



Sensory Marketing: Case Study Burguezia do Leitão

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Abstract

The evolution of consumer behavior has shifted the focus of marketing from purely rational attributes to emotional and experiential dimensions. In the highly competitive restaurant sector, the quality of food alone is no longer sufficient to guarantee customer loyalty. This study aims to analyze the application of sensory marketing strategies in “Burguezia do Leitão”, a gastronomic reference in the Bairrada region, Portugal. Adopting a qualitative approach based on the case study method, the research utilizes a multisensory analysis and direct observation to evaluate the stimuli present in the servicescape. The methodology integrates a review of the customer journey, from digital interaction to the physical environment. The findings demonstrate that the brand successfully integrates all five senses: vision (through architecture and decor), smell (the characteristic aroma of traditional roasting), hearing (strategic sound zoning), touch (comfort and ergonomics), and taste (the preservation of traditional gastronomy). The study concludes that the alignment between the digital promise and the physical sensory experience validates the brand’s positioning. Ultimately, this research proves that sensory marketing is a crucial tool for differentiation, emotional engagement, and value creation within the hospitality industry, transforming a traditional meal into a memorable holistic experience.

Keywords: sensory marketing, gastronomy, consumer experience, case study, five senses

Introduction

Historically, marketing focused on functional and utilitarian attributes, characteristic of a pragmatic era centred on price and quality. However, contemporary consumers, immersed in what Pine and Gilmore (1998) defined as the ‘Experience Economy,’ seek

more than just the satisfaction of basic needs; they seek emotional involvement, meaning, and lasting memories (Higueras Medina et al., 2021).

In this context, the restaurant sector faces particular challenges. As Spence (2017) and Krishna (2012) point out, eating out is no longer just an act of nutrition but has become a complex social and cultural activity. Gastronomic quality, although essential, has become a commodity, forcing restaurants to differentiate themselves through strategic management of the environment and sensations. Thus, sensory marketing emerges as a fundamental discipline, allowing brands to use visual, olfactory, auditory, tactile and gustatory stimuli to influence consumer perception, judgement and behaviour (Krishna, 2012).

This case study aims to analyse the practical application of sensory marketing strategies at the restaurant 'Burguezia do Leitão', a landmark establishment in the Bairrada region. This establishment stands out for elevating the consumption of traditional roast suckling pig to a level of sophistication, using a distinctive visual and sensory narrative. Through a qualitative approach, this case study seeks to understand how the sensory stimuli present in the servicescape, from the architecture to the aromas in the environment, converge to influence consumer behaviour.

The work is structured in five sections. After this introduction, a review of the literature is presented, addressing the evolution of sensory marketing, the characterisation of the dimensions of the five senses, and the relevance of the multisensory experience as a differentiation strategy in the restaurant sector. The third section describes the methodology adopted for data collection and analysis. This is followed by the presentation and discussion of the case study, which details the customer journey and the analysis of the brand's sensory vectors. Finally, the conclusions are presented, highlighting how multisensory integration contributes to competitive advantage and value creation in the hotel and restaurant industry.

Literature Review

1. Sensory Marketing

1.1 From Traditional Marketing to Sensory Marketing

Sensory marketing emerged as an evolution of traditional marketing, which focused predominantly on pragmatic and rational arguments (1940 to 1960), centred mainly on price and utility, to an era where identity and branding reigned supreme (1970) (Krishna, 2010). However, at the end of the 20th century, a new consumer model emerged, characterised by a rational and emotional duality (Higueras Medina et al., 2021).

However, market saturation and technological developments are driving a paradigm shift. According to Higueras Medina et al. (2021), the commonplace supply of goods and services has become insufficient, giving rise to the 'Experience Economy.'

According to these authors, brands must provide memorable events that engage consumers on a personal level in order to create real economic value. In this context, Apaza-Panca et al. (2023) argue that traditional criteria, such as quality and price, are no longer the only determinants in the act of purchasing, as today's consumers seek experiences that involve emotions.

Krishna (2012) defines sensory marketing as the set of actions that engage consumers' senses in order to affect their perception, judgement and behaviour. This approach allows the creation of subconscious stimuli that define consumers' abstract perceptions of the product, such as its sophistication or quality, and is often more effective than explicit appeals.

Currently, the literature confirms this view, adding that sensory marketing is superior to traditional marketing in that, by getting to know the customer and their preferences on an emotional level, their purchasing decision will be influenced more profoundly (Apaza-Panca et al., 2023). Higuera Medina et al. (2021) further emphasise that, in a saturated market, consumers seek valuable sensations and experiences, and that the effectiveness of communication increases proportionally to the number of senses integrated into the strategy, enhancing brand loyalty.

1.2 The dimensions of the senses

Understanding sensory marketing requires a clear distinction between sensation and perception. Krishna (2012) explains that sensation is the biochemical and neurological process that occurs when a stimulus reaches the receptor cells, while perception is the awareness of this sensory information.

Although humans use all five senses to interpret their surroundings, each individual has distinct characteristics that influence consumer behaviour in different ways.

Sight is often considered the dominant sense in marketing (Higuera Medina et al., 2021). According to Apaza-Panca et al. (2023), it is estimated that around 80% of the information that customers process is recognised through sight, making it a determining factor in decision-making. Thus, elements such as colours, lighting and the design of a space not only capture attention, but can also override logic, directly influencing persuasion at the moment of purchase.

However, Krishna (2012) points out that visual predominance can lead to perception biases, where optical illusions affect judgement about, for example, the size or volume of a product. In addition, Higuera Medina et al. (2021) suggest that brands should pay special attention to visual stimuli, such as design and packaging, when defining their identity.

Apaza-Panca et al. (2023) highlight that humans can distinguish more than 10,000 odours. In addition, Krishna (2012) states that the sense of smell is distinguished by its anatomical connection to the limbic system, responsible for emotions and memory, which allows for immediate but lasting reactions.

Furthermore, Higuera Medina et al. (2021) point out that many of the benefits of scent marketing are due to the impact that aromas have on consumers' memory and attention to stimuli. The authors also introduce the concept of the 'Proust effect,' which determines that smell has a superior ability, compared to other senses, to awaken memories, including childhood memories.

Much of marketing communication is auditory in nature, with sound considered a key element in creating atmosphere and communicating a brand (Krishna, 2012). The author adds that sound symbolism and background music have the power to alter temporal perception and rhythm during shopping. Apaza-Panca et al. (2023) emphasise that the intensity of the music must be appropriate to generate comfort, constituting a determining factor in customer satisfaction in restaurants. According to Higuera Medina et al. (2021), music has the ability to generate specific emotional reactions, which depend on variables such as rhythm, tone and volume. Additionally, Krishna (2010) states that sounds and music in commercial environments influence mood, perception of waiting time, and consumption rate. Thus, music in an establishment is seen as a fundamental element in creating an atmosphere that can be relaxed or, on the other hand, exciting, depending on the brand's intended goal.

Touch is the first sense to develop in humans and the last sense to be lost with age. Krishna (2012) introduces the concept of "Need-for-touch" (NFT), a scale that measures individual preference for touching products to obtain information, distinguishing between instrumental touch and touch for sensory pleasure. Higuera Medina et al. (2021) add that touch plays a crucial role in the physical evaluation of products, such as checking texture and temperature, influencing confidence in the purchase. Thus, Apaza-Panca et al. (2023) conclude that the possibility of touching an object increases the consumer's sense of ownership and perception of value.

Taste is considered the most complex sense. Krishna (2012) states that taste is, in reality, an amalgamation of all the other five senses, being heavily dependent on smell and sight for the identification of flavours. Higuera Medina et al. (2021) state that it is much more difficult to distinguish a flavour using only taste, which makes taste experiences richer and more memorable when they involve other stimuli such as touch and smell. Due to this sensory interaction, Krishna (2012) suggests that taste experiences are often more complete and memorable. Thus, Apaza-Panca et al. (2023) point out that brands often use tastings to facilitate the purchasing decision process through this sensory integration.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of sensory marketing is directly linked to the number of senses stimulated. In other words, the greater the sensory integration, the greater the customer's loyalty to a brand tends to be (Krishna, 2010).

2. Sensory marketing in the catering sector

Currently, the restaurant industry faces a problem where gastronomic quality, although essential, is no longer sufficient to ensure competitiveness and customer

loyalty. The literature shows that consumer behaviour has evolved from a rational logic, focused on price, satiety or convenience, to a growing demand for integral, memorable and emotionally meaningful experiences (Higuera-Medina et al., 2021; Spence, 2017). In this sense, the restaurant industry asserts itself as a naturally sensory setting, where sensory marketing emerges as a key tool for influencing consumer perception, judgement and behaviour (Krishna, 2012).

This change reflects the assumption of the experience economy, according to which organisations compete not only for goods or services, but also for the ability to provide memorable and emotionally meaningful experiences. In the restaurant sector, this is particularly evident, given that eating out has a strong social and symbolic dimension and is laden with experience. Having a meal in a restaurant is associated with moments of leisure, celebration and escape from routine, which leads customers to favour the ecosystem surrounding the meal over the mere consumption of the product (Spence, 2017).

Higuera-Medina et al (2021) note that the shift in focus from “product” to “experience” is based on the assumption that the competitive advantage of brands lies in their ability to establish lasting emotional bonds with consumers. Understood as an approach that appeals to sensory systems in order to shape consumer perception and behaviour, sensory marketing finds one of its areas of application in the restaurant sector, given the multisensory nature of this activity (Krishna, 2012).

Unlike the purchase of tangible goods, where consumption occurs after the transaction, in the restaurant sector, production and consumption are inseparable in the physical space of the entity itself. When entering the service environment, customers are immediately exposed to visual, olfactory, auditory, gustatory and tactile stimuli, which define the brand identity and anticipate the perception of service quality (Bitner, 1992; Spence, 2017).

2.1 The multisensory experience in catering

The gastronomic experience involves the simultaneous activation of different sensory stimuli throughout the consumer’s journey. Krishna (2012) and Liu et al (2022) state that satisfaction, memory and evaluation of the entire experience result from the integration of perceptions generated by the five senses. This perspective reinforces the need to understand the gastronomic experience as a complex and dynamic combination.

In order to understand this dynamic, Bitner (1992) introduced the concept of servicescape (service setting). The author defines servicescape as a physical environment where the service is provided. It includes factors such as architecture, layout, lighting, temperature, sounds and aromas. This environment influences both customers and employees, affecting both perceptions, emotions and behaviours.

According to Bitner (1992), consumers interpret the servicescape in an integrated way. Although they can identify distinct elements of the space, it is the overall configuration of stimuli that determines cognitive, emotional and physiological responses and subsequent approaches or avoidance behaviours. That said, a sensorially cohesive environment can stimulate consumption, continuity and satisfaction, while an incongruous environment can generate discomfort and rejection.

In catering, this approach is reinforced by conceptualising the experience as an integrated system of offerings, where food is linked to service, space and brand narrative (Eringa & Paredes, 2023). Haute cuisine enhances the symbolic nature of this integration by structuring the meal as a complex sensory experience. This approach assumes that the construction of meaning is the result of total immersion, where attention to detail acts as a vector for communicating the brand's identity and cultural values.

In order to empirically validate this approach, Liu et al (2022) developed the Memorable Dining Experiences with Five Senses Scale (MDEFS). This scale allows for the systematic measurement of the contribution of each sensory domain to the creation of memorable gastronomic experiences. The results show that the strategic management of sensory stimuli acts as a statistically significant predictor of critical variables, namely the intention to revisit, word of mouth and loyalty, validating the need for deliberate control of the sensory dimension.

2.2 Application of the five senses in the context of catering

The strategic application of the five senses allows restaurant managers to transform physical stimuli into emotional added value. According to Krishna (2012), each sense contributes differently to the consumer experience.

Sight plays an undeniably central role in sensory marketing and is described as the most dominant sense. Krishna (2012) suggests that much of the information processed by consumers comes from visual cues, influencing expectations, perceptions of quality and choices. The design, lighting, colours and visual presentation of dishes act as symbolic signs of the restaurant's positioning and service quality (Liu et al., 2022). The presentation of food can alter the perception of taste and sophistication, reinforcing the hedonic value of the meal (Spence, 2017).

The auditory dimension acts as a regulating element of the experience, influencing the consumer's emotional state and consumption rate. Background music, when aligned with the restaurant's concept, enhances comfort, prolongs the length of stay, and optimises service evaluation (Apaza-Panca et al., 2023). In addition, verbal interaction between employees is part of this auditory dimension, directly influencing professional competence and hospitality.

Smell is widely recognised as one of the most important senses in sensory marketing, given its direct connection to emotions and memory (Higueras-Medina et al., 2021). In catering, aromas play an anticipatory role, preparing the consumer for the taste experience and consolidating the identity of the servicescape. The literature reiterates that olfactory stimuli congruent with the restaurant's concept are a catalyst for satisfaction, intention to return and recommendation (Liu et al., 2022).

Although taste is the most obvious sense, it does not act in isolation. The perception of flavour results from the integration of stimuli from sight, smell and hearing, confirming the multisensory nature of the gastronomic experience (Krishna, 2012). Despite this complexity, the intrinsic quality of taste remains the cornerstone of consumer loyalty, laying the foundation for an emotional bond with the establishment.

Finally, touch contributes to the perception of comfort, authenticity and quality. Interaction with the materiality of the space, the texture of the utensils, the weight of the crockery and the ambient temperature influence the overall assessment of the experience. These elements take on critical relevance in premium and haute cuisine establishments, where physical detail is interpreted as an indicator of sophistication (Liu et al., 2022).

2.3 Sensory marketing as a differentiation strategy

In a saturated market, where culinary excellence is seen as a minimum requirement, sensory marketing has become a central strategy for differentiation and positioning (Higueras-Medina et al., 2021). The coherent integration of sensory stimuli allows the creation of a distinctive sensory brand, capable of differentiating the restaurant from the competition and generating symbolic value.

Differentiation is demonstrated through the construction of sensory narratives (storytelling), in which the senses function as conduits of meaning. In haute cuisine contexts, chefs use sensory stimuli to communicate cultural identity, territory and authenticity, transforming the meal into a symbolic and emotionally engaging experience (Eringa & Proaño Paredes, 2023). This approach supports the notion of the “mind as a sixth sense”, where stimuli are cognitively integrated to create meaning and memory.

Apaza-Panca et al. (2023) confirm that there is a strong and positive relationship between sensory marketing and customer loyalty, and demonstrate that congruent sensory stimuli generate emotional attachment and intention to return. Thus, sensory marketing transcends initial attraction, acting as a structuring mechanism for loyalty and the construction of lasting relationships with consumers.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach, obtained through the case study method, focused on the “Burguezia do Leitão” brand. The choice of this methodology is based

on the premise that sensory marketing involves the creation of subconscious triggers that affect consumer perception and behaviour (Krishna, 2012). As such, in order to capture the complexity of these stimuli, our data collection was structured around three axes:

Direct observation: We visited the establishment with the aim of identifying and recording the sensory stimuli present in the space.

Access to institutional information: The study was complemented with data provided directly by those responsible for the space, ensuring an inside view of Burguezia do Leitão's strategy.

Digital research: An analysis of the content of the website and other platforms was carried out in order to gather as much information as possible.

The Burguezia do Leitão

Burguezia do Leitão is an integrated tourist resort, defined as a 'little bourgeois', located in Mealhada, next to the A1 motorway exit, which positions itself in the market as a benchmark for sophistication and celebration of Bairrada culture. The brand operates through a range of services that includes the jewel in the crown, the traditional restaurant, where Leitão à Bairrada (roast suckling pig) is served. This restaurant has been awarded the '4 Maravilhas da Mesa da Mealhada' (4 Wonders of the Mealhada Table) prize. Complementing the restaurant is a themed hotel in the Bairrada area, with views over the vineyards, and finally there is also a lounge bar.

The brand's identity is highly symbolic, inspired by the historical concept of the 'bourgeoisie' and an aesthetic of leadership, visually represented by lions and a golden shield, a colour associated with prosperity.

The restaurant's atmosphere has been designed to maximise comfort and visual experience. This space is distinguished by its panoramic view over the vineyards, which can be admired from the main room or the terrace.

As a complement to Burguezia do Leitão, there is also a hotel, which offers features designed to provide the greatest possible comfort and rest, with each room offering different views of the Bairrada region.

Analysis of the Senses

The strategy most used by Burguezia do Leitão is Sensory Marketing, using the five senses - sight, smell, taste, hearing and finally touch - to build its value proposition.

In terms of sight, Burguezia do Leitão makes the most of its location, with the breathtaking views that Bairrada offers. The visual field of customers is filled with vineyards and landscapes, whether in the Burguezia room, on the terrace or in the hotel rooms. This vision is achieved through an exhibition by the photographer of Memórias e Pessoas (Memories and People), Ana Martelo, with her exhibition 'Um

Olhar sobre a Bairrada' (A Look at Bairrada). This concern with visual stimulation allows the beauty of Bairrada and the best it has to offer to be displayed in a single space, making it engaging.

In addition to this landscape exhibition, the restaurant also offers the opportunity to admire the entire process of preparing suckling pig, from the roasting to the carving, through a window overlooking the cooking and preparation areas.

Moving on to the sense of smell, Burguezia do Leitão has invested in a partnership with 4SENSE to install devices throughout the space that release a specific aroma for each occasion and experience, making the space and moment unforgettable. This approach, complemented by the other senses, makes the Sensory Marketing approach even more comprehensive and capable of attracting customers to return and spend more time enjoying the space.

Taste is the focus of the central experience, the tasting. The brand stimulates this sense through authenticity and tradition, highlighting the Bairrada suckling pig, which is part of the award given to Burguezia do Leitão, the '4 Wonders of the Mealhada Table', which in addition to suckling pig refers to Luso water, bread and wine. In addition to providing these wonders of Mealhada, it also diversifies its taste experience through the diversification of fresh fish, seafood and meat, which appeals to a demanding palate.

As for touch, this is connected to physical comfort, which is explored through ergonomics and temperature. Temperature is a factor of comfort throughout the hotel and common areas. The furniture is chosen to be as welcoming as possible, allowing guests to relax physically, whether at happy hour or during a restful night's sleep.

In terms of hearing, the brand shows considerable sensitivity to the soundscape. In the restaurant, they use music at a moderate volume to complement the meal. Here, in addition to the music, the piglet is carved in an open space so that customers can hear the crackling of the skin, whetting their appetite. In the Lounge Bar, the sound is set at a specific volume that allows for conversation, facilitating social interaction without intrusive noise. Finally, in the Hotel, the auditory promise changes to a peaceful environment, providing luxurious silence.

Consumer Journey

In order to explore, experience and get to know more closely, we decided to undertake a consumer journey. The aim of this journey was to verify the promises made by Burguezia do Leitão and to understand first-hand the use of the tool that is Sensory Marketing.

This journey begins with the convenience of the location, as it is at a motorway exit, making it easy to visit. Upon arriving at Burguezia do Leitão, we noticed the imposing size of the building and the logistical convenience of private parking, with the possibility of using Tesla SuperChargers.

Upon entering, we were enveloped by the exhibition of photographer Ana Martelo, which allowed us to contextualise ourselves in the 'Bairrada region'. In addition to the exhibition, we noticed the pleasant aroma that conveyed tranquillity and comfort.

To begin this journey, we decided to start with the cuisine of this space, the restaurant. We immediately knew what we would choose as soon as we saw the cooking area and heard the crispy cut of the suckling pig. As we had researched beforehand, we knew about the '4 wonders of the Mealhada table' award, which was also on display in the space. We realised that this was something we had to try, and we were not disappointed. Whether it was the crispy suckling pig, the refreshing water, the fresh bread or the sparkling wine, they were all worthy of the award.

Going up to the hotel, we were able to admire the continuous theme of Bairrada, with each room decorated differently. In addition to the attention to detail, we noticed the attention given to creating different categories of rooms, such as rooms for a long stay to relax, rooms for guests just passing through to rest, such as on business trips, all of them with a comforting aroma and temperature.

Moving on to the lounge bar, we realised the various reasons why guests enjoy it. We saw groups of friends just socialising with background music, people using the space to work while their electric cars charged. Here, we felt the comfort and tranquillity of an open space for socialising, while enjoying the famous suckling pig and Bairrada sparkling wine.

We ended this journey by admiring what is so indirectly commercialised, the landscapes of Bairrada from the Terrace.

Discussion and Results

This consumer journey we undertook allowed us to validate Burguezia do Leitão's positioning strategies, confirming that the brand delivers on its promises through coordinated and planned multisensory stimulation. Field observation showed that the concept of a sophisticated 'little bourgeois' is not just a theoretical narrative, but a tangible reality through architecture, service and atmosphere.

In terms of vision, the first impression we described in the journey, the 'imposing size of the building', is in line with the brand's ambition to convey leadership and something majestic, which is symbolised by the use of the colour gold and the lions in its symbol. Observation of Ana Martelo's photographic exhibition at the entrance confirmed the effectiveness of the cultural immersion strategy. By contextualising the customer in the 'Bairrada region' through photography, Burguezia do Leitão is able to transform the entrance hall into a point of admiration that enhances the territory before the gastronomic consumption. We ended our journey at the Terrace, confirming the 'breathtaking view over the vineyards' that is mentioned by the brand as a central asset of the experience. This connection between the exhibition and the

outside landscape reinforces Burguezia's identity as an admirer and ambassador of the region.

The restaurant experience stands out for its fusion of stimuli, the auditory observation of the suckling pig being cut, the view of the cooking area and the taste of the dishes, which fulfilled the promise of respect for pure Portuguese tradition. The confirmation of the quality of the products validates the distinction of the '4 Maravilhas da Mesa da Mealhada' (4 Wonders of the Mealhada Table), which is rightly boasted by the brand. It is worth noting that during the visit, it was possible to identify a distinct sound management in the Lounge Bar, where the background music allowed for socialising, which corroborates the brand's strategy of regulating the volume to allow dialogue between customers. This demonstrates effective sensory segmentation between the restaurant with sounds of action and sounds of relaxation in the Lounge Bar.

The pleasant aroma and comfortable temperature felt in both the rooms and common areas prove the commitment to air conditioning and furniture designed for physical comfort. In the hotel, the observation of the exclusive themed decoration in each room reinforces the personalisation of the stay. The existence of different room types is noticeable during the visit, reflecting the company's strategy of serving both leisure and corporate customers.

The ease of access via the motorway and the private parking observed during the journey directly correspond to the competitive advantage of the location next to the A1 exit in Mealhada. The perceived presence of customers working while their cars were charging at the specific electric car chargers validates the focus on the business segment and technological innovation, enabling the brand to create a hybrid environment where leisure and work are united by the comfort of the space.

In short, our consumer journey confirmed that Burguezia do Leitão uses sensory marketing as a tool and as its main strategy to make its proposal of quality and refinement tangible. This consistency between the information that can be found on its website and the actual experience, from convenience to visual and gastronomic immersion, proves that the brand stands out by offering an integrated experience of discovery about Bairrada, which leads to an increase in traditional consumption of suckling pig to a level of tourist and executive sophistication.

Conclusion

This case study sought to investigate the role of sensory marketing as a differentiation strategy in the restaurant sector, focusing on the brand "Burguezia do Leitão".

Krishna (2012) and Apaza-Panca et al. (2023) suggest that the creation of subconscious triggers through the five senses is crucial in influencing consumer perception of value, judgement and loyalty behaviour. The analysis carried out

through the consumer journey allowed this theoretical premise to be validated in business practice.

The results show that “Burguezia do Leitão” does not merely serve a traditional gastronomic product, but rather a holistic experience consistent with its positioning of sophistication and leadership. There was deliberate and segmented management of all sensory domains:

- Sight is stimulated by the architectural grandeur and integration of the vineyard landscape, reinforcing regional identity;
- Smell is strategically activated through scent marketing partnerships and the endogenous aromas of the cuisine;
- Hearing benefits from effective zoning between the ‘action’ sounds of the restaurant and the relaxation of the Lounge Bar;
- Touch is ensured by ergonomics and air conditioning;
- Taste confirms the quality of the products awarded by the “4 Wonders of the Mealhada Table”.

Direct observation confirmed that the “bourgeois” and cultural narrative communicated on digital platforms is materialised in the servicescape through tangible details. This consistency generates trust and validates the brand's strategy of serving both the leisure and corporate segments, creating a hybrid environment where the tradition of suckling pig coexists with technological innovation and contemporary comfort.

In short, the case of “Burguezia do Leitão” illustrates that sensory marketing, when applied in an integrated manner, is a powerful tool for adding value to traditional products. By transcending flavour and enveloping the customer in a multisensory atmosphere, the brand manages to differentiate itself in a saturated market, proving that strategic management of the senses is fundamental to transforming a simple meal into a memorable cultural experience.

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