sub-hypotheses were tested as follows:  $H_{01a}$  (influence of quality control of service operations on tangibility),  $H_{01b}$  (influence of quality control of service operations on responsiveness),  $H_{01c}$  (influence of quality control of service operations on assurance),  $H_{01d}$  (influence of quality control of service operations on empathy), and  $H_{01e}$  (influence of quality control of service operations on reliability). The results of the five univariable regression models are exhibited in Table 5.

Table 5. Service Quality Dimensions Regressed on Quality Control of Service Operations

Models' Parameter	Service Quality Dimensions				
	Tangibility	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Reliability
$R$	.616	.760	.822	.787	.706
$R^2$	.379	.578	.676	.620	.498
$F$	47.659***	106.885***	162.920***	127.262***	77.355***
$p$ -value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
(Constant)	1.543	1.485	0.837	1.166	0.604
$B$	0.549	0.649	0.804	0.737	0.806
Std. Error	0.079	0.063	0.063	0.065	0.092
$\beta$	<b>0.616</b>	<b>0.760</b>	<b>0.822</b>	<b>0.787</b>	<b>0.706</b>
$t$	6.904***	10.339***	12.764***	11.281***	8.795***
$p$ -value	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Notes.  $N = 80$ . Predictor = Quality Control of Service Operations. Dependent variable(s) = Service Quality Dimensions. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

As can be seen from Table 5, the overall regression models were significant ( $F [1, 78] = 47.66, p = .000$ ) for tangibility, ( $F [1, 78] = 106.89, p = .000$ ) for responsiveness, ( $F [1, 78] = 162.92, p = .000$ ) for assurance, ( $F [1, 78] = 127.26, p = .000$ ) for empathy, and ( $F [1, 78] = 77.36, p = .000$ ) for reliability. In addition, the regression models accounted for 37.9% ( $R^2 = .379$ ) variation in tangibility, 57.8% ( $R^2 = .578$ ) in responsiveness, 67.6% ( $R^2 = .676$ ) in assurance, 62.0% ( $R^2 = .620$ ) in empathy, and 49.8% ( $R^2 = .379$ ) in reliability. Moreover, quality control of service operations was found to significantly predict tangibility ( $\beta = 0.616, t = 6.904, p = .000$ ), responsiveness ( $\beta = 0.760, t = 10.339, p = .000$ ), assurance ( $\beta = 0.822, t = 12.764, p = .000$ ), empathy ( $\beta = 0.787, t = 11.281, p = .000$ ), and reliability ( $\beta = 0.706, t = 8.795, p = .000$ ). Therefore, it is evident that hypotheses  $H_{01a}, H_{01b}, H_{01c}, H_{01d}$ , and  $H_{01e}$  were not supported. Accordingly, a one standard deviation increase in quality control of service operations was associated with 0.616 standard deviations in tangibility, 0.760 in responsiveness, 0.822 in assurance, 0.787 in empathy, and 0.706 in reliability.

5. Discussion, conclusion and implications of research

The purpose of the global hypothesis was to establish a possible causal relationship between quality control of service operations and service quality in the setting of barbeque restaurants in Kiambu County, Kenya. Regression analysis indicated that barbeque restaurants with the ability

to control the quality of service operations, such as engaging in proper planning of service operations, conducting periodical staff-in-service training, performing continuous improvements of service operations, effective control of every aspect of service operations, collecting feedback from customers on services provided, ensuring all employees understand their roles and duties, and empowering employees to deal with customers' requests and complaints were more likely to provide service quality to their customers.

Quality control of service operations is essential in driving service quality provided by barbeque restaurants. In line with Suciptawati et al. (2019), who argued that quality control includes, but is not limited to, planning and underscoring the ability of restaurants to set out the actual standards upon which service quality is measured, the results of the current study reverberated reasonably well with a 2019 study by Yadav et al. in the United States of America (USA) which revealed that quality control is crucial and leads to continuous improvement of the operations which eventually boosts service quality. Additionally, the results of this study have indicated that continuous improvement of service operations is an integral ingredient to promoting service quality. Similarly, studies such as Farrington et al. (2018) in the United Kingdom (U.K.) found that service quality provision was a function of continuous improvement of products and services.

### *5.1 Managerial implications*

The results of the current study have contributed to a better understanding of the influence of quality control of service operations on the overall service quality of barbeque restaurants in the context of barbeque restaurants in Kiambu County, Kenya. Additionally, the results of the study have delineated the influence of quality control of service operations on each dimension of service quality. There are apparent implications from a managerial standpoint in a highly competitive barbeque restaurant sector in Kenya in comprehending how key employees assess their capability to control the quality-of-service operations and how it relates to service quality and its dimensions. It is plausible to argue that the delivery of service quality to customers originates in the mind of employees who perceive service quality as provided by barbeque restaurants. The influence of quality control of service operations was prominent on the assurance followed by the responsiveness dimension of service quality in the context of barbeque restaurants in the current study. Barbeque restaurants must ensure customers feel comfortable and confident, feel safe for financial transactions, employees are consistently courteous, and have the requisite knowledge to respond to customers' queries. Moreover, barbeque restaurants in the current study must provide prompt and quick services even during rush hours while ensuring that employees are consistently willing to help and handle customers' unique needs and requests.

## **6. Recommendations for further research**

Despite the significant contributions made by this study, several limitations need to be addressed. The current study focused on the influence of quality control of service operations on service quality and its dimensions. Consequently, future studies should examine other factors, such as product and service innovations and management of competition practices in other counties of Kenya, to compare the results. Such studies are likely to prove vital in a very varied barbeque

restaurant sector such as the one found in Kenya, which has seen recent exponential growth in the high influx of customers. The competitive business environment of barbeque restaurants in Kenya demonstrates that practitioners in this sector cannot afford to be complacent concerning the service quality provided to customers.

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