

The Influences of Beauty Bloggers on Behaviors of Female Followers on Xiaohongshu Application

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Abstract—This study examines how beauty bloggers on Xiaohongshu shape the purchasing behavior of female users in Beijing. Using the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Source Credibility Theory, it analyzes the impact of credibility, emotional attitude, platform usability, and social media exposure through a survey of 400 participants. Results show that credibility and emotional connection are the strongest predictors of consumer behavior. The findings reveal how localized language and cultural storytelling create trust and drive quick “see-trust-buy” decisions, offering insights for influencer marketing and the cultural dynamics of China’s social-commerce environment.

Keywords—consumer behavior, cultural communication, influencer marketing, Xiaohongshu

I. INTRODUCTION

In this context, *Beauty Bloggers Function* as key opinion leaders (KOLs), often perceived as more trustworthy and relatable than traditional advertising. They cultivate *strong parasocial* relationships with followers through perceived authenticity and transparency. On Xiaohongshu, their influence is further amplified by the platform’s design—users can view content, access product links, read reviews, and make purchases within the same interface. This immediacy creates what can be described as a “see-trust-buy” loop, a feature largely absent on Western platforms such as Instagram and YouTube.

While previous research has examined influencer marketing mainly through platforms like Instagram and YouTube, few academic studies have analyzed Xiaohongshu’s integrated social-commerce ecosystem. In particular, the ways in which features such as *in-app purchasing and community-based content curation* shape the relationship between influencer credibility and consumer behavior remain underexplored. This research addresses this gap by focusing on the mechanisms through which Xiaohongshu-specific variables—such as platform perception and influencer engagement—affect users’ behavioral responses in beauty-related contexts.

Specifically, this study investigates four key factors: *social media exposure, perception of beauty bloggers, attitude toward beauty bloggers, and perception of the Xiaohongshu platform*. These variables are analyzed in relation to consumer behavior outcomes, including purchase intention, trust, and engagement. The target population comprises active female users, who represent the platform’s most engaged demographic in the beauty sector.

Theoretically, the study is grounded in the *Elaboration Likelihood Model* (ELM) and the *Source Credibility Theory*. The ELM distinguishes between central and peripheral routes

of persuasion. On Xiaohongshu, where content is often visual and emotionally driven, users are more likely to engage with peripheral cues—such as influencer credibility and aesthetics—rather than with detailed product information. Meanwhile, the Source Credibility Theory emphasizes that a communicator’s trustworthiness and expertise significantly affect message acceptance. By integrating these two models, this study provides a comprehensive framework to explain how consumers navigate and respond to persuasive content in social-commerce environments.

Beyond marketing implications, this research also contributes to understanding how linguistic strategies and semiotic framing on Xiaohongshu shape affective consumer responses. Influencers’ use of localized idioms, emotional tones, and culturally resonant narratives constructs a persuasive linguistic environment, particularly among female Gen Z users navigating identity and aspiration in China’s digital marketplace.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Social Media Exposure

Social media exposure plays a fundamental role in shaping users’ awareness, attitudes, and eventual behaviors [1]. Repeated exposure to digital content enhances brand recall and encourages interaction. On Xiaohongshu, beauty-related content—such as tutorials, reviews, and lifestyle posts—fosters familiarity with products and stimulates user curiosity. This frequent engagement often leads to behavioral intentions, such as seeking additional information or making a purchase.

Additionally, perceived popularity—reflected in metrics like views, likes, and reposts—creates social proof, reinforcing consumer trust [2]. From the perspective of *Social Influence Theory*, users tend to conform to the behavior of influential or widely followed figures, especially when they face uncertainty or lack sufficient product knowledge [3].

B. Perception of Beauty Bloggers

Perceptions of influencers significantly affect the persuasiveness of their content. [4] Emphasize that perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and authenticity are central to influencer effectiveness. On Xiaohongshu, bloggers who share personal experiences, acknowledge product flaws, and avoid overtly promotional messaging are generally regarded as more credible.

However, increasing commercialization has also heightened skepticism toward sponsored content. *Source Credibility Theory* [5] explains that trust and competence are

the most persuasive attributes of a communicator. Bloggers who transparently disclose partnerships and provide balanced reviews are more likely to sustain their persuasive impact over time. User trust is thus rooted not only in content quality but also in the perceived intent behind the message.

C. Attitude Towards Beauty Bloggers

Attitude refers to a consumer's emotional evaluation and affinity toward influencers. [6] Emotional closeness—such as perceived similarity or shared values—encourages users to adopt influencer-endorsed behaviors. On Xiaohongshu, this bond is strengthened through consistent interaction, stylistic coherence, and perceived relatability of the influencer.

The *Attitude–Behavior–Context* (ABC) model [7] posits that a positive attitude, when reinforced by a supportive environment, increases the likelihood of action. In this framework, beauty bloggers function as parasocial figures whose lifestyles, identities, and emotional tones resonate with users—enhancing persuasion even in the absence of extensive rational evaluation.

D. Perception of the Platform

Platform perception serves as a mediating factor between influencer trust and behavioral conversion. Xiaohongshu is frequently praised for its intuitive design, search functionality, and user-driven community content. Liu and Suh [8] demonstrated that platform usability and information quality significantly strengthen digital trust.

Nevertheless, concerns about algorithmic bias or inauthentic reviews can erode user confidence. The platform's ability to verify blogger identities (e.g., through “*verified blogger*” tags) and regulate misleading content directly impacts consumers' willingness to act on influencer recommendations. In beauty consumption—where risks are personal—users evaluate both influencer credibility and the perceived integrity of the platform ecosystem.

E. Theoretical Integration

This study integrates three theoretical perspectives—the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), *Source Credibility Theory*, and *Social Influence Theory*—to offer a comprehensive explanation of consumer behavior on Xiaohongshu. In line with ELM [9], Xiaohongshu users predominantly engage through the *peripheral route*, responding to cues such as influencer trust and aesthetics rather than detailed product specifications.

Source Credibility Theory [5] further explains how expertise and trustworthiness enhance message acceptance, particularly when emotional resonance is present. *Social Influence Theory* [3] adds a sociocultural dimension, suggesting that perceived group norms and social approval reinforce behavioral alignment. Based on this integrated model, consumer behavior is shaped by both content-level factors (e.g., influencer perception and emotional attitude) and *platform-level factors* (e.g., system credibility and interface design).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Petty and Cacioppo [9], explains how individuals process

persuasive messages through two cognitive routes: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route involves thoughtful and deliberate evaluation of information, such as product specifications and factual details. In contrast, the peripheral route relies on heuristics and external cues—such as the credibility or attractiveness of the source.

On Xiaohongshu, where visually rich, short-form content dominates, users are more likely to adopt the peripheral route due to the low-involvement nature of their browsing behavior. Within this framework, the platform's immersive visual environment encourages users to rely on peripheral cues—especially influencer credibility—rather than engaging in in-depth evaluation of product attributes. This aligns with ELM's assertion that individuals experiencing cognitive load or low motivation are more susceptible to peripheral persuasion. Beauty bloggers thus *serve as affective and symbolic triggers* that simplify decision-making.

B. Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory, first proposed by Hovland and Weiss [5], posits that the persuasiveness of a message is directly influenced by the source's perceived expertise and trustworthiness. In the context of influencer marketing, beauty bloggers must be perceived as both knowledgeable about the products and honest in their recommendations. These qualities strongly influence the audience's perception of message reliability and, ultimately, their behavioral intentions.

When integrated with ELM, Source Credibility Theory strengthens the explanatory power of peripheral route processing. Users on Xiaohongshu are likely to accept influencer recommendations not primarily because of detailed product information, but because of the bloggers' perceived authenticity and authority. This creates a complementary relationship: the platform's design reduces cognitive involvement (as described by ELM), while influencer credibility serves as a shortcut to persuasion (as described by Source Credibility Theory).

C. Social Influence Theory

Social Influence Theory [10] explains how individual attitudes and behaviors are shaped by real or perceived pressure from others. This theory is particularly relevant in describing two mechanisms: *informational influence* (reliance on others' knowledge) and *normative influence* (the desire to fit in).

On Xiaohongshu, where user interactions are publicly visible and “likes” or comments signal social approval, individuals may conform to popular recommendations to maintain social cohesion or to avoid missing out (fear of missing out, FOMO). Beauty bloggers with large followings often function as opinion leaders, setting aesthetic norms and influencing consumption trends within the platform's social-commerce ecosystem.

IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

A. Conceptual Framework Overview

Based on the reviewed literature, this study adopts a conceptual model comprising four independent variables—social media exposure, perception of beauty bloggers, attitude towards beauty bloggers, and perception of

Xiaohongshu—and one dependent variable, consumer behavior. The relationships among these variables are grounded in media exposure theory, source credibility theory, and social influence theory. This framework aims not only to examine the direct effects of each variable on consumer behavior but also to explore their interrelated roles in shaping trust, engagement, and purchase intention.

B. References

In today's digital era, consumer behavior is increasingly influenced by mediated experiences, especially on platforms like Xiaohongshu, which seamlessly integrate e-commerce with influencer-driven content. This chapter reviews key theoretical models that shed light on how consumers interact with beauty bloggers and digital platforms, with a special emphasis on three pivotal theories: the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Source Credibility Theory, and Social Influence Theory.

C. Hypotheses Development

H1: The perception of beauty bloggers' credibility positively influences consumers' purchase intentions.

H2: Attitude toward beauty bloggers mediates the effect of credibility on consumer behavior through emotional contagion.

H3: Social media exposure positively impacts consumer behavior by enhancing content familiarity and emotional engagement.

H4: Platform usability moderates the relationship between credibility and consumer behavior by reducing barriers to action.

This integrated model offers a multi-dimensional perspective on influencer impact, blending cognitive, emotional, and social dynamics within Xiaohongshu's digital environment.

V. METHODOLOGY

A. Study Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to investigate the influence of four key variables—social media exposure, perception of beauty bloggers, attitude toward beauty bloggers, and perception of the Xiaohongshu application—on consumer behavior.

B. Sample Size Determination

The required sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula for unknown populations at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error:

$$n = \frac{0.05^2 \times 1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{1} = 384.16$$

To account for potential invalid or incomplete responses, 460 questionnaires were distributed. After data screening, 400 valid responses were retained, yielding an effective response rate of 86.96%, which exceeds the minimum threshold for reliable statistical inference.

C. Sampling Method

The target population consisted of active female Xiaohongshu users aged 18 to 35 residing in Beijing. To ensure representativeness, stratified random sampling was employed. The city's 16 districts served as primary strata,

with proportional allocation based on district population sizes. Secondary stratification was performed by age groups (18–25, 26–35), education levels (high school, undergraduate, postgraduate), and monthly income (<¥3000, ¥3000–¥8000, >¥8000). Participants were recruited through Wenjuanxing, a popular Chinese online survey platform. All respondents were screened to confirm they had followed at least one beauty blogger and engaged with beauty-related content on Xiaohongshu within the past six months.

D. Questionnaire Design and Variable Measurement

The questionnaire was developed based on validated scales from prior studies and translated into Chinese using a rigorous back-translation process to ensure cross-cultural equivalence. A pilot test involving 30 participants was conducted to assess item clarity and internal consistency.

E. Constructs and Scale Details

The final questionnaire consisted of five sections, each employing a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree):

- (1) Social Media Exposure: Adapted from Schivinski *et al.* [11], measuring time spent, interaction frequency, and media engagement (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.91$).
- (2) Perception of Beauty Bloggers: Based on De Veirman *et al.* [12], evaluating trustworthiness and expertise ($\alpha = 0.89$).
- (3) Attitude Toward Beauty Bloggers: Adapted from Lou and Yuan [6], focusing on emotional connection, relatability, and authenticity.
- (4) Perception of Xiaohongshu Application: Developed based on Liu and Suh [8], emphasizing usability, content reliability, and overall platform experience.
- (5) Consumer Behavior: Constructed to capture behavioral outcomes such as purchase intention, recommendation, and trend adoption following exposure to beauty bloggers.

All constructs demonstrated acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's α values exceeding 0.80.

F. Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted using JASP version 0.17.1. Descriptive statistics were first calculated to summarize participants' demographic profiles. Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was then employed to examine the predictive effects of the four independent variables on consumer behavior.

G. Additional Analyses

Control variables—including age, education, and income—were included to test for moderating effects. Interaction terms were added to the regression model to explore conditional relationships. Notably, respondents with higher income levels showed greater sensitivity to influencer credibility ($\beta = 0.167$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting differentiated persuasive pathways across demographic subgroups.

VI. RESULTS

A. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

To examine the effects of the four independent variables—Social Media Exposure, Perception of Beauty

Bloggers, Attitude Towards Beauty Bloggers, and Perception of the Xiaohongshu Application—on Consumer Behavior, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using JASP statistical software. The model demonstrated a good fit, with all four predictors showing statistically significant contributions to explaining variations in consumer behavior.

Specifically, Perception of Beauty Bloggers emerged as the strongest predictor, with a standardized path coefficient (β) of 0.875 and a t-value of 3.248, indicating a highly significant relationship. This suggests that when users perceive bloggers as knowledgeable, trustworthy, and honest, they are more likely to adopt their recommendations, thus influencing their purchasing decisions.

Attitude Towards Beauty Bloggers was also a strong predictor ($\beta = 0.766$, $t = 2.465$), highlighting the importance of positive emotional connections—such as admiration, enjoyment, and relatability—in driving user engagement and behavioral change.

The Perception of the Xiaohongshu Application showed a standardized coefficient of 0.699 ($t = 8.929$), suggesting that platform usability, ease of navigation, and reliability play vital roles in reinforcing consumer trust and converting interest into action.

Although slightly weaker, Social Media Exposure still demonstrated a meaningful effect ($\beta = 0.587$, $t = 3.248$), implying that increased frequency of exposure to influencer content—via likes, views, and notifications—enhances the likelihood of influence on consumer decision-making.

All predictors had t-values exceeding the conventional significance threshold of 2.0, confirming their statistical significance and supporting the proposed conceptual framework.

B. Summary of Key Findings: Social Media Exposure

The results indicate that frequent exposure to beauty-related content—such as watching tutorials, reading reviews, and engaging through likes or comments—gradually builds users' awareness and interest. Although Social Media Exposure is not the strongest predictor, it provides an essential foundation for subsequent consumer behaviors. Its impact may be more passive unless coupled with other factors. For instance, users who follow multiple bloggers and receive frequent notifications are more likely to encounter product trends and seasonal campaigns, subtly shaping their preferences over time.

C. Summary of Key Findings: Perception of Beauty Bloggers and Attitude

The perceived expertise and authenticity of beauty bloggers significantly influence trust. Respondents generally agreed that bloggers are knowledgeable and provide useful recommendations. However, mean scores revealed some skepticism, particularly regarding the honesty of sponsored content. While followers recognize bloggers as experts, they expect balanced and transparent reviews. This finding underscores the need for influencers to increase transparency by clearly disclosing sponsorships and presenting both pros and cons in their content. When perception of credibility is high, consumers are more willing to act on influencers' recommendations and even advocate products within their social networks.

Emotional attitudes—including enjoyment, inspiration,

and personal connection—play a central role in shaping behavior. Users generally enjoy consuming blogger content and look forward to their posts, yet the emotional bond, such as feeling a personal connection with bloggers, remains relatively weak. This gap indicates that while influencers may entertain and inform, they do not always foster loyal or emotionally connected communities. Enhancing this bond through interactive formats—such as replying to comments, sharing personal stories, and behind-the-scenes content—could strengthen consumer responsiveness and loyalty.

D. Summary of Key Findings: Perception of Xiaohongshu Application

Platform usability received relatively high ratings, with users noting that Xiaohongshu is easy to navigate and helpful for product research. Nevertheless, concerns remain about the credibility of the content. Many users expressed doubts about whether reviews are genuine or sponsored, reflecting a moderate level of trust. This suggests that while the platform's technical features are robust, its role as a reliable source of product information needs further reinforcement. Implementing features such as verified user reviews, content badges, or reviewer histories could help bridge this trust gap and enhance the platform's overall influence on consumer decision-making.

VII. CONCLUSION

A. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study makes significant contributions both theoretically and practically to the understanding of digital consumer behavior within influencer-driven ecosystems. Theoretically, it confirms and extends the application of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Source Credibility Theory in the context of Chinese social commerce. The findings demonstrate that users heavily rely on peripheral cues—particularly influencer credibility—when making beauty-related purchasing decisions. Additionally, the study highlights the growing importance of platform trust and emotional user experience as key factors influencing consumer behavior.

B. Practical Implications for Stakeholders

From a practical standpoint, the results provide valuable strategic insights for various stakeholders. For influencers, maintaining transparency and providing balanced reviews are crucial to sustaining audience trust. For Xiaohongshu, implementing verification systems and content credibility indicators could substantially enhance the platform's trustworthiness. Marketers are advised to collaborate with influencers whose values align with the target audience and who possess strong storytelling skills, as this alignment can improve conversion rates and user engagement.

C. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The sample was exclusively drawn from female users in Beijing, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other regions and male users. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases. Future research could broaden the demographic scope, incorporate mixed-method approaches, or conduct

cross-platform comparisons. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in influencer credibility over time, as well as cross-category analyses (e.g., comparing fashion and food sectors), would further test the robustness of the integrated trust-to-purchase model. Moreover, comparative research between Chinese and Western social commerce ecosystems may uncover culturally contingent persuasion mechanisms.

D. Theoretical Advancement

Theoretically, this study extends the ELM by revealing the dominance of the peripheral route in hybrid social-commerce contexts. It also advances Source Credibility Theory by elucidating the nexus between transparency, trust, and consumer behavior. These insights deepen our understanding of how trust is constructed and leveraged in digital influencer marketing, providing a foundation for future academic inquiry and practical application.

VIII. DISCUSSION

A. Influence of Perceived Influencer Credibility

This study reveals that perceived influencer credibility ($\beta = 0.875$, $p < 0.01$) exerts the most substantial effect on consumer behavior on Xiaohongshu, surpassing other variables such as user attitude, platform usability, and content exposure. This finding holds important implications for both persuasion theory and digital marketing practices within hybrid social-commerce platforms.

B. Credibility Peripheral Route Dominance: Revisiting the ELM

The results align with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) [9], confirming that users on Xiaohongshu predominantly rely on the peripheral route for decision-making. Unlike traditional advertising channels, Xiaohongshu's highly visual and fast-paced feed environment (with an average exposure time of approximately 1.2 seconds per content unit) limits users' cognitive bandwidth for detailed product evaluation. Consequently, users resort to heuristic cues such as influencer expertise, authenticity, and transparency. This contrasts with Instagram-based studies, where central cues like product features carry more weight [6]. Here, emotional trust, rather than argument strength, drives behavioral change.

This finding extends the ELM by demonstrating that credibility cues dominate even in high-involvement categories like skincare, where deeper cognitive processing might typically be expected. The social-commerce context transforms informational content into affective interaction, effectively collapsing the central route into the peripheral route through interface design and algorithmic exposure.

C. Advancing Source Credibility Theory: Transparency as a Trust Precondition

The data also support and extend Source Credibility Theory [5], which posits that trustworthiness and expertise are critical for persuasion. Xiaohongshu users exhibit selective trust: they engage with bloggers perceived as authentic but remain skeptical toward sponsored content, with an average trust score for advertisements of only 2.89 out of 5. This suggests a threshold model of trust, where credibility is earned not solely through expertise but through perceived transparency—a nuance often absent in Western influencer literature [4].

To mitigate the emerging credibility crisis, platforms like Xiaohongshu should institutionalize trust by implementing features such as:

- (1) "Verified Review" badges
- (2) Automatic disclosure tags for paid partnerships
- (3) Access to reviewer histories

These mechanisms not only support user autonomy but also align with dual-trust frameworks, whereby platform trust scaffolds influencer trust.

D. Attitude-Behavior Gap: An ABC Theory Perspective

Although attitude toward bloggers ($\beta = 0.766$) significantly influences behavior, the mean attitude score ($M = 3.85/5$) indicates only moderate emotional engagement. From the lens of Attitude-Behavior-Context (ABC) Theory, this reflects a disjunction between personal affinity and behavioral activation. Several contextual barriers contribute to this gap:

- (1) Algorithmic fatigue: Users are inundated with content, which diminishes intimacy and emotional resonance.
- (2) Sponsorship saturation: Over-commercialization undermines parasocial relationships [13].
- (3) Behavioral inertia: Many users consume content passively without translating liking into purchase or engagement.

To address this gap, content creators should emphasize personal storytelling, behind-the-scenes transparency, and interactive feedback loops that foster reciprocal trust.

E. Platform-Specific Insight: The "Integrated Trust-to-Purchase Pathway"

A unique contribution of this study is the identification of Xiaohongshu's "See-Trust-Buy" decision loop, which distinguishes it from other platforms. Unlike Instagram, where social interaction often precedes commerce, Xiaohongshu's integrated in-app shopping enables users to transition immediately from viewing content to purchasing. This loop explains why platform perception ($\beta = 0.699$) outweighs content exposure ($\beta = 0.587$) in predicting consumer behavior. When users trust both the messenger and the medium, the conversion pathway becomes frictionless.

F. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations:

- (1) Geographic bias: The sample focuses on urban female users in Beijing, limiting generalizability to rural populations or users in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities who may differ in digital literacy or purchasing power.
- (2) Cross-sectional design: The non-longitudinal nature restricts observation of how influencer trust or content fatigue develops over time. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to explore causal relationships.
- (3) Platform specificity: While Xiaohongshu was the study context, extending the model to platforms like Douyin or RED International could help generalize the theoretical framework beyond a single ecosystem.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. For Influencers

- (1) **Enhance Transparency**—Clearly disclose all sponsorships and partnerships, and provide balanced reviews that outline both advantages and drawbacks of the products or services. This practice can mitigate

audience skepticism and foster long-term trust.

- (2) **Strengthen Emotional Bonding**—Organize live Q&A sessions, share behind-the-scenes content, and engage in personalized interactions to deepen the emotional connection with followers, thereby encouraging stronger parasocial relationships.

B. For Xiaohongshu

- (1) **Implement Trust-Building Tools** – Introduce features such as “Verified Review” badges and algorithmic detection systems to flag undisclosed advertisements. These mechanisms can institutionalize trust and enhance user confidence in platform content.
- (2) **Optimize Personalization**—Leverage AI-driven recommendation systems to match users with influencers whose content and values align with their historical engagement patterns, thus improving content relevance and conversion potential.

C. For Future Research

- (1) **Expand Demographic Scope** – Include male users, rural populations, and residents of lower-tier cities in future sampling to test the generalizability of current findings across diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts.
- (2) **Examine Algorithmic Influence** – Investigate the role of AI-powered content curation in shaping user trust toward influencer recommendations, paying particular attention to how algorithmic transparency might moderate persuasion outcomes.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Yue Yin (first author) was responsible for conceptualizing the research framework, designing the questionnaire, collecting and cleaning the survey data, and performing statistical analyses. She also conducted the literature review, interpreted the results, and drafted the full manuscript; Lucksana Klaikao (second author and advisor) provided continuous academic guidance throughout the research process, including refining the research design, reviewing and improving the survey instrument, and offering critical feedback on data interpretation. She also reviewed and revised the manuscript for intellectual content and approved the final version for submission; both authors had approved the final version.

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