AI IS THE KEY TO CUSTOMER-CENTRICITY: ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION AND INVOLVEMENT THROUGH AFFECTIVE CONNECTION

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ABSTRACT

Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the dynamic between suppliers and customers by changing the way things work when buying online. This study applies the social support theory to analyze consumer purchase intentions via the lens of social media involvement, AI technology, and consumer experience. We polled 467 Chinese social media users who had shopped online or used artificial intelligence before. We use PLS-SEM, or partial least squares structural equation modeling, to look at the data and the hypotheses. This study found that AI improves customer engagement and satisfaction on social media. Following a similar line of thought, there is a favorable correlation between social media use and customer contentment, which in turn enhances customer satisfaction and purchase intent. In addition, the strength of an emotional connection moderates the relationship between purchase intention and customer pleasure. The results demonstrate that social media platforms can increase customer contentment and purchase intent through the application of artificial intelligence (AI). Furthermore, we provide instructions for making flawless service business models. To entice customers and inspire them to create, distribute, and share content across various social media platforms, marketers are looking into ways to increase the engagement of social media postings using visually appealing photographs and videos.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Purchase intention, Consumer engagement, social media, Consumer experience

Introduction
1. Introduction

The advent of AI has caused tremendous shifts in global dynamics. According to Nazir et al., (2023), gadgets powered by artificial intelligence can learn, plan, and solve problems just like a human brain. Artificial intelligence has turned regular business performance tools into intelligent machines that can learn on their own, program themselves, and execute other complex cognitive tasks (Ameen et al., 2021).

AI has revolutionized many business domains, such as marketing, customer service, and consumer engagement, and is gaining widespread popularity around the world.

By utilizing machine learning, AI has the potential to address problems methodically and imaginatively. Both marketers and customers are interested in artificial intelligence (AI) because of the benefits it offers. According to Yin & Qiu, (2021), several clients have found that AI may help them save time and money by automating mundane tasks. According to Bag et al., (2022), artificial intelligence has made previously impossible tasks relatively easy to complete. Artificial intelligence has made it possible to interact with operations in a way that is both user-friendly and focused on the consumer. Modern consumers have high standards for convenience, and AI delivers. Thanks to AI, finding, selecting, buying, and disposing of things is a breeze for customers. Thanks to artificial intelligence, consumers can order from anywhere and give evaluations from anywhere (Sung et al., 2021).

1.1. How companies use AI

Yeo et al. (2022) claim that companies make various use of artificial intelligence. One approach to assist consumers in making better choices is Increasing consumer happiness and business efficacy is another option. Still another approach would be to raise consumer service and product quality. More proof of this is given by Kliestik et al., (2022). Rana et al. (2022) project that artificial intelligence will significantly boost the world economy from $20.82 billion in 2020 to $15 trillion in 2030. Including artificial intelligence into Web 2.0 marketing tools allows companies to meet consumer needs more quickly and win the allegiance of devoted consumers. According to research by Abou Ali et al., (2020), Chatbots, consumer feature recognition, and content recommendation are just a few of ways artificial intelligence is enabling companies to enhance the customer experience. Using artificial intelligence, companies may better control their marketing campaigns and raise social media customer interaction. Using AI-powered solutions, companies create, cultivate, and monitor strong social media customer relationships (Ho & Chow, 2024).

E-commerce activities include social media and artificial intelligence to help to enable effective contacts with consumers. Consumers now know more about things thanks to these technologies, which might affect their decisions on what to buy. As such, customers are more likely to recall brands (M. Sharma et al., 2024). Companies employ social media in the expectation that happy consumers would tell others about their brand experiences. Engagement of clients, opinion-shifting, brand awareness, and feedback facilitation—all of which depend on participation in these assessments—are benefited by this (J.-S. Chen et al., 2021). In 2020 Wibowo et al. also discovered that social media improves product quality while raising income and sales. On the other hand, negative comments from unhappy customers could harm performance, brand image, and development.

1.2. A framework for analyzing consumer purchase intentions and social media with AI integration

Researchers Wibowo et al., (2020) have lately investigated the elements influencing purchase intentions and consumer behavior in view of the opposing business reality described previously. Given customers spend four to seven hours every day on social media networks, artificial intelligence might be used to track their behavior and grasp

their purchase patterns. Companies are looking to AI-powered social media channels more and more to boost customer involvement and get a competitive edge (Yen & Chiang, 2021). Studies on social media usage repeatedly reveal how customers' purchase decisions are influenced (Liang et al., 2020). Shi et al. (2020) claim that artificial intelligence is already significantly impacting customers' buying decisions and is progressively becoming a necessary component of digital revolution. This is thus because artificial intelligence shapes individuals to browse for goods on several websites before deciding what to buy. Evidence of how artificial intelligence influences social media involvement is scarce, though. This study seeks to add to the existing body of knowledge on the issue by exploring the following research questions:

RQ1: Does artificial intelligence help consumers make decisions about what to buy?

RQ2: Does AI have an impact on consumers' intentions to buy and their use of social media?

RQ3: Does the relationship between purchase intention and customer pleasure get mediated by affective attachment?

Following here is the structure of the study's subsequent sections. Section 2 provides a literature review of the relevant works. In Section 3, we gave theories that are relevant to it. Section 4 presents the research strategy. In this section, we now present data analysis as promised in section five. Section six is devoted to the statistical testing of the model. Then the results, their limitations, implications as well as their practical and theory implications are discussed and analyzed in section seven.

2. Background conceptual ideas

2.1. Artificial intelligence

The ability of machines to study, develop, be critical thinkers, and solve issues in a creative manner synonymous to human capability denotes that a computer has artificial intelligence (AI) (Kliestik et al., 2022). Artificial intelligence helps businesses digitalize and get an edge over competitors. AI outperforms humans in terms of decision-making, information absorption speed, and lack of prejudice. Big data is the result of businesses using AI to compile information from many sources, including websites, social media, location-based ads, chatbots, and email (Daqar & Smoudy, 2019).

The fact that China has the most advanced artificial intelligence (AI) infrastructure and the most progressive regulations in the world is not surprising. The diversity of China's AI technology aims is hindered by their vagueness and overt statement, despite the fact that China now has a complete collection of state programs and legislative acts articulating these goals. By 2025, China will reportedly have developed the most advanced AI systems and applications and will have made enormous progress in the field's foundational theories. Research into artificial intelligence is thus crucial in China since the country views it as a potential new engine for economic growth (A. Sharma et al., 2022).

2.2. Social support theory

Social support refers to the idea that people in one's social network will back one's actions, whether that's to boost one's performance or protect one from harm (Curry &

Zavala, 2023). According to Tseng (2023), offline settings and mental health were the original inspiration for social support theory (SST).

Due to the exponential growth of computer-mediated communication, a great deal of empirical research has employed SST to study virtual social support in the online realm (Lee et al., 2024). This study examines many social support parameters, including the online social aspects, customer happiness, and interaction with artificial intelligence (Simons & Bird, 2023). These factors could offer insights into human-AI interactions (Siu et al., 2023). By integrating various forms of social support with subsequent behaviors, this approach clarifies how individuals engage in it and the extent to which they are satisfied with it.

2.3. Purchase intention

Customer satisfaction increases the likelihood that a consumer will make a purchase. According to Ivanova & Moreira, (2023), a substantial portion of a company's revenue comes from customers' repeated patronage. It is incredibly challenging for online sellers to understand what motivates customers to make purchases. Online shoppers are wary for a number of reasons, including security, service quality, and customer happiness. Online shopping has expanded significantly over the last two decades (Agusiady et al., 2024), yet the industry as a whole is still quite petite. According to Zhang et al., (2024), clients often use social media to study products. Businesses utilize social media to boost conversion rates. Online forums are influenced by positive remarks made by satisfied customers on social media (Zhu et al., 2023).

A large number of people purchase goods and services on the internet (Gao et al., 2023). Many companies rely heavily on AI to improve customer experiences and increase sales of specific items and services. Users can peruse virtual products and make assessments at their leisure using this service. Because AI provides customers with access to a plethora of information, they may choose the best solution out of several alternatives. Recent research shown that augmented reality apps with artificial intelligence (AI) let users see objects in fresh ways and make better purchasing decisions, so benefiting them (N. Chen & Yang, 2023). Modern companies have included AI-enabled technologies to provide customers the best and most customized answers (Kim & Lee, 2023). AI helps people find their buying tastes by means of creative and new technology. Every time a user of the service uses artificial intelligence, AI automatically provides support.

3. Development of hypothesis

3.1. Consumer experience and AI

The total of a consumer's experiences with a brand or firm plus their impressions of that entity later on defines their consumer experience (Capatina et al., 2020). A customer's engagement with a product or service is all inclusive, covering the mental, sensing, feeling, movement and many more interacting elements (Arasu et al., 2020). Higher-level mental activities include seeing, speaking, abstractly thinking, remembering, and problem-solving—that is, the cognitive component of the brain— are handled by M. Sharma et al. (2024). The cognitive components of the customer experience are accessibility, quickness, and functionality (Kietzmann et al., 2018).

Customers' bodily and sensory experiences vary across online and offline settings. Location, artifacts, lighting, and signage are considered in offline encounters, as opposed to online ones, which prioritize more straightforward designs and easier-to-navigate interfaces. Finally, the customer's social network, including their friends and family, has a role in shaping their overall satisfaction (Nekmahmud et al., 2022). Hence, we proposed the following hypothesis.

H1: AI positively effects consumer experience.

3.2. AI and social media user interaction

AI has a significant impact on customer behavior. Using AI, businesses can offer clients a social media buying experience that is tailored to their specific needs. Business owners can gauge the success of their digital advertising initiatives with the help of AI, which can forecast consumer actions (Thomassey & Zeng, 2018) and engage with them on social media to provide more data points. By gathering and analyzing product data and enabling communication between companies and consumers, AI enhances online purchasing, for instance. Many issues plaguing social media platforms might be amenable to AI solutions (Song & Yoo, 2016). People working in sales, for example, may feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of data provided by social media (Kliestik et al., 2022). Some ways AI might aid companies in dealing with these issues include automated information mining and predictive marketing analytics (Yen & Chiang, 2021). A person's behavioral and psychological reactions to their surroundings impact how they react to them, according to SST (Cheng & Jiang, 2022). Based on previous arguments and SST, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

H2: AI has a positive impact on social media user engagement.

3.3. Consumer satisfaction and experience

The term "customer experience" refers to the overall perception that a product or brand leaves on a consumer after they've used it and learned more about it. According to Masuda et al. (2022), the way a consumer interacts with the product, the firm, or a specific department determines the quality of their experience. When consumers interact with a brand or business in any way, whether it's directly or indirectly, their internal and subjective reactions make up what is known as the customer experience (Sohn et al., 2020). Customers value hassle-free purchases because they save them time and effort. Customers are more satisfied when a platform is easy to use. According to Hanaysha, (2022) customers are satisfied when they like a product.

According to Hew et al., (2019), the increase in computer-human communication in recent years has prompted a lot of research on the adoption of older technologies. Emotional, physiological, spiritual, sensory, and logical engagement are all required for a truly unique AI user experience. According to Dwivedi et al., (2021), there is a favorable correlation between AI consumer pleasure and experience. Therefore, AI technologies enhance consumer knowledge, confidence, and happiness while simultaneously improving the user experience. Hence, we proposed following hypothesis.

H3: AI customer experience raises customer satisfaction.

3.4. Social media user interaction and customer satisfaction

According to Danniswara et al. (2020), consumers are more likely to suggest these companies to others after a positive experience with them. Regular social media users may enjoy more satisfied clients. Human interactions shape the experiences of others, which in turn influence their mental processes. Brands and consumers alike attribute happiness to mental states. Customers' experiences with the business will allow them to make an informed decision about the service or product (Alwan & Alshurideh, 2022). Thus, the following hypothesis can be reasonably assumed.

H4: AI has a favorable impact on consumer satisfaction and engagement.

3.5. Purchase intention and consumer satisfaction

According to Kurdi et al., (2022), businesses may retain customers by offering discounts that are both attractive and of good quality. If consumers think a website provides a valuable service, they are more likely to purchase from that site (Bag et al., 2019). Studies have shown that consumer satisfaction is a good indicator of future purchases (Kurdi et al., 2022). Customers' intent to acquire a similar product in the near future is revealed by their purchase intention. Therefore, we assume that dissatisfied consumers will purchase from a rival business, whereas contented consumers will make a purchase (A. Sharma et al., 2021). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be put forth.

H5: Consumer satisfaction impacts positively on purchase intention.

3.6. Moderating role of affective attachment

When people feel deeply connected to a certain company, location, or item, they say that they have "affective attachment." Affective attachment is defined as the act of creating and maintaining relationships (Kim & Park, 2023). People are more likely to look out for one another because affective attachment promotes emotional bonding and indulgence, according to this perspective. Affective attachment is characterized by a deep sense of identification with the person you're focusing on and a long-term exchange of feelings. This study finds that people use the term "affective attachment" to characterise the emotional link they have with artificial intelligence. According to Grover et al., (2022), happiness affects the formation of affective attachments. Kim & Park, (2023) state that when consumers have a positive experience with a brand, their affinity for the brand grows, which impacts their level of pleasure with the brand. If users have a good time interacting with AI, they will get connected to it.

Feelings of safety and trust, which are essential in every relationship, are a component of affective attachment, which may impact the desire to buy something online. Grover et al., (2022) state that when it comes to online shopping, "affective attachment" means how emotionally invested a consumer is in a particular company, product, or service. If consumers had a positive experience when shopping online, they were more inclined to buy from the same store or brand again.

However, suppose customers have a terrible emotional connection to a seller. In that case, they can be hesitant to make a purchase from them since they won't feel safe or comfortable doing business with them (Basri, 2020). Consequently, internet businesses need to create and maintain a solid emotional connection with their customers. Some approaches to support brand image include:

- Providing a personalized experience.

- Providing first-rate customer service.
- Maintaining a consistent and reliable image.

There will be an uptick in both online purchase intent and customer loyalty as a result for businesses. The following hypothesis follows logically from this.

H6: The association between purchase intention and customer satisfaction is moderated by affective connection..

4. Research methodology

4.1. Sampling and data collection

In order to determine if the measurement methods were valid, a poll was distributed through the messaging app WeChat. With an estimated 1.2 billion active users, WeChat easily outnumbers all other Chinese social media platforms combined. One of the main reasons for its success is its Moments feature, which is very similar to Instagram. China is a fantastic place to study social commerce online consumer buying because of the enormous growth and significance of social commerce on WeChat in the country. Therefore, the study's subjects were chosen from among WeChat users.

Data collection occurred between December 2023 and March 2024. The survey was initially sent out to four important first-tier Chinese cities: Guangzhou, Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai. This demographic was studied because, compared to older users, those in the 18–40 age range find social media easier to use and have a more robust infrastructure. In addition to being the commercial and financial hubs of China, these cities are home to a large population of tech-savvy consumers. Our target markets of Guangzhou, Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai all have large youth populations that follow the lead of popular Chinese influencers.

In order to locate appropriate respondents, a purposive sampling approach was employed. All told, 497 answers were considered legitimate. A post hoc test using 467 samples yielded power values of 0.998. All of us were social media influencers with a thousand to tens of thousands of followers. All respondents needed to verify their usage of social media and AI. It all started with a search for social media users who met specific criteria.

The research questionnaire consisted of two sections. Based on the demographic profile provided in part A. Table 1 from part B of the study shows the frequency of online purchases.

Table 1. Information of respondent.

"Measure"	"Item"	"Frequency"	%
Gender	Male	287	61.5
	Female	180	38.5
	Total	**467**	**100**
Age (years)	Less than 20	19	4.1
	20–30	208	44.5
	31–40	117	25.1
	41–50	83	17.7
	above 50	40	8.6
	Total	**467**	**100**
Education	High school or below	29	6.2
	College certificate	74	15.8
	Bachelor's degree	208	44.5
	Master's degree	123	26.3
	Doctoral Degree	33	7.2
	Total	**467**	**100**
Frequency of online purchase	Everyday	87	18.6
	Always	187	40.1
	Sometime	124	26.6
	Seldom	69	14.7
	Total	**467**	**100**

4.2. Measures

This study utilized a variety of measurement scales, including ones developed by other researchers (Capatina et al., 2020; Agarwal and Singh, 2018; Habibi et al., 2014; Laroche et al., 2012; Yuksel et al., 2010; Davis, 1989; Oghuma et al., 2016). The AI scale consisted of eight items, while the consumer experience scale consisted of three. Additionally used was the "Modified five-item" scale for consumer involvement on social media. We built an online poll in English to assess these ideas. To assess the notion, we applied a "Likert scale" whereby 1 denotes "strongly disagree," and 5 denotes "strongly agree". Table 2 shows the dependability of every measuring scale applied in this work.

Table 2. Measurement properties.

"Construct"	"Loading factor (LF.)	t-value"	"α	CR	VIF"
Artificial Intelligence			0.74	0.87	3.6
AI 1	0.79	29.12			
AI 2	0.84	27.39			
AI 3	0.83	32.61			
AI 4	0.87	38.18			
AI 5	0.87	24.68			
AI 6	0.85	32.35			
AI 7	0.89	35.18			
AI 8	0.82	36.29			
Consumer Satisfaction			0.76	0.86	3.8
CS 1	0.91	38.28			
CS 2	0.92	34.49			
CS 3	0.93	32.16			
CS 4	0.86	41.14			
Consumer Experience			0.74	0.85	3.6
CE 1	0.83	29.35			
CE 2	0.87	31.18			
CE 3	0.94	35.44			
Consumer Engagement on Social Media			0.81	0.84	3.5
CESM 1	0.98	30.23			
CESM 2	0.87	36.16			
CESM 3	0.91	38.33			
CESM 4	0.87	36.15			
CESM 5	0.87	33.15			
Affective Attachment			0.75	0.87	3.7
AFA 1	0.91	37.51			
AFA 2	0.79	32.29			
AFA 3	0.92	41.49			
Purchase intention			0.81	0.87	3.8
PI 1	0.79	33.39			
PI 2	0.93	34.12			
PI 3	0.92	34.43			
PI 4	0.83	37.49			

5. Data analysis and results

In our analysis of data, we carried out structural equation modeling SEM with the use of Partial Least Squares PLS. Marketers, in particular, utilize the said method regularly, as Kübler freely confess. Other SEM techniques such as PLS do not provide values pertaining to case weights that are employed to indicate the value of dependent variables. A goal is set towards by independent factors as much variance of the dependent variables as possible is tried to be explained. Due to the absence of any sample size limitations, Dinh & Lee, (2022) utilized this method. As observed by Kübler, PLS-SEM multivariate analysis does not require normality in distribution. The PLS-SEM approach, in stark contrast to the Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling CB-SEM method (Kübler et al., 2020), does not require normality conditions to be satisfied for singular multivariate distribution to be performed.

5.1. Structural model

We used a PLS analysis to verify the expected correlations in our research model. Every single hypothesis was found to be supported once the statistical tests were run. Concerning, AI may have an impact on CE and CESM. AI has a higher effect on CE (H1), as evidenced by a very significant level ** ($p < 0.01$) and a pat coefficient of 0.75. The considerable value * ($p < 0.05$) and pat coefficient of 0.64 show that CE has a more substantial effect on ST compared to CESM. Based on our analysis of the correlation between ST and PI, we found a path coefficient of 0.68 and a significant impact of ST on PI of *** ($p < 0.001$). It means that "AFA significantly" affects the link between "H6 (ST → PI)", as shown in the moderation research. Based on the coefficient determinant ($R2$), CESM may account for 68% ($R2 = 0.68$), while CE may account for 72% ($R2 = 0.72$) of AI. With an $R2$ value of 76, ST can explain as much as 76% of CE and CESM. With an $R2$ value of 0.82, the PI can be prepared by ST up to 82% of the time. This approach had an 82% illustrative power. Tables 4 and 6 display the results of the proposed hypothesis.

Table 3. "Coefficient, R^2, p-values.

"Path"	"Hypothesis"	"R2/path coefficient"	"p-value"	"Hypothesis Supported"
Effects on CE		0.72		
By AI.	H1	0.75	**($p < 0.01$)	Yes
Effect on CESM		0.68		
By AI.	H2	0.62	***($p < 0.001$)	Yes
Effects on ST		0.76		
By CE.	H3	0.64	*($p < 0.05$)	Yes
By CESM	H4	0.59	**($p < 0.01$)	Yes
Effects on PI		0.82		
By ST.	H5	0.68	***($p < 0.001$)	Yes

6. Discussion

Examining the potential application of artificial intelligence (AI) in social media marketing to influence customer behavior, precisely purchase intention, is the focus of this study. In this article, we'll go over the ways in which companies are incorporating AI into their social media marketing campaigns to get people to respond via SST. According to this research, client engagement and pleasure rise when businesses apply artificial intelligence for their social media marketing. Modern AI-based approaches let businesses increase customer-relevant social media activities. Moreover, companies can utilize artificial intelligence to convert their conventional operations into digital ones by means of social media marketing initiatives, thereby creating website traffic and, finally, consumers (Lee et al., 2021). Because AI and customer experience have a good relationship, companies can boost their sales volume by including AI into social media marketing.

AI and social media user engagement showed a positive association in this study (Rana et al., 2022). Capatina et al., 2020 contend that by including artificial intelligence into social media, marketers may interact with possible consumers. Furthermore suggesting a positive relationship between the two, M. Sharma et al., (2024) discovered that satisfied consumers were more likely to engage on social media. The findings of the research confirm those of other studies by demonstrating that happy consumers

are more likely to publish favorable evaluations of products on social media (Nekmahmud et al., 2022).

Based on social media research, virtual and augmented reality powered by artificial intelligence can improve consumer relationship and finally result in conversions. The results also imply that artificial intelligence (AI) will help chatbots and virtual assistants as well as that including them with social media could raise customer satisfaction. Previous studies (Sung et al., 2021) indicated that consumers' social media engagement favorably influences their inclinations to buy.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

This study significantly theoretically advances the body of current knowledge. This study used SST to build a research model of the factors—such as artificial intelligence technology stimuli, customer experiences, and social media engagement—that influence consumers' intentions to purchase online before doing interdisciplinary research on this topic. Here, substantial theoretical advancement and exploration take place.

secondly, consumer happiness and experience have a beneficial effect on buying intentions. Businesses rely on digital platforms to use AI technology, manage digital marketing effectively, and collect client feedback (Lee et al., 2021). Customers are more likely to purchase from the same brand again after a pleasant experience, based on our study.

In our analysis of the relationship between customer satisfaction and intent to purchase, we found that high attachment scores were associated with a higher likelihood of purchase. This finding is the fourth and final point we want to make. Online shopping makes customers' happiness a stronger predictor of their buying intention, yet consumers may not be compelled to purchase if they do not feel emotionally invested in the shopping experience, regardless of how satisfied they are with it.

The study concludes by providing further clarity to the social support idea. With the rise of technology-mediated interactions, much empirical research has utilized SST to investigate online social support. However, the impact of social support on human-AI interactions remains largely unexplored.

6.2. Practical implications

Academics and professionals should take note of this study because of its many implications. In the wake of COVID-19, social media usage skyrocketed among local Chinese customers. Buying products over social media is a popular choice these days. Secondly, interacting with customers on a personal level allows businesses to understand their needs better and wants. Instead of focusing on social media interaction, companies should aim to satisfy their customers. According to Alwan & Alshurideh, (2022), our research should provide managers with a better understanding of the ways disruptive technologies impact society and behavior.

Finally, according to Masuda et al., (2022), social media may be an excellent tool for assessing customer feedback and turning it into actual responses from customers.

Artificial intelligence (AI) enabled social media platforms allow businesses to anticipate shifts in customer behavior (Danniswara et al., 2020).

In the fourth place, artificial intelligence may assist businesses in developing digital tools that track and forecast their social media activities in order to increase sales.

6.3. Limitations and future research directions

People tend to have a more negative impression of humanoid social robots than they do of invisible ones (A. Sharma et al., 2021). Investigating the guises that AI chatbots take on (such as machine-like or humanoid chatbots) might help determine whether an approachable appearance promotes greater adoption. Third, the atypical COVID-19 epidemic that occurred within the study's time range may have prompted social media influencers to take various actions. Investigating social media influencers after the outbreak will help us understand their behavioral goals and the impact of AI on them. Finally, to make the findings more applicable to a global scale, researchers could do a cross-cultural analysis contrasting consumer behavior between many nations and sectors.

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