

**GHANA INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM
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**ASSESSING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE WILDLIFE
TOURISM PATRONAGE: A CASE STUDY OF THE ACHIMOTA ZOO**

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DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATIONS

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ASSESSING THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO PROMOTE WILDLIFE TOURISM

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DECLARATION

I, Samuel Ofori Adjei Addo, hereby declare that this long essay is my original report of my research, written by me, and has not been submitted for any previous degree. Except for references to other people’s works which have been accordingly acknowledged, this long essay titled “Assessing the Use of Social Media to Promote Wildlife Tourism Patronage: A Case Study of the Achimota Zoo” was carried out in partial fulfilment of a Master of Arts Degree in Development Communications at the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), under the supervision of Dr. Rabiu Asante.

This dissertation was submitted for examination with the approval of;



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2020

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2/10/2020

2020

DEDICATION

To my adorable parents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My foremost heartfelt gratitude goes to the Almighty God for His invaluable benefits. I made it this far only because of Him.

To my supervisor, Dr. Rabiw Asante, I am extremely grateful for his patience and support throughout this dissertation.

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ABSTRACT

This study identifies social media as a marketing tool that can be used to increase patronage at the Achimota Zoo. With recent decline in patronage and general output of the zoo, the researcher on the basis of related empirical evidence suggest social media an option that could be used to increase the media visibility of the zoo through user-generated content and sharing of information on online platforms

Using in-depth interviews, this qualitative study seeks to solicit data from 12 participants ranking staff members at the Achimota zoo to assess the viability of this option.

The study on the basis of various assertions and empirical studies from related literature emphasizes that the Achimota zoo has the potential to increase its patronage capacity, if it employs the use of social media in its management strategies.

CHAPTER ONE (1)

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

The world has changed dramatically since the inception of social media. The continuous surge of social media usage has not only affected human relationship, but its effect transcends all forms of human interactions. Industries are no exception to this phenomenon. Ingram (2017) reported a figure of 1.97 billion active users for Facebook, 328 million active users for Twitter, and 166 million active users for Snapchat per month in a comparative report on active social media users. Gill, Arlitt, Li, and Mahanti (2007) estimate that there are 100 million views on Youtube per day, which accounts for approximately 60% of the videos watched on the internet in a single day. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) adds more to this claim by emphasizing that, nearly ten hours of content are uploaded to YouTube in a single minute.

These continuous surge in numbers of active users of social media sites have become a subject of interest to decision makers of various firms and industries. The tourism industry having relied on traditional forms of media in the past to advertise their product and services are now reverting to novel trends in order to promote their services (Diaz-Luque, 2009). Patronage for tourist destinations continue to grow as various patrons of tourist attraction now have easy access to information on tourist destinations, as well as the added opportunity of being able to share their experiences in various media forms to millions of people all over the world (Zouganeli, Trihas, & Antonaki, 2011). Social media, can therefore be considered as an effective marketing tool for patronage of tourist attractions and destinations (Fotis, Dimitrios, & Rossides, 2012).

In Ghana, the cultural valuation of wildlife is not highly prioritised as done in other parts of the world (Acquah, 2013). However, some wildlife for the purposes of conservation, tourism and

superstition are preserved. The Achimota zoo falls within the category of preserved wildlife for the tourist attraction purposes. The zoo is located within the Achimota Forest, and has had its purposes transformed from being from a green buffer to the city of Accra to a Nature Reserve and a Recreationl Park. The Achimota zoo is managed by the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission of Ghana and as a major tourism centre in Ghana, the zoo attract 20,000 patrons and generates US\$ 60,000 annually(Forestry Commission of Ghana, 2020). Comparatively, the numbers generated by the zoo in terms off patronage and revenue to other similar major zoos, recreational parks and natural reserves reveal a very disappointing statisitc. Akama and Damiannah (2003) for instance, report an annual attraction figure of 96,000 patrons and an annual revenue figure of US\$ 8 million. Although just one wildlife destination cannot be a sufficient baseline to assess the capacity of the Achimota zoo, the assertion that the zoo is performing significantly below its potential capacities is reiterated by Kuuder (2012). Given the relatively cheap opportunities that a marketing tool like social media offers, the study assesses the possible benefits of integrating social media into the management of the Achimota zoo.

1.2. Statement of Problem

The Ghanaian wildlife toursim industry, and more specifically, the Achimota zoo have recorded average numbers in patronage and output in comprison to other wildlife reserves internationally. Scholarship relating to this have dwelt on specifics like management of animal species and aspects of the zoo like location as remedies for managerial lapses. However, very little has been done in considering the potential of social media to increase tourist attraction to the zoo, and therefore patronage. According to Heras-Pedrosa, Millan-Celis, Iglesias-Sanchez, and JambrinoMaldonado

(2020), tourism industries are yetto fully exploit the use of social media as a viable marketing tool option. An information and marketing gap exists in the wildlife industry, and more specifically the Achimota zoo; pertaining to the role of social media in enhancing the Achimota zoo as an ideal tourist destination. The research problem may thus be summarized as the need to understand the value of social media in promoting patronage for the Achimota zoo.

1.3. Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to evaluate the use of social media to promote patronage in the Achimota zoo.

The objectives in response to the aim stated above are:

- i. To examine the existing tools and media used in soliciting for patronage at the Achimota zoo.
- ii. To examine the value of social media in promoting patronage at the Achimota zoo
- iii. To determine the effectiveness of the social media as an information and marketing tool for the Achimota zoo.
- iv. To examine the extent to which social media can increase patronage or the decision of a tourist to visit the zoo.

1.4. Research Questions

This study is founded on the evaluation of social media to promote patronage at the Achimota zoo.

Following through with this purpose, the study answers the following questions:

- i. What are the existing forms of media and tools used in marketing the Achimota zoo?
- ii. What is the value of social media in promoting patronage at the Achimota zoo?
- iii. How effective is social media as an information and marketing tool for the Achimota zoo?

1.5. Significance of Study

Wildlife tourist attractions, having developed from sources of private amusement to wealthy class of citizenry has now become congenial sources of public recreation. Aside its provision of entertainment and satisfaction of human curiosity, zoos are established for conservational, research, and economic purposes(Larnyoh & Awunyo-Vitor, 2016). As such, any decline in its performance at any level subsequently affects the aspects of society, afore mentioned. Given the declining levels in output of the Achimota zoo, this study presents an opportunity to explore the potentials of a relatively cheap resource that can be used to effectively create attention and awareness about the Achimota zoo.

This produces an additional contribution to existing scholarship on wildlife tourist centers in the country. Also, the study produces reference framework from which policies and can be formulated to manage the performance of the Achimota zoo and other zoos within the country. Benefits in terms of economic gains through increased patronage as emphasized by the study creates a sustainable revenue source for the country as well.

1.6. Organization of Study

The study is organized under four main chapters. The foremost chapter deals with the general introduction to the study, capturing the sub-sections on background of the study, research

objectives, questions, and significance of study. Chapter two reviews related literature to the study under the following headings: conceptual framework, empirical review and theoretical framework. Chapter three covers the methodology employed by the study. Chapter four, which is supposed to present the results from data collected and subsequent analysis of the results is omitted following the directive from the research department of the researcher. Rather, it covers major findings, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO (2)

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter primarily focuses on a review of relevant literature to this study on social media elements that can promote wildlife tourism patronage. Having discussed the background to this study in the first chapter, this chapter continues with an emphasis on the concepts upon which the study is built, and concludes this chapter with the theories that provides a basis for analysis for this study.

2.2. Empirical Review

This study reviews certain scholarship and other relevant sources of information on social media and its relationship with tourism. Several classifications of tourism exist. Nature tourism, the category under which wildlife tourism falls, has relatively received a considerable amount of attention. Whereas numerous research studies have been done on social media and its related tools, and certain branches of tourism like cultural and pleasure tourism, very little has been done on the marketing potential of social media and the wildlife tourism in particular. However, social media has been extensively researched and experientially proven to have positive effects on several products and services. Although the study of its correlations with wildlife tourism is barely visible in academic spheres, its effect on patronage on other products and services, especially within the broader hospitality and tourism industry.

Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014), sourced information from 14 marketing managers of different companies in a qualitative study to examine the outcome of brand creation and management in social media. With strategies like announcement of new products and services, customer interactions, promotions and several other innovations on social media, outcomes of targeted

acquisition of new customers, increased popularity of company brand, customer satisfaction and increased profit margins were found. The study practically offers a broad spectrum of benefits associated with social media integration in the daily management of a company or firm's activities. The study, however with its qualitative approach was limited in possible divergent perspectives from the customers, who are at the receiving end of the social media integration of product and service delivery. Erdoğan and Cicek (2012), employed a quantitative scope to conduct a survey on 338 people. The focus of the study was to assess the impact of social media marketing on customer loyalty. A significantly positive effect of social media on customer loyalty to brands was found. Although different in study approach, a similar impact of social media on customer choice to product and service brands that appear on various social media platforms was one of the major findings of the study.

Vanauken (2015), studying the effects of customer engagement via social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram by airports and airline companies established substantial increase in their concessional revenues. Social media was found to have enhanced the mutual relationship between airports and airlines, and its patrons. Easily accessible information on flight routes and destinations, ticket pricing, products and services available to travellers at airports travellers, among several other comprehensive marketing information positively reinforced the smart partnership between airports and airlines, and their clients. Heras-Pedrosa, Millan-Celis, Iglesias-Sanchez, and Jambrino-Maldonado (2020), narrowing the research on social media impact on tourist destinations avers that, social media due to its compelling effect, and its interactive capacity has been successful in enhancing the image of tourist destinations to tourists. Sampling the views of various stakeholders, the study employed a mixed method to investigate how social

media is used to promote tourist destinations and other products and services related to tourism. Studies by Crespo, Gutierrez, and Mogollon (2015), and King, Racherla, and Bush (2014) were both consistent with the findings of Heras-Pedrosa et al, (2020); social media along with the innovations of Web 2.0 by adding an interactive and participatory component to internet communication has contributed massively to the patronage of tourist destinations. The study however by focusing mostly on the qualitative method of interviews to sample the views of various stakeholders cannot argue thoroughly that the positive effects of social media on tourism destinations is a fair representation of the opinions held by the larger population.

Nyakabwa (2017), similarly conducted a study on the role of selected social media platforms in tourists' patronage to the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda. Conclusions from this qualitative study also confirmed the afore cited studies that, social media plays a huge role in tourist destination choices. The study however, was confined to only three social media platforms; Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor. These only represent a small fraction of the large number of social media platforms available to internet users, including tourists. Kuric(2016), in a mixed method study also affirmed that social media, as a marketing tool can also be used to promote tourist destinations of a country, as well used to improve the negative images of a country. The study confirmed a direct relationship with a country's image and social media marketing of tourist destinations within the said country. The study however, with its limited sample size proves to score low on external validity. Another review of several research articles on e-tourism by Buhalis and Law (2008), did not only cite social media as marketing tools for tourist destinations but also agreed with Aftab, Khan, and Iqbal (2019), on how social media provides information that guides preferences and decisions of tourists before patronizing a particular tourist site. This refined search

and information feature coupled with the information of previous experiences by former patrons of tourist destinations have all had a cumulative effect in increasing the patronage of tourist destinations. Comparing social media with traditional media forms like the print, film, music, radio and television broadcasting, Reino and Hay (2016) concluded that the extensive reach, immediate broadcast capacity, explosive transmission speed, low cost and increased connectivity is the novel tourism marketing tool for the tourism industry.

Clarke, Reuter, LaFleur, and Schaefer (2019), although admitting to the positive impacts of social media on tourism and wildlife specifically, also raise contrasting negative effects that user-generated content on social media tend to have on these animals, even if unintentional. In a quantitative set-up which analyzed a data set of 744 tweets from twitter, a conclusive finding that, sharing of viral videos of animals had the tendency of increasing misperceptions about wildlife was on the rise(Lenzi, Speiran, & Grasso).

Similarly on the downside to social media effects on wildlife tourism, Folk (2019), also agrees on the negatives social media can have on wildlife tourism. Although social media seems to be anonymously agreed as a successful marketing tool for tourism destinations, the welfare of animals as attention is drawn to wildlife sites seems to be largely undesirable.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

Key concepts used in this study are explained in this section, i.e. social media and wildlife tourism. Aside providing an understanding into the main variables of the study, the framework provided a basis for the researcher to review certain pertinent literature to the study, and also guide the study through the progression of examining the impact of social media on wildlife tourism patronage.

2.2.1. Social Media

Among the plethora of definitions on the subject stated above, this study will focus on some selected scholarship that particularly explains the concept, capturing in the process, the five key elements of participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness (Mayfield, 2008). Underpinnings of social media, although definitively not traced to a particular time period, is considered by McFadden (2020) as a primal need by human beings acting as social creatures to maintain social interactions using various suitable channels of communications unique to the specific time periods. The last two centuries with its characteristic technological explosion however, has offered a more evolved definition of social media within the academic circles.

Brake and Safko (2009), defines social media as ‘activities, practices, and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media.’ Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), by offering a more technical definition, refers to conversational media as “User-Generated Content” (UGC) that can be created and exchanged on a group of internet-based applications that are founded on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. Boyd and Ellison (2008) refer to social media as webbased platform that allow users to create a profile, view that of others, whiles sharing and building traverse connections with others users within a defined online community. Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011), offer a more practical explanation of social media by defining it as web-based applications that revolve around seven building blocks and provides functionality for identity, conversation, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups within the confines of an online community. Tuten (2008), similarly posits social media to be an umbrella term for social-networking sites, virtual worlds, wikis, forums and opinion sites (online communitites) that feature fluid participatory and conversational functions.

2.2.1.1. Social Media- Common Denominators

Guided by Mayfield's (2008) five key elements of participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness, an obvious trend of these terms can be easily deduced from the above definitions and several other related scholarship on the subject. The term, social media for the purposes of this study will be used to define an online community that functions on webbased technologies and allows its users to generate, share and exchange their own content, while building traverse relationships. In using the term, the elements of an online community, connected by contents generated by them and engaged in varying levels of conversation and activities that requires participation is used.

2.2.2. Wildlife Tourism

The concept simply involves any form of tourist encounters with wildlife (Burns, Macbeth, & Moore, 2011). Fennell (2008), rather refines this definition by adding that such encounters are non-consumptive in nature and may largely include activities such as viewing, touching and photography. Reynolds & Braithwaite (2001), presenting ideals in their definition of the concept, suggest that wildlife tourism is 'about increasing the probability of positive encounters with wildlife for visitors whilst protecting the wildlife resource.' Higginbottom (2004), in the same vein, views wildlife as a resource in its natural habitats, or man-made habitats like zoo, aquaria and recreational parks (Mallapur, Sinha, & Waran, 2005) managed and sequestered for economic patronage.

2.2.3. Social Media and Wildlife Tourism: Intersections

The impact of social media continues to transcend various levels of human living standards. With a sharp progression from broadcast media content to user-generated content, which now includes personal experiences, reviews, comments, etc. in both text and images, the tourism industry has

hugely benefited. It has performed admirably in connecting people around the world on any subject- including wildlife. It has provided easily accessible information and insights on what is happening within natural and man-made habitats of wild animals, natural landscapes and conservation. Consumers who desire to patronize tourist attractions can make informed decisions on destinations easily. The intersection between social media and wildlife tourism in particular is huge one, with both personal and institutional effects.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter generally entails the description of the data collection process and it provides grounds for verification and replication of this study (Industrial Research Institute, 2010). According to Goddard and Melville (2004), the methodology section of a research paper serves as a medium for finding a solution to the research problem stated in the introductory chapter. Specifically, the chapter details the research design along with all the methods, procedures and techniques involved in the research design.

3.2. Research Design

This study will employ a non-interventional approach and is qualitatively descriptive in nature. According to Kerlinger (1986), a descriptive research assesses the prevailing conditions within the study area without effecting any form of manipulation. In order for the researcher to acquire information from key persons who are experienced in the occupational field the study covers, the qualitative research design was opted for to essentially explore, explain and describe the subject matter of this study in fulfilment of the research objectives. Walliman (2011) emphasizes interviews as one of the descriptive forms of data collection for qualitative research designs, which can be used to establish norms and patterns, as well used in examining existing situations.

This study on the above basis therefore employed semi-structured interviews to precisely solicit data from key respondents. The design allowed interviewees to speak relatively free, while being regulated in their responses within the confines on the subject matter (O'Leary, 2004).

3.3. Study Area

This study was situated at the Achimota Zoo, located within the Achimota Forest Reserve in the Okaikwei North District Assembly in the Greater Accra Metropolis. The zoo operates under the supervision of Wildlife Division of Forestry Commission, which is overseen by the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources. The zoo is envisaged by its management to undergo transformation into an ecological park. The study area will offer an advantage of proximity to the researcher and is the best available option considering the undeveloped nature of wildlife destinations in the Accra Metropolis.

3.4. Sources of Data

Primary sources of data will be used for this study. This implies a data retrieval process which will be carried out on a first-hand basis from various participants in a targeted data collection process. Sources of data will include administrative staff members, zookeepers, veterinary technicians, the conservation biologist, the zoologist and the tour guides at the Achimota zoo.

3.5. Study Population

In meeting the requirements of the study objectives, research data was expected from a designated sample from a combined staff population of about 30 workers at the Achimota zoo.

Specifically, high ranking members who are involved in the administrative and client relations at the zoo will be purposefully selected for this study.

3.6. Sample Size and Justification

With the data collection objective of lessening discovery failure in qualitative research studies, the researcher's objective of arriving at a sample size of 12 participants was dependent on the reasons discussed below. Foremost, the sample size for the study will reflect a targeted group of participants within the study area, who are mostly high ranking officers, and are directly involved in administrative roles. Also, the sample size of 12 participants will be large enough to sufficiently describe the subject matter of the study. Given the standardised and relatively similar roles of the population to be sampled, any additional participant will not result in obtaining additional information or perspective. The saturation point as proposed by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) rests around a figure of 12 participants in homogenous groups. A similar range of 12-20 participants is agreed to by Crouch and McKenzie (2006). A sample size of 12 participants will therefore be enough to generate the variety of opinions upon which themes were deduced as a basis for subsequent analysis framework.

3.7. Sampling Procedures

As noted by Creswell (2004), expert interviews are better suited with purposive strategies. Using the non-probability approach, all participants involved in this research study will be recruited purposefully on the basis of their characteristic experience and knowledge on the subject matter of the study. Consequently, purposive sampling method will be employed.

3.8. Data Collection Methods

In-depth interviews will be used to collect data from the sample set of the study. Each interview session will average about 35 minutes and all will be conducted individually. All interview sessions will be carried out at the zoo, spanning a period of six days. Two interview sessions will be scheduled and carried out each day with two participants each. To achieve optimum use of interview time, an interview guide will be used to serve the purpose of comprehensively regulating responses within the confines of the research objective. With the permission of all interviewees, each session will be recorded, and later transcribed by the researcher in order to capture verbal prompts that could have been missed out in the researcher's notes. Hand written notes will be taken by the researcher to capture emphatically, key responses.

3.9. Data Collection Instruments

In order to capture quality evidence for further analysis and formulation of themes, an interview guide will be used. Recommendations from Creswell (2009), and Turner III (2010) on interview guides will serve as essential pointers to guide the researcher on the design of the interview guide and conduction of the interviews. The interview guide will be semi-structured. It will be structured along themes deduced from the objectives of the study. An introductory part of the interview guide which will include an informed consent and ethical consideration section. This will be followed by a section which will record the relevant demographics of the participants. This will exclude name and age. The interview guide will be completed with four sections, each detailing an average of three questions each.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

The ethical principles governing scientific research will be duly applied by the researcher in this study. This study conforms to ethical considerations as presented by Bryman and Bell (2007) in the following manner:

- The full consent of participants will be sought for voluntary participation, prior to the data collection process, and they will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research process.
- The protection of the privacy research participants will be guaranteed.
- A satisfactory level of confidentiality of responses from research participants and research data will also be ensured.
- The highest level of objectivity will be employed in the discussion and analyses of research data.
- All forms of external resources related to the study will all be duly accredited to the respective authors and referenced accordingly in compliance to the sixth edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style.

3.11. Limitations of the Study

Owing to the recent restraints on movement and physical human interaction, as well as limitations of the research design, the researcher highlights in this section the constraints encountered during the process of undertaking this research.

The data collection process coincided with the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in restriction in movement and physical human interaction. Following the directives of the parent

academic organization of the researcher, the data collection process was halted, and conclusions were made on the researcher's presentation of the introductory and literature review section of this study. Considering the strong expectation of the research data confirming the research objectives of the study, the validity of the study to a small extent is affected by the loss of data, and consequent analysis of such data.

Also, the research design employed by the researcher required an in-depth level of interaction with the sampled research participants. The limited duration associated with the completion of the study therefore adds to the afore-mentioned limitation encountered by the researcher.

In light of the above, it is recommended that future related research on social media as a tool to increase patronage in wildlife reserves should consider quantitative and mixed method designs. These employ data collection on cross-functional basis, which implies that time and resources are saved.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

Given the afore-mentioned limitations associated with the research, conclusions and recommended detailed in this chapter are made on the basis of the introductory and review of related literature chapter.

5.2. Conclusions and Implication of Study

The Achimota zoo by following the example of many business organizations within the wildlife and tourism industry in exploring the new technological trends of the Web 2.0 applications ensures for the zoo, a solid increase in patronage. Based on the interactive and participatory component involved in social media, the zoo can benefit immensely by saving tons of resources that should have been used to advertise the various aspects of the zoo through the traditional media. Social media offers tourists access to information on various destination prospects within the zoo as well as its other related marketable products and services. Such information is not only cultivated alone by the managers of the zoo, but also patron who through their experience would like to generate their own content and share it to their contacts online. This phenomenon gives the zoo a wider advertisement reach which could not have been otherwise offered by the traditional media. A wider advertisement reach of the zoo implies that information will continue to multiply to possible patrons of the zoo through the user generated content element in social media.

The study highlighting these benefits therefore implies that the supervisory body of the Achimota zoo; the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission of Ghana, under the auspices of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources adapts to the new technocological trends of social media in order to market effectively the Achimota zoo, thereby generating revenue for the government.

Also, increase in patronage with effective management, which directly leads to increase in revenue will ensure that that zoo and its various products and services are maintained and improved.

5.3. Recommendations

Given the value of social media and the benefits it can bring to the Achimota zoo, the researcher recommends the following:

- The creation of an official and expertly managed Achimota zoo website and online platform.
- The single social media account (Facebook) of the Achimota zoo should be managed by an expert and there should also be a consideration to expand the to other social media account (e.g. twitter, instagram, snapchat, etc.)
- The user-generated content on these social media platforms should be skillfully handled in other to project positively the public image of the zoo, while permitting ratings and shared experiences of its patrons.

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