

Gender and Usage of Instagram

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Abstract

Social media plays such an important role in modern society that it has become an important aspect in one's lifestyle, as well as changed the manner in which people interact and do things on a daily basis. Given rapid advancement in social media and communication technology, it is no surprise that social networking has become a key method of communication in contemporary society. A key mobile application to note is Instagram, which is widely used for personal and business purposes. In this study, quantitative method was adopted by means of a survey to elicit gender differences in the usage of Instagram for 150 Malaysian teenagers. It serves to identify gender preferences, as well as gratifications sought when using Instagram. Results indicate that the most gratification sought after by the respondents were affective needs, followed by personal and cognitive needs. There are no significant differences when it comes to personal gratifications for using Instagram between males and females in order to fulfil all of their needs. In a conclusion, although uses and gratifications theory is an old theory, it is still relevant to explain the reason people use or choose any type of media they believe are able to satisfy their needs especially with the existence of the social media.

Keywords: *Social networking, Instagram, Uses and Gratifications*

Gender dan Penggunaan Instagram

Media sosial memainkan peranan penting dalam masyarakat moden kerana ia telah menjadi suatu bahagian yang penting dalam gaya hidup seseorang individu. Ianya secara tidak langsung telah mengubah cara berinteraksi dan kehidupan harian individu berkenaan. Justeru itu, kemajuan pesat dalam teknologi komunikasi telah menjadikannya sebagai kaedah utama untuk berkomunikasi dalam masyarakat kontemporari. Instagram adalah antara media sosial yang digunakan secara meluas bagi tujuan peribadi dan perniagaan. Dalam kajian ini, kaedah kuantitatif berteraskan teori kegunaan dan pemuasan (U&G) melalui teknik tinjauan digunakan untuk mengenal pasti perbezaan gender dalam penggunaan Instagram dalam kalangan 150 remaja di Malaysia. Kajian ini dilaksanakan untuk mengenal pasti keutamaan dalam penggunaan mengikut kategori gender serta kepuasan yang dicari apabila menggunakan Instagram. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa keperluan tertinggi yang dicari oleh responden adalah keperluan afektif, diikuti oleh keperluan peribadi dan kognitif. Tiada perbezaan yang signifikan antara kepuasan peribadi untuk menggunakan Instagram antara remaja lelaki dan perempuan dalam memenuhi semua keperluan mereka. Kesimpulannya, walaupun teori U&G adalah teori lama, ianya masih relevan untuk menjelaskan sebab orang menggunakan atau memilih jenis media yang mereka percaya mampu memenuhi keperluan mereka terutamanya dengan kewujudan media sosial.

Kata Kunci: Rangkaian Sosial, Instagram, Kegunaan dan Pemuasan.

Introduction

Given the significant growth of Social Networking Sites (SNS) since its inception, it is not farfetched to say that its widespread use has made an enormous impact towards the society. SNS is a platform used for people to connect globally, with various advantages that benefit the end users. With multiple features that can be suited to everyone's needs and wants, it has definitely changed the way people communicate and conduct businesses worldwide (Moody, 2010). Moreover, over 90% of Internet users can identify with at least one social media network (Brown,

2010). SNS networks emerge often, with a distinctive range of probable uses and conceivable gratifications for their users, and thus many are integrated with new communication technologies and mobile devices (Ballard, 2011).

The usage of smartphones is not limited to adults; it has transcended the age gap to include teenagers and children. Children are more likely to own smartphones across all age groups and gender (53%), followed by laptop computers (48%), desktop computers (34%) and ordinary mobile phones (31%) (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2013). The same study also affirmed that smartphone possession has increased users' exposure towards the Internet. The portability of smartphones also provides teens with the ability to access SNS anytime and anywhere. Through SNSes, teens can stay connected with existing friends, while expanding their network by fostering new friendships with like-minded individuals globally. Teens keep in touch with friends by constantly updating their SNSes, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Google+ and many others. In 2013, nearly half of teens surveyed named Facebook as their favourite SNS. That is no longer the case. For teens these days, Instagram is considered the most significant SNS on the Internet (Bosker, 2014). Teenagers shifted to Instagram as they felt that Facebook is for the older generation, whereas Instagram is more suited for the youth (Bosker, 2014). In 2014, the number of teenagers on Facebook declined by 25.3%, whereas the number elderlies above the age of 55 increased by 80.4% (Saul, 2014). Instagram is a mobile social network that allows users to edit and share photos as well as videos either publicly or privately to pre-approved followers, making it an excellent platform for sharing visual cues to others around the world (Reynolds, 2012). The number of Instagram users has increased drastically as it is considered the best medium to stay connected to friends. Users like that they're deemed as creative by using editing features provided by Instagram. It offers instant gratifications when others like their posts, or when their photos are re-posted. Other than that, Instagram also provides seamless social integration across all SNS platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Foursquare and Tumblr. Today, there are over 800 million monthly active users on Instagram (Statista, 2017).

While many studies have been conducted to expand on the topic of social media, not many have concentrated specifically on Instagram. Although previous studies have focused on the impact on Instagram among adults and university students, as well as by marketers and advertisers, not many scholars have looked at its usage among teenagers.

The objective of this research is to identify gender preferences, as well as gratifications sought by teenagers when using Instagram. This study will look at users and gratifications theory (U&G) to examine the audience choices on the usage of Instagram.

Literature Review

Activities on Social Networking Sites

Users are exposed to different types of activities on social networking sites and these include consumption and directed communication. Consumption can be defined as the scale that measures the degree of attention users are giving to general posts shared by their friends, including status updates and public conversations. Apart from that, attention can be measured or defined in this context as the users' interest towards the items on the news feed. Users will browse through news feed and view distinct profiles, photos, news, and stories that interest them. On the other hand, directed communication is a scale that measures users' interactions on SNS with their friends, which involve text exchanges and non-text feedback that is usually translated into actions such as "like" and photo tagging. It includes the number of people or friends who initiate the actions, as well as those who received it. Actions such as giving gifts, "pokes" and video and note tagging were excluded due to its lack of usage.

The activity that most teenagers always conduct on SNS is to "check-in" at the location that they are visiting. SNS allow users to provide useful data about the context in which they are in, at any given moment, through platforms such as Instagram and Foursquare which employ participatory sensing systems. Location sharing services are examples of participatory

sensing systems. The sensed data is a check-in of a particular place that indicates, for instance, a cafe in a specific location, and also a signal from a user expressing his/her preference. In Instagram, the sensed data is a picture of a specific place. Similarly, in Foursquare, the sensed data is the actual location associated with a specific category of place (Silva et al., 2013).

“Like” is the most frequent activity that users do on SNS. Additionally, Instagram is a great platform for business purposes. Businesses that have a visual element, such as restaurants or retail stores where visitors may take photos of food or products are especially well-suited to Instagram. A creative photo that is uploaded by friends will ought to catch attention. This has produced a new wave of social media influencers, such as food bloggers. Moreover, the varying themes that this platform offers can be matched with the feel of a certain product or service. For example, a travel agency may wish to modify their pictures to emphasize the cerulean blue waters of a beach landscape. Comparably, a law firm may choose to highlight tonalities of greys and blacks; stressing a “no nonsense” approach to their litigation cases.

Needs Gratified by Using Social Networking Sites

In everything that people do, there must be an objective that they want to achieve. The same applies to going online and using SNS – there must be a reason why people are using it. According to U&G, there are five needs that people want to gratify when they are using certain media; cognitive needs, affective needs, social needs, personal needs and tension release needs (Katz, Gurevitch & Haas, 1973).

A study shows that teenagers are extremely active users of social media, with 95% of American teens are online and 81% using SNSes (Forte, Dickard, Magee & Agosto, 2010). Another study indicates that young people use social media not only for identity exploration and socialization, including friendship and relationship-driven activities, but also to engage in interest-driven activities including learning and exploring the world around them (Ito et al., 2010).

Young people also differ from adults in their reasons for using or not using the Internet; however, explanations for these differences are not yet robust (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). Identity exploration have described by developmental psychologists as a serious feature of the teenage years. Additionally, the ways that young peoples' activities and relationships with technology are influenced, structured-by and subject-to monitoring and regulation by adults and institutions have been examined by social scientists. The concurrent experience of growth and vulnerability that characterize teenage years make youth experiences of mediated social interaction an object of widespread interest.

A few researches have been done on how teenagers seek for information on specific contexts that are viewed as socially or developmentally important, such as finding health information and information that they need to complete their homework. A large and increasing body of research has also examined teen practices as they encounter information needs in diffused contexts, sometimes referred to as everyday life. For instance, a study found that young people mostly seek information from their homes (Rieh, 2004), whereas another noted that young people encounter information needs in diverse contexts outside of school that draw unique search and assessment strategies (Gasser *et al.*, 2012).

Another study recommended that whatever activities youth are engaged in at a given time has a reflective effect on how they communicate online and what they communicate about; friendship-driven participation on sites such as Myspace and Facebook largely involve learning about the opinions and values of peers and friendship, whereas interest-driven participation involve the development of specialized forms of expertise within niche knowledge communities (Ito *et al.*, 2011). Additionally, a research also developed an empirically grounded taxonomy of youth information needs, including 28 discrete categories, which we use as a starting point for capturing the breadth of questions teens ask and answer in SNSes (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2006).

While few studies have systematically investigated gratifications on cognitive need obtained, a number of studies provide important insight into the wide range of gratifications that users obtain from employing

SNSes. In an investigation of the effects of Facebook on social capital, it is found that Facebook use was motivated primarily by social gratifications, which include maintaining existing social ties and being able to reconnect with friends from the past (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, Friendster also offers a space for users to converse with their friends and peers, and to share digital artefacts (Boyd & Heer, 2006). To substantiate these studies, one of the few investigations that systematically employed U&G found that Facebook was used to build and maintain university students' social networks, as well as to learn about social events (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

In gratifying their needs, teenagers will choose the medium that can satisfy their need at a point in time. Different SNSes offer different features to users. For teenagers, they understand that the limited number of characters allowed on Twitter makes it more suited for brief thoughts and links to other content, and in some ways, constrain bullying behaviour. They also understand that Instagram is almost purely visual, and is used as a medium to express creativity by sharing them with friends.

Teens are paying attention on the social media platforms used, and recognize the different characteristics and limitations of each SNS. The one-size-fits-all social media platform does not exist — it never has, despite Facebook's best efforts — and each platform has different characteristics (Long, 2013). A focus group data indicated that teenagers are using different platforms according to their preference towards the online social interaction they want to experience. Apart from that, in order to determine their preferred choices of SNS, teenagers will analyse the limitations and characteristics of the SNS to identify the most compatible SNS that can meet with their requirements.

The situation is best explained with these examples: if a teenager has higher tendency to share and seek an opinion, he/she will opt for Facebook as it offers the desired functions and; if they have higher tendency towards sharing photos of themselves and places, then Instagram would be the best SNS that can meet their preference. The difference in their preferences and choices are able to make researchers understand their minds and level of thinking. Teenage minds function

and work differently than those of adults. The study reflects how teenage minds would think and come out with the best way to communicate with others; on how to communicate, what to communicate and to whom shall they communicate to.

In today's digital age, there is a necessity for teachers to start teaching the basics of digital culture as students as young as twelve years old are aware of the tools they and others use to perform different tasks. Users no longer choose Facebook due to its trendiness and popularity but instead, it is chosen as a preferred medium that meet the users' personalities and communities. As a result, a preferred social media site can be used as an analytical tool to understand how a student is able to choose the best medium to process information and communicate with others.

Different Needs and Gratifications by Different Gender

A research found that the majority of females are using Facebook as a platform to maintain relationship, for academic purposes as well as to follow agendas. Meanwhile, the majority of males use Facebook as a tool to establish new relationships. It also shows that females have a higher tendency to not disclose their identities and personal information in order to protect their privacy online (Mazman, 2011). Another research has shown that women would not disclose themselves to strangers as they are often linked with traditional social roles and social pressure (Bölükbaş & Yildiz, 2005). It is in line with another study which indicate a staggering difference between males and females on their usage of social network. The female population have a higher preference in using social networks to connect with their circle of friends who live in nearby areas or who study in different schools, while the male population have a higher tendency to use the social networks as a platform to find potential friends and others of similar interests (Tüfekçi, 2008).

It is also found that males have higher tendency to establish new relationship in social network environment in comparison to females (Thelwall, 2008; Madden *et al.*, 2013). This is supported by another study which suggests that males tend to be more open towards new

relationship and communication skills are a vital factor in maintaining both new and existing relationships. The same study also suggests females are more sociable and have a more positive communication as compared to males (Korkut, 2005).

According to a national survey conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 55% of American youth aged 12-17 years old use online social networking sites. The survey also show that older teenage girls are more prone to using social networking sites as a tool to reinforce pre-existing friendships while boys are more prone to use it as a platform to flirt and establish new friendships. Although there are shifts in the current trend and a decrease in the percentage of teens using several social networking site features, the population of SNS users have increased significantly.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The effects of mass media have been a controversial topic for scholars over the past century. With the rise of film and radio in the early part of the 1900s, communication researchers began to study what effects media messages have on those who receive them. U&G approach captures the audience's motivation for attending to mass media as its standpoint for understanding media exposure and effects (Swanson, 1992).

From the U&G perspective, media messages are no longer being directly received and accepted by consumers. The focus is more towards the audience's ability to select the messages they are exposed to rather than on the supremacy of the messages being sent. U&G allows audience to be more active and selective towards the content and messages conveyed by the media. It also provides a ground-breaking insight to the interrelations between audience-centric approach and the media effects that has changed the general viewpoints of mass communication.

The basis of U&G approach was set before the 1950s, with the whole perspective developing into a robust mechanism in the mid-20th century because of researchers Blumler and Katz. The process of development

and clarification of the U&G concepts during the mid-20th century had allowed researches to explore the effects of people to media rather than media to people (Katz, 1959).

U&G theory clarifies that media users or audience will choose or seek the media technology and content based on their specific need or gratification. The approach of the theory focuses on the audience's preference and choices on a particular media rather than its content. In comparison with the common concern of the media effects which hypothesize an identical mass audience and an injected or instilled view of the media, U&G allows media researchers to explore a variety of responses and interpretations towards the "people effects" or "what people do with media".

Traditionally, U&G examines involvement of audience and gratification attained from watching television, listening to the radio, with emphasis on motives for medium, psychological and social traits that influence the audience in using certain media.

In early 1970s, television was the most popular media medium which most typologies were focused on. During that era, analysing links between uses and social roles (social condition) and psychological characteristics done by many U&G researchers which began developing typologies of the media. As a whole, the typologies discovered a framework of shared gratification and items for single investigator. Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) debated that the dissimilarities in the typologies were due to the fact that researchers focused on the diverse levels of the study, for example, medium or content and diverse materials such as diverse programs or types of program in dissimilar cultures. Rubin (1981) is also of the view that the uses and gratification research was prone to be a mass medium general rather than content specific. Rubin's 1983 motivation category entitled social interaction translated these statements into concepts; "I am belonging to the group because I watch TV so I know what they know from watching TV."

McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) explained a media-person interaction typology by linking the social conditions and viewer's background with gratification desires. Their typologies consisted the following uses:

(a) diversion (escape, emotional release); (b) personal relationships (companionship, social utility); (c) personal identity (personal reference, reality exploration, value reinforcement); and (d) surveillance (acquiring news and information). An idealist view of the television use was perceived as unconvincing. The word “use” in this context was described as personal relationships, which reflects a similar need for “community” or “fellowship”.

Katz, Gurevitch and Haas (1973) identified the 14 needs that were associated with media use. The needs were placed into one of the five following categories: (1) Cognitive needs (acquire information, knowledge); (2) affective needs (emotion, pleasure, feelings); (3) personal Integrative needs (enhance credibility, status); (4) Social Integrative needs (interact with family and friends) and (5) Tension Release (escape and diversion).

There are 16 motivations of mass media use that are linked to a variety of human needs that were identified as even more ambitious than Katz and his acquaintance McGuire. Greenberg (1974) identified seven child and adolescent television viewing motivations: habit, relaxation, companionship, passing time, learning, arousal and escape. A similar methodology was applied and Rubin (1977) had identified and adopted child and adolescent television viewing motivations in his study: learning, passing time/habit, companionship, escape, arousal and relaxation. In 1979, Palmgreen and Rayburn identified seven gratifications associated with public television; relaxing, learning about things, communication utility, forgetting, passing time, companionship and entertainment.

U&G theory is widely use in media research since it was introduced. Before, researchers apply the theory to test the consumption of traditional media, and today, researchers mostly use U&G to test the consumption of new media.

Research on U&G have addressed the internet use and social networking sites in general (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004; Ruggiero, 2000; Bumgarner, 2007). A survey conducted on undergraduate Facebook users in the United States and the findings

showed that most students use Facebook to maintain existing offline relationships rather than establishing new connection and meeting new people. Furthermore, by providing 11 social benefits for users with low self-esteem and low level of life satisfaction, the study found that SNS such as Facebook may improve the students' psychological well-being (Ellison *et al.*, 2007). The study also shows that the use of SNS had gained the interest of the society due to its ability to connect a variety of individuals with similar or different characteristics.

Apart from individual connections, Facebook is also able to connect various people via a group function which indirectly instil a sense of community within its users. A quantitative study on Facebook group managed to explore the needs and reality of the social conditions that encourage Facebook group use (Park, Kee & Valenzuela, 2009). The users' purposes of joining the political Facebook groups are primarily for socializing, entertainment and to seek status and information (Part *et al.*, 2009). Although this study focused more on the usefulness of political Facebook groups, the motivations has the potential to be applied in other topics as well.

The assessment of actual interaction between group members can provide a more comprehensive understanding of users' motivations for using Facebook groups as a support for the real-world circumstances. There are different views between the communication scholars on whether Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) increases (McKenna, Green & Gleason, 2002) or diminishes (Jacobson, 1999) relationship quality. CMC relationships are often regarded as having less or low relationship quality (Cummings, Butler & Krut, 2000) and relationship categories such as friendship and romance are believed to have more significant influence on relationship quality rather than the medium of communication used (Baym, Zhang & Lin, 2004). Nevertheless, there is still a lack of studies to address the relationship between social media and romance.

Methodology

Data were collected through a survey that was designed and distributed to samples chosen via non-probability sampling. The questionnaire consists

of four major sections. Section A collected demographic information of the respondents. While, Section B covered respondents' frequency and usage of Instagram application. Section C gathered respondents' needs and gratifications sought from Instagram usage, while Section D probed further into respondents' activity on the site. Section B, C and D will use 5 points Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Respondents consisted of Malay, Chinese and Indian teenagers between the ages of 12 to 19. A total number of 150 questionnaires were distributed within the Klang Valley.

There are 23 items constructed to measure the gratification of needs. Items 1 to 6, (six statements) will measure the cognitive needs, item 7 to 13, (seven statements) will test on affective needs, question 14 to 18, (five questions) will test on personal needs, and question 19 to 23 (5 questions) will test on social needs.

Findings and Discussion

Demography

Majority (16%) of the respondents involved in this study were 14 years old, followed by teenagers who were 15 years old (15.3%), while 14% were 12 years old. Another 13.3% were aged 18, 12% were 13 and 19 years old, 10.7% were aged 17, and 6.7% were 16 years old. In terms of gender, 51.3% of the respondents were female, while another 48.7% were male.

Gratifying needs from Instagram

Table 1 shows the highest needs that teenagers looked after was the affective needs ($M=4.90$; $SD=0.31$). Followed by gratifying for personal needs ($M= 4.80$; $SD=0.61$) and cognitive needs ($M= 4.56$; $SD= 0.36$). However, not many teenagers use Instagram to satisfy for their social needs ($M= 2.43$; $SD= 0.36$).

Table 1: Needs that teenagers seeking from Instagram (N=150)

Need to gratification	M	SD
Affective	4.90	0.31
Personal	4.80	0.61
Cognitive	4.56	0.36
Social	2.43	0.36

The above findings clearly suggest that regardless of the categories of age, people use media mainly to gratify affective or emotional needs. This phenomenon occurs because compared to the traditional media, in which viewers need to choose contents fixed by media conglomerates, the new media such as Instagram however, provides opportunities for teenagers to create their own content, and express and share their thinking, opinion, and feeling freely and ultimately gratify their needs. Likewise, Leung's (2013) study also proposes that among gratification that people across age group sought after from the social media was emotional needs. In addition, teenagers are the period when they experience emotional turbulence and Instagram becomes a right platform for them to fulfill for their affective needs (Pickhardt, 2010). For instance, young people use media to share pictures or photos on their wall or to follow personalities' account for the reasons of fulfilling their personal and cognitive needs. For personal needs, teenagers may use this medium for example to improve their self-esteem by taking the personalities as their examples or inspiration, while for cognitive needs, they gain knowledge through either seeking or sharing of information. For example, Malik et al. (2016) found that photo-sharing activities on Facebook fulfilled users need for attention seeking, affection seeking, entertainment, information sharing etc.

Gratification of needs according to gender

Two independent sample t-test were performed to compare between male and female Instagram use according to their needs. Table 2 shows there were no significant differences between male and female Instagram use on all needs that they intended to gratify ($t_{\text{affective}} = -0.58$; $t_{\text{personal}} = 0.376$; $t_{\text{cognitive}} = -2.95$; $t_{\text{social}} = -1.10$, $p > 0.05$). The mean values for all needs between male and female were: affective needs ($M_{\text{Male}} = 4.91$;

$M_{\text{Female}}=4.89$), personal needs ($M_{\text{Male}} = 4.81$; $M_{\text{Female}}=4.82$), cognitive needs ($M_{\text{Male}} = 4.53$; $M_{\text{Female}} = 4.54$) and social needs ($M_{\text{Male}} = 2.40$; $M_{\text{Female}} = 2.46$).

Table 2: Differences between male and female on gratifications sought from Instagram

Needs	Gender	Mean	Standard deviation	t	p
Affective	Male	4.91	0.31	-0.58	0.954
	Female	4.89	0.43		
Personal	Male	4.81	0.61	0.376	0.707
	Female	4.82	0.62		
Cognitive	Male	4.53	0.36	-2.95	0.769
	Female	4.54	0.36		
Social	Male	2.40	0.48	-1.10	0.272
	Female	2.46	0.32		

The findings of this study were inconsistent from previous results. Many previous studies found that male and female users have different needs to be satisfied when they choose the type of media they expose themselves to. For instance, Mazman (2011) has found that women use Facebook to maintain existing relationships, for academic purposes and to follow their own agenda, whereas men use it to create new relationships. Men also have better chances in creating new relationships in social networking environments better than women did (Thelwall, 2008; Madden *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, Grellhesl and Punyanut-Carter (2012) reported that women used higher text messaging than men to cater for their affective or emotional purposes. Therefore, those results showed that men and women use media to gratify for conflicting needs.

Conclusion

In a conclusion, the highest seeking need teenagers were looking for was the affective needs. Followed by personal and cognitive needs. These include sharing photos of their daily activities, major life events, as well as expressing their emotion. However, there are no differences between male and female teenagers in gratifying all of their needs. Both use Instagram for the same reasons, which is to achieve all their

needs. This study also indicated that U&G theory although considered classic but is still significant to explain how audiences actively select, participate in the Instagram activities and finally utilize fully the media in satisfying their needs, especially with the existence of social media that offer abundance of activities and information.

Implications and Recommendations

There are a few implications that can be derived from this study. Theoretically, the study has found that U&G theory can be applied when measuring one's preferences for using certain communication mediums irrespective whether the media are traditional or the new media. The development of communication technology namely the social media that permit users to become content providers by preparing, uploading and sharing information to others had multiplied the gratification of needs among users. Thus, the needs that can be satisfied are also unlimited as the new media allow users to creatively develop their own and unlimited content and share with others instantaneously.

However, the study also has its own limitations. Most importantly, due to the size of the sample, the findings may not be significantly used to generalize to the whole population. The study was conducted in an urban area, Klang Valley, where teenagers had bigger exposure to Internet and new technologies as compared to those living in rural areas. With regards to the conclusion of the study, the researchers suggest using qualitative method in order to elicit in-depth responses, thereby contributing to further development of U&G theory.

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