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Man in the world of old and new media – selected concepts of media influence and their contemporary interpretations

Introduction

The media have an impact on almost every sphere of human existence, they become ubiquitous in everyday life, work, education and entertainment. In fact, it is extremely difficult today to find a sphere of human activity in which media would not be present in some form. The place of the school, family, peer group, electoral meetings, and social exchange of opinions is more and more often occupied by the media[1]. The information that reaches us through them is more important than the content of school textbooks, often we seem more contemporary than the knowledge accumulated over decades by grandparents, parents and teachers. Knowledge about the political world is almost entirely taken from the media, which saves time, energy and resources necessary for personal meetings with politicians or participation in electoral rallies[2].

The importance of the media should be associated with their functions, which they fulfill by organizing and creating the social space. The first group of functions is associated with socialization by the media, which affect how the unit functions in the social space. This part of media interactions is related to their role in education, knowledge transfer, or structured information, extending the skills of recipients, but also in the area of shaping patterns, motivating, encouraging specific actions, choices or resignations. Especially in the case of young people, children and young people, the media are often a natural starting point for their own feelings, beliefs and even norms. Media content referring to the most frequently researched issues, such as violence, sex, the use of stimulants, shape the social space, decide about the sphere of values, about what is considered to be allowed and what is banned in a given space.

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1   R. Klepka, *Analiza zawartości mediów: dlaczego i do czego można ją wykorzystać w nauce o bezpieczeństwie i politologii?*, „Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia de Securitate et Educatione Civili" 2016, t. VI, nr 224, pp. 32–41.

2   J. Idzik, R. Klepka, *O analizie zawartości, czyli jak badać medialne obrazy świata?,* [in:] *Medialne obrazy świata*. Tom 2. *Polityka i bezpieczeństwo w relacjach medialnych*, R. Klepka (ed.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Kraków 2019, pp. 11–13.

The second group of media functions should be associated with shaping the commitment to being part of a community that consciously decides about itself and the space that surrounds it, political involvement. In this area, media functions such as informing about facts, creating knowledge, narratives, opinions, shaping the debate and establishing its platform play a key role. The level of independence of the media, their quality, relative impartiality, distance to the rulers is what the public debate looks like and how society decides about the most important issues in its environment.

The third group of media functions is related to the treatment of the media as a carrier of culture and their tasks related to the promotion of culture understood as broadening knowledge about it, developing imagination and aesthetic needs, and promoting a specific culture of a given civilizational circle. In this regard, there are also media functions related to amusement, entertainment, recreation and leisure, but also with integration, making units part of the community and their protection against marginalization. Media realizing the functions within this area can shape the space of tolerance or conflict, respect for all cultures or promote the belief about the superiority of some over others, I can promote cheap mass entertainment or try to present also less commercial forms of elite entertainment[3].

Bearing in mind the constantly growing role of the media and the dynamics of their changes, in particular the development of new media, mainly using the possibilities of the Internet, a new context takes on the traditional media concepts and effects they cause. The aim of the article is to present selected ones and characteristics in the light of new phenomena that take place in the contemporary media space.

Media as content creators

One of the key issues relating to media content is the selection of content. In a perverse way, it can be pointed out that the vast majority of events in the world will never be mentioned by the media, and only news about a few of them will reach viewers, listeners and readers. What is important in this situation is the question of who and on the basis of which criteria makes the selection, deciding what will appear in the media. The attempts to answer them are studies in the areas of gatekeeping and the theory of information value[4].

The first of these concepts has its roots dating back to the late 1940s. At the time, David Manning White used the concept of psychologist Kurt Lewin to analyze the processes of information selection. Lewin investigated the eating habits of the population and in this context introduced the concept of a goalkeeper – gatekeeper – as an important person in the family who makes purchase decisions and choosing products has an impact on what will be found on the table and will be consumed by

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3 S.J. Baran, D.K. Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment and Future*, Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, Boston 2011, p. 247; R. Klepka, *Obrazy polityki w mediach: podstawowe uwarunkowania,* [in:] *Medialne obrazy świata. Wybrane problemy społeczno-polityczne w mediach*, R. Klepka (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Kraków 2018, p. 9.

4 R. Klepka, *Medialna walka o dobrą zmianę: obraz wyborów parlamentarnych w 2015 roku w wybranych mediach*, Wydawnictwo Libron, Kraków 2018, p. 41–46.

the whole family. White in his analysis used the concept of „goalkeeper" to analyze the process of material selection, which will be published in a local newspaper in the USA. He turned to the editor-in-chief of a small town newspaper, which he called „Mr. Gates", asking him to keep all the materials that appeared in his editorial office in one week of 1949. Mr. Gates also agreed to provide an explanation of why he rejected 90% of all materials, giving up their use. White then stated that the selection decisions were mainly subjective. About a third of the articles passing through the editorial channels were rejected because of the personal assessment of Mr. Gates who doubted that the news was real. Other stories were rejected due to lack of space or because similar ones were already presented in the newspaper[5]. White's concept, in which he focused on the subjective decisions of a chosen journalist, encouraged communication researchers to look at selection decisions in the media, which became the beginning of numerous multi-faceted projects conducted in many countries and at various levels of analysis[6].

The content conveyed by the media is therefore a consequence of the fact that each editorial office has a set of written and unwritten rules that influence the decision whether a given material passes through the selection gateway or not. Among unwritten rules, there is a editorial attitude towards the subject or reporting paradigm, additionally conditioned by media secrecy. Conservative media try to suppress contradictory positions, while liberal stressing the actions of the state as a depleting individual freedom, tabloids focus on gossip, and high-quality media tend to present in-depth analysis of events. There is also a clear relationship between the publisher's attitude and the content of the press in particular. This happens even if the publisher is not involved in the daily supervision of the presented content. Selection is also a result of the type of medium. TV stations choose topics that are visually appealing, while local newspapers prefer regional issues. The form of content selection is also the employment of journalists whose views are in line with the editors' line. On the other hand, the economic dimension of the selection process, sometimes also a source of ethical doubts, may lead to the elimination of content that would put a significant advertiser or a person or organizations on the negative light on which the operation of a specific medium depends[7].

The processes of selection in the media, also explains the theory of information value, which proves the existence of dependence between the characteristics of a specific event and the chance for its presentation in the media. The conducted research allows to calculate a catalog of information features that increase their media attractiveness. It should be considered significant:

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5   P.J. Shoemaker, T. Vos, *Media gatekeeping*, [in:] A*n Integrated Approach to Communication Theory and Research*, D. Stacks, M. Salwen (ed.), Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, New York, London 2009, p. 75.

6   P.J. Shoemaker, T. Vos, S.D. Reese, *Journalists as Gatekeepers*, [in:] *The Handbook of Journalism Studies*, K. Wahl-Jorgensen, T. Hanitzsch (ed.), Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, New York, London 2009, p. 75.

7   R. Zeh, *News Selection Process*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, L.L. Kaid, C. Holtz-Bacha (ed.), Sage Publications, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore 2008, vol. 2, pp. 510–511.

– existence of a conflict, the possibility of presenting the reasons of various parties, their argumentation and generating interest through dramatization;

– important for the audience, the event should be perceived as significant, but indirectly also affecting the audience's experience, the proximity of the event is an additional factor in favor of the issue or publication;

– the latest events have a privileged character, especially those that have taken place in the last 24 hours and that can be easily monitored as they develop;

– simplicity, the significance of events should be relatively unambiguous, the diversity of potential interpretations should be kept to a minimum;

– personalization, which emphasizes people who „cope with life on earth" instead of abstract descriptions of „faceless" structures, forces and institutions;

– a surprising character, the event should be extraordinary, in line with the old journalistic maxim that it is interesting when a person bits a dog, and not when the reverse occurs;

– continuity indicating a chance for the event to develop, preferably in a way that maintains tension for a long time;

– composition of materials in one edition of the program or issue of the newspaper related to the need to mix different types of events, international, national and local, regarding politics, entertainment, sport, so that there is no dominance of one type or a range of issues, as this could bore or discourage the recipient;

– reference to elite nations, there is a clear tendency to present the events of these countries, which are considered „directly affecting the audience", due to their prosperity, such as the US, or other affluent countries at the expense of materials concerning events taking place in other countries places, especially developing countries;

– reference to elite people, activities carried out by politicians, entertainment and sports stars, corporate leaders are presented more willingly than the fate of „ordinary people";

– cultural specificity, is associated with a tendency to present events that are consistent with the „meaning map" of the medium and the audience, so priority is given to „people like us" at the expense of those who „do not share our way of life";

– negativism, meaning that bad news is usually preferred and much more readily discussed from good news, which in an extreme case can even lead to the situation that ads are the only „good news" in the newspaper[8].

When talking about selection criteria one should bear in mind the fact that the choice according to various criteria takes place in each editorial office. The existence of repetitive and relatively similar selection criteria is also supported by the fact that the various editorial offices present relatively similar information about political events. Journalists and publishers do not think identically, but in news programs and the press, news about almost exactly the same appear in a given period, only presented in a different way, emphasizing a different aspect or building a specific narrative[9].

8   S. Allan, *News Culture*, Open University Press, New York 2004, pp. 57–58.

9   J. Strömbäck, *Mediatization of Politics: Toward a Conceptual Framework for Comparative Research,* [in:] *The Sourcebook for Political Communication Research: Methods, Measures, and*

The dynamic development of the media environment, conditioned to a large extent by changes in the technical and technological environment, leads to changes in the process of message selection. The leading role is played by the Internet and new media associated with it. Some researchers point out that the importance of gates and selectors is rapidly declining, as the internet has no barriers to publishing any content[10]. Attention is drawn to the use of social media, blogs and online citizen journalism, which is not limited by any barriers known from traditional media[11]. On the other hand, the immensity of information available on the internet does not limit the role of gatekeepers, only the existing selectors cease to be theirs, and Internet search engines such as Google or Yahoo become active, influencing which websites will be visited by internet users[12].

Recipients as content selectors?

Today's media recipients often feel that almost all people around them think similarly, that they are in the majority, and views contrary to those they express are of an extremely rare nature[13]. Often the results of elections, referendum or even the results of opinion polls bring quite a surprise. It turns out that we are in a minority, and our views are not as popular as we expected. Numerous studies show that such feelings, as well as the broadly understood shaping of our beliefs and opinions not only in relation to our decisions or political views, but also to what others think, are created by the media. Interesting evidence confirming this thesis is provided by media coverage of events such as Brexit, US elections won by Donald Trump, hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine, waves of refugees arriving in Europe after

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Analytical Techniques, E.P. Bucy, R.L. Holbert (ed.), Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, New York, London 2011, p. 371; W. Schulz, *Politische Kommunikation: Theoretische Ansätze und Ergebnisse empirischer Forschung zur Rolle der Massenmedien in der Politik*, Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen, Wiesbaden 1997, p. 74.

10 A. Bandura, *Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication,* [in:] *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, J. Bryant, M. B. Oliver (ed.), Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, New York, London 2009, p. 114; S. Sunder, S. Bellur, *Concept Explication in the Internet Age: The Case of Political Interactivity,* [in:] *The Sourcebook for Political Communication Research: Methods, Measures, and Analytical Techniques*, E.P. Bucy, R.L. Holbert (ed.), Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, New York, London 2011, p. 486; B. Williams, M. Delli Carpini, *After Broadcast News: Media Regimes, Democracy, and the New Information Environment*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2011, p. 77.

11 T. Bakker, C. Paterson, *The New Frontiers of Journalism: Citizen Participation in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands,* [in:] *Political Communication in Postmodern Democracy: Challenging the Primacy of Politics*, K. Brants, K. Voltmer (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2011, p. 183; S. Cooper, *The Oppositional Framing of Bloggers,* [in:] *Doing News Framing Analysis: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, P. D'Angelo, J. Kuypers (ed.), Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, New York, London 2010, p. 136; S. Cushion, *Television Journalism*, SAGE, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC 2012, p. 182; J. Jones, *Satiric Television and Political Engagement*, Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth 2010, p. 181.

12 M. Ancu, *Online Political Advertising,* [in:] *Political Communication*, R. Mann, D. Perlmutter (ed.), Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge 2011, p. 192.

13 R. Klepka, *Obrazy polityki w mediach...*, p. 9–25; C. Happer, G. Philo, *The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change*, „Journal of Social and Political Psychology" 2013, vol. 1, no 1.

the Syrian crisis or increasingly popular news stories[14]. They clearly show that the selection of information sources we use, most often made by us or by search engines and social media, as well as our existing knowledge and beliefs have a strong impact on the perception and assessment of content.

According to some of these concepts, the individual using the media is exposed to self-censorship, contact only with the information filtered for it, which means that in fact he knows only attitudes and views similar to his own. In this way, we are placed in a chamber with an omnipresent echo. We have many channels and sources of information at our disposal, but on the one hand we reach for ourselves, and on the other hand, technological solutions facilitate our access to those that allow us to confirm the judgments and feelings to which we are accustomed[15]. We mainly look for publications that would prove that our assessments are correct, which in turn may lead to the fact that we are in a metaphorical room with an echo, and thus do not receive views, opinions and opinions that are polemical or critical of its position. The choice of a press title, a TV program or a website for most media users is not a case of curiosity or a world, but a response to a psychological confirmation strategy, a tendency to prefer those sources of information and opinions that confirm the expectations or hypotheses that already exist.[16].

Outlined conditions mean that supporters of one party mainly watch news programs on television, which supports it, and those who vote for the other on television better assess this political group. Conservative people who prefer religious values go to Catholic media, and viewers and readers with liberal views use the media, which present their ideas about the world. Similarly on the Internet, search engines and social media using the knowledge of what has been liked by a given recipient, and in particular what topics and opinions followed for the most time, work so that the user is always in a group of topics and similar topics similar to his own, he never was directed to different values, incompatible with his system[17]. This is what makes viewers and readers believe that they stay in the majority, because all the sources they are dealing with not only confirm, but also deepen their thinking, which strongly shapes political views and favors their polarization[18].

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14   R. Klepka, *Fake news,* [in:] *Vademecum bezpieczeństwa*, O. Wasiuta, R. Klepka, R. Kopeć (ed.), Instytut Nauk o Bezpieczeństwie Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego im. Komisji Edukacji Narodowej w Krakowie, Kraków 2018, p. 299–304; O. Wasiuta, S. Wasiuta, *Wojna hybrydowa Rosji przeciwko Ukrainie*, Wydawnictwo Arcana, Kraków 2017; D. Geschke, J. Lorenz, P. Holtz, *The triple-filter bubble: Using agent-based modelling to test a meta-theoretical framework for the emergence of filter bubbles and echo chamber*s, „British Journal of Social Psychology" 2019, vol. 58, no 1; J. Idzik, R. Klepka, *Media Coverage Of Refugee Crisis Some Evidence From Poland*, „International Relations Review" 2018, vol. 1, no 1.

15   F. Hamborg, K. Donnay, B. Gipp, *Automated identification of media bias in news articles: an interdisciplinary literature review*, „International Journal on Digital Libraries", 16.11.2018.

16   D.C. Mutz, *Facilitating Communication across Lines of Political Difference: The Role of Mass Media*, „American Political Science Review" 2001, vol. 95, no 1.

17   E. Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What The Internet Is Hiding From You*, The Penguin Press, New York 2011.

18   C.R. Sunstein, *The Law of Group Polarization*, „Journal of Political Philosophy" 2002, vol. 10, no 2.

Negativity and media infotainment

The selection of events that will be presented in the media and which the recipients are usually more interested in also leads to the fact that negative phenomena are often presented. The image of politics through this regularity is the portrait of prominent and affluent celebrities, involved in illegal activities, scandals, often corrupt. Definitely less often, politics is presented as a sphere of compromise, solving existing problems or actions of people who devote all their professional activity to society. The most often overlooked are events whose reception could be ambiguous, and their analysis would take a long time and could not be understood by the recipients. The inevitable simplifications of processes, events and interpretations are particularly due to the conviction that difficult and multidimensional issues are not attractive media material and potential recipients could move to another TV channel or reach for another press title. Flashy headlines, shocking titles, photos that evoke interest are ways to attract attention. The Internet speeds up the process, which makes the recipient pay attention to one topic or problem for a short while, to be interested in the next issue.

An important list of concepts explaining the shape of the media images of the world is entertain. All phenomena presented in the media have greater audience, attract more readers when given in a light entertainment convention. Often for its naming the term infotainment is used, which means crossing of entertainment and information. This process causes that some of the messages in information programs are deliberately concerned with issues that are trivial, irrelevant and given in a manner aimed at amusing or make the recipient laugh[19]. Following the convention of entertainment, it uses not only content, but also the use of various genre conventions. The policy is presented both in various formats of information and documentary programs, as well as conventions such as talk shows, drama, sitcom (also animated sitcom), fake news, religious program, sketch, meme and even reality shows. The traditional dividing lines for „serious" and „entertainment" programs have largely eroded. Daytime and evening TV and radio programs as well as the press and the internet seem to be looking for new and increasingly surprising ways of showing social problems or cultural phenomena from a previously unknown perspective. No topic is a domain of subdued and matter-of-fact discussion, which is replaced by entertainment and a fun convention[20].

The way of presenting the content

Apart from the selection, i.e. the choice of events that will be made available to us due to the choices made by the media content providers or our expectations of habits, our view of the world is influenced by the way the content is presented. Researchers dealing with communication have developed a number of theoretical concepts

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19   R. Klepka, *Hard czy soft: specyfika newsów w „Wiadomościach" TVP w czasie prezydenckiej kampanii wyborczej w 2015 roku*, „Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia de Securitate et Educatione Civili" 2017, vol. 7, no 250, pp. 245–257.

20   H. Batorowska, R. Klepka, O. Wasiuta, *Media jako instrument wpływu informacyjnego i manipulacji społeczeństwem*, Wydawnictwo Libron, Kraków 2019, p. 324.

explaining the ways in which the media interact. The most popular ones are the *agenda setting* and *framing theory*[21].

The first of these dates back to the 70s of the last century, and its essence is the phrase that the media „can not say what to think, but they can tell us what to think about"[22]. The rank and importance of themes is determined by the frequency of their occurrence in the media. Repeatedly speaking in the media about the value of healthy eating will be enhanced by the feeling that it is a burning and important problem. The same applies to feelings related to the threat of a war explosion, early parliamentary elections or the probability of a terrorist attack. Regardless of the real intentions of terrorists and the activities of anti-terrorist services, the frequency of information in the media about terrorist attacks translates into a sense of security. It should be emphasized that the order of the information provided plays a big role, in addition to the frequency, which creates order in the minds of the recipients, giving the importance of topics from the most important to the less important to the trivial ones. Messages starting the main releases of news sites, topics from the covers of dailies or the problems of the most extensive articles in weeklies will be considered more important than the information that was given at the end of the site or about which one column was written in a newspaper or magazine. In accordance with the agenda setting concept, the media creates in our minds a map of important and less important things, which is additionally perpetuated in the minds of people constantly using the media[23]. The layout of content in information portals, the channels we observe in social media create in our minds a peculiar hierarchy of important things.

The second of the indicated concepts, framing, refers to how the presentation of a given topic translates into its perception by the recipients. Most of the information provided by the media corresponds to specific schemes consistent on one hand with journalistic practice, on the other with the expectations and habits of viewers and readers[24]. For example, information about wars, terrorist attacks, accidents or disasters is always given with the number of dead and wounded[25]. The natural formula for informing about the election or referendum is using a sports or war style, using such terms as „in the peloton", „in the first place", „the winner of this battle", „lost in this game". Changes in the budget are usually presented through the prism of underlining what exactly and how many were missing. Politics are most often presented, especially in TV news programs, as a strategy, game or race for

21 D.A. Scheufele, D. Tewksbury, *Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models*, „Journal of Communication" 2007, t. 57, nr 1, pp. 9-11.

22 M. McCombs, *Ustanawianie agendy: media masowe i opinia publiczna*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2008; J.W. Dearing, E.M. Rogers, Agenda-Setting, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi 1996.

23 M. McCombs, A. Reynolds, *How the News Shapes Our Civic Agenda*, [in:] *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, J. Bryant, M.B. Oliver (ed.), Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, New York, London 2009, p. 10.

24 R. Klepka, *Wojna, bitwa, walka... Ramy tematyczne w relacjonowaniu parlamentarnej kampanii wyborczej w Polsce w 2015 roku*, „Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis Studia de Securitate", vol. 9, no 266, pp. 7–17.

25 R. Klepka, *Wojna w mediach: wybrane zagadnienia dotyczące relacjonowania konfliktów zbrojnych*, „Wojny i konflikty. Przeszłość–Teraźniejszość–Przyszłość" 2016, vol. 1, no 1, p. 11.

power, influence and prestige[26]. There are a multitude of cases where the multilateral and complexity of the problem is put in the way of a particular „thematic framework" and in such a simplified way, is perceived by the media users. There is no doubt that for the majority of recipients the problem presented in a specific frame exists only in it - they themselves use its simplified and schematic way of perceiving. Social media portals portray artists more often through the prism of how they spend their holidays and how expensive their homes are, or how often they change partners, while they rarely mention their talent or artistic work. Internet sources of information do not open up new perspectives for viewing the world, but they consolidate the old known cognitive schemes.

Summary

Selected concepts allow to organize knowledge about the complexity and multidimensionality of determinants affecting the perception of the world presented in the media. It is remarkable that in today's world the individual has a relatively limited choice as to whether he wants to explore the world through the media, or would prefer a different path. The development of the Internet and the fact that people have been in contact with it from the earliest years of life determines that the media are becoming an autonomous and independent force, entity or institution present and affecting the individual's awareness. This is what makes it constantly worth analyzing the existing concepts regarding the influence of the media and assess how well they work in the light of constant changes, as well as look for new regularities that explain media-related phenomena that we have not dealt with before.

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26   T. Aalberg, J. Strömbäck, C.H. de Vreese, *The framing of politics as strategy and game: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings*, „Journalism" 2012, vol. 13, no 2, p. 163.

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Man in the world of old and new media - selected concepts of media influence and their contemporary interpretations

Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyze selected concepts regarding media effects and their interpretation in the context of contemporary phenomena related to the media. Reference was made, among others, to the theory of gatekeeping, the theory of information value, echo chamber, filter bubble, agenda setting and framing, and their roles were indicated, taking into account in particular the growing role of the Internet as a source of knowledge about the world as well as the reception of media content.

Słowa kluczowe: media, efekty mediów, gatekeeping, echo chamber, filter bubble

Key words: media, media effect, gatekeeping, echo chamber, filter bubble

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