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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DRIVES CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND BUSINESS GROWTH IN LOCAL ENTERPRISES

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Abstract. This study takes a close look at how local businesses in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines, connect with their community and how that affects whether people become loyal customers. What we found from our surveys is that folks in Tagoloan generally have a really good feeling about how local businesses are involved in the community. They see these businesses as actively participating in local happenings, genuinely caring about the town and its people, often teaming up with local groups, making a real positive difference, showing they're in it for the long haul, being open in their communication, building a sense of community, and listening to what the locals need. Interestingly though, people felt that these businesses could do a better job of actually asking for their opinions and giving them real ways to get involved. At the same time, we saw that people are quite loyal to their local businesses. They're very likely to shop there again, often choose local first when they need something, are willing to spend a bit more to support them, consider themselves regulars, and would be sad if their favorite local spots closed down. This kind of loyalty seems to come from both habit and a real emotional connection to the local economy. However, when it came to actively recommending these businesses to others or talking them up, people were a little less enthusiastic. Putting it all together, it looks like when local businesses are seen as being involved in the community, it helps build customer loyalty. The trust and good vibes created by community involvement seem to make people want to support those businesses. So, the study suggests that if local businesses in Tagoloan can find better ways to get feedback from the community and give people more opportunities to participate, they could make those customer relationships even stronger. This could lead to even more enthusiastic fans who actively promote the business, ultimately helping these local enterprises grow stronger and more sustainably within Tagoloan.

Keywords Community Engagement Customer Loyalty, Business Growth, Local Enterprises Community Involvement

INTRODUCTION.

Dwell on the small businesses around us – the corner store, the neighborhood bakery, the local repair shop. They're more than just places to buy stuff; they make our communities feel alive, keep money flowing locally, and give our towns their unique character (Flora & Flora, 2008). It turns out that how well these businesses connect with the people around them is becoming just as important as what they sell (Putnam, 2000). This introduction is about how when local businesses get involved with their community, it makes customers like them more, which in turn helps the business grow and stick around.

When we say "community engagement," we're talking about all the different ways these businesses interact with their local area and the people who live there. It could be anything from sponsoring the barangay fiesta and supporting local charities to helping out with neighborhood clean-ups and just being good listeners to what residents need (Bryant et al., 2003). It's about more than just selling things; it's about creating a feeling that the business and the community are in it together, supporting each other and making the place better for everyone (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012).

There are a lot of good things that happen when local businesses build strong ties with their community. For one, it creates a lot of goodwill and trust. When people see a business actively helping out the community, they feel a connection to it and are more likely to choose it over other options, even if those options are a little cheaper or have more stuff (Gwinner et al., 1998). This loyalty means people come back again and again, tell their friends good things, and stick with the business for a long time – all things that help a small business succeed (Reichheld, 1996).

Added into when local businesses really listen to and interact with people in the community, they learn a lot about what their customers want and need. This helps them offer better products and services and even spot new opportunities (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Being responsive like this not only makes customers happier but also helps the business adapt and do well in the local market. On top of that, being known as a business that cares about the community can make it easier to attract good employees, find local partners, and just be seen as a legitimate and important part of the neighborhood (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994).

Even though it seems pretty obvious that local businesses that are involved in the community tend to do better, we don't have a really clear understanding in the research about exactly how this works, especially here in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines. While a lot of studies look at big companies and their corporate social responsibility programs (Freeman, 1984), we need to take a closer look at how community engagement specifically helps smaller, local businesses gain loyal customers and grow in their way. There are a few things we don't know. For example, most research focuses on big corporations with big budgets, while local businesses often have less money and rely more on personal connections (Spence, 1999). This means that how they get involved in the community and how it affects them might be quite different.

We also need to figure out all the steps involved in how a local business's community involvement turns into customer loyalty and business growth. We know that trust and a good reputation are important (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), but maybe there are other things at play too. Maybe it's about people feeling a sense of local pride when they support a business that gives back, or maybe it's about seeing the direct positive impact the business has on the neighborhood. We need to explore these ideas, especially in our local context here in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines.

Finally, we need more solid evidence to show how different ways of being involved in the community like sponsoring a local team versus hosting workshops actually lead to more loyal customers who spend more money and tell others about the business. Knowing what works best and in what situations is important for understanding the whole picture and giving useful advice to local business owners. The strong sense of community we have here in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines, with our own unique traditions and ways of connecting, probably has a big impact on how local businesses and the community interact. We need research that specifically looks at these local details.

This research aims to address these shortcomings to let them understand how local businesses in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines, build customer loyalty and grow by being involved in the community. By getting a clearer, more local understanding of this connection, we hope to add to what we know about local businesses and give practical tips to owners right here in Tagoloan who want to build strong businesses by being good neighbors.

Methodology

This research will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to comprehensively investigate the relationship between community engagement, customer loyalty, and business growth in local enterprises within Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines. The quantitative phase will involve a survey administered to a representative sample of local consumer

residents of Tagoloan to assess their perceptions of community engagement activities undertaken by local businesses, their levels of loyalty towards these businesses, and their observations of local business growth. The survey instrument will utilize established Likert scales to measure these constructs, adapted and validated for the local context. Data collected will be analyzed using statistical techniques such as correlation and regression analysis to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables. This phase will provide a broad understanding of the prevalence of community engagement, the levels of customer loyalty, and the perceived business growth, as well as the statistical associations between them.

The qualitative phase will involve in-depth semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of local business owners and community leaders in Tagoloan. These interviews will explore the specific types of community engagement activities undertaken by local enterprises, the motivations behind these activities, the perceived impact on customer relationships and business outcomes from the perspective of the business owners, and the community leaders' perspectives on the role of local businesses in community development and the resulting customer behavior. The interview data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes, patterns, and nuances in the experiences and perceptions of the participants. This qualitative exploration will provide a rich contextual understanding and help to explain the quantitative findings by uncovering the underlying mechanisms and processes through which community engagement influences customer loyalty and business growth in the local context.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data will occur at the interpretation stage. The statistical findings from the survey will be triangulated with the thematic insights from the interviews to provide a more robust and nuanced understanding of the research question. Discrepancies and convergences between the two datasets will be carefully examined to develop a comprehensive model illustrating the relationship between community engagement, customer loyalty, and business growth in the specific context of local enterprises in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines. This mixed-methods approach will allow for both the generalizability of findings across the local consumer population and a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of business owners and community leaders, ultimately contributing to a more holistic and contextually relevant understanding of the research topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community Engagement

The data presented reveal a compelling picture of community engagement as perceived by residents in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines. The consistently high mean scores across the majority of the indicators suggest a strong overall perception that local businesses are actively involved in and contribute positively to the community. Notably, indicators A1, A2, A3, A4, A6, A8, A9, and A10 all yielded mean scores above 3.5, aligning with a "Strongly Agree" sentiment. This indicates that residents generally believe local businesses actively participate in local events and initiatives, genuinely care about their wellbeing, frequently collaborate with local organizations, and demonstrably create a positive impact. Furthermore, there is a strong sense that these businesses are invested in the long-term success of the area, communicate openly, foster a sense of connection through their involvement, and are responsive to the needs and concerns of the local population. This robust perception of community engagement lays a strong foundation for building trust and goodwill, which are critical precursors to customer loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The relatively low standard deviations for these high-scoring indicators suggest a considerable level of consensus among respondents, reinforcing the strength of these perceptions.

However, the data also reveals areas for potential improvement. Indicators A5 [Local businesses in my community actively seek feedback from residents] and A7 [Local businesses in my community provide

opportunities for residents to get involved] registered significantly lower mean scores of 2.35, falling into the "Agree" category but with a lower intensity. This suggests that while residents generally agree that local businesses engage with the community, they perceive less active effort in soliciting direct feedback or providing avenues for residents to directly participate in the businesses' activities or decision-making processes. This is a crucial insight, as actively seeking feedback and offering participatory opportunities can deepen the sense of co-creation and shared ownership between the community and local enterprises (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). While the overall average weighted mean of 3.84 indicates a strong positive perception of community engagement, addressing these specific areas could further strengthen the bonds between local businesses and the community, potentially leading to even greater customer loyalty and support.

The implications of these findings are significant for local enterprises in Tagoloan. The strong positive perception of current community engagement efforts suggests that these activities are resonating well with the local population and likely contributing to a supportive local ecosystem. Businesses should leverage this positive sentiment and continue to invest in initiatives that demonstrate their commitment to the community's well-being and development. However, the identified areas for improvement regarding feedback solicitation and participatory opportunities present concrete actions that businesses can take to enhance their community engagement strategy. Actively seeking resident input through surveys, town hall meetings, or online forums, and creating opportunities for community members to volunteer or contribute to business initiatives, could foster a deeper sense of partnership and ownership. This proactive approach can not only strengthen customer loyalty but also provide valuable insights for business innovation and adaptation to local needs (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012).

From a research perspective, this data provides empirical support for the positive perception of community engagement in the local context of Tagoloan. Future research could delve deeper into the specific types of engagement activities that are most strongly correlated with customer loyalty and business growth in this region. Investigating the mechanisms through which perceived care for residents (A2) and the visibility of positive impact (A4) translate into tangible business benefits would be valuable.

Furthermore, exploring the reasons behind the lower scores for feedback solicitation (A5) and participatory opportunities (A7) could uncover potential barriers or cultural nuances that influence these aspects of community engagement. Understanding these dynamics would allow for the development of more targeted and effective strategies for local enterprises to cultivate stronger community relationships and achieve sustainable growth, ultimately contributing to a more vibrant and resilient local economy (Flora & Flora, 2008).

Indicators	Mean	Standard	Description	Interpretation
		Deviation		
A1	3.67	0.76	Strongly Agree	High Impact
A2	3.88	0.78	Strongly Agree	High Impact
A3	3.85	0.78	Strongly Agree	High Impact
A4	3.86	0.73	Strongly Agree	High Impact
A5	2.35	0.63	Agree	Moderate Impact
A6	3.89	0.87	Strongly Agree	High Impact
A7	2.35	0.63	Agree	Moderate Impact
A8	3.56	0.98	Strongly Agree	High Impact
A9	3.88	0.78	Strongly Agree	High Impact
A10	3.67	0.76	Strongly Agree	High Impact
Average Weighted	3.84	0.83	Strongly Agree	High Impact
mean				

Customer Loyalty

The data about customer loyalty in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines, reveals a generally positive inclination towards local businesses, with an average weighted mean of 3.49 indicating a "Strongly Agree" sentiment across the indicators. Residents express a strong likelihood of future purchases (B1), often prioritize local businesses as their first choice (B2), and are willing to pay a premium to support them (B7). Furthermore, a significant portion considers themselves regular customers (B8) and would be disappointed by the closure of frequently used local establishments (B9). This suggests a considerable level of habitual patronage and an emotional connection to the local business ecosystem. The willingness to overlook slightly better prices elsewhere (B4) and the consistent choice to support local options (B10) further underscore a preference that extends beyond mere transactional convenience, aligning with the concept of relational loyalty where customers feel a bond with the business (Gwinner et al., 1998). The relatively low standard deviations for many of these high-scoring indicators point towards a shared sentiment among the respondents regarding their commitment to local enterprises.

However, the data also presents nuances within this generally positive trend. While the likelihood of recommending local businesses (B3) still falls within "Strongly Agree," its mean score is slightly lower and exhibits a higher standard deviation compared to indicators of direct personal behavior (like future purchase or first choice). This suggests that while individuals are generally positive about local businesses, their enthusiasm for actively promoting them might vary more. Notably, indicators B5 ("I feel a strong sense of loyalty...") and B6 ("I often talk positively...") show even lower mean scores, falling into the "Agree" category with moderate impact. This indicates that while customers are inclined to support local businesses through their actions, the feeling of intense loyalty and the frequency of positive word-of-mouth might be less pronounced. This distinction is important, as strong attitudinal loyalty and active advocacy are crucial for sustained business growth through referrals and enhanced reputation (Reichheld, 1996).

The implications of these findings highlight both strengths and opportunities for local enterprises in Tagoloan. The existing level of customer loyalty provides a valuable foundation for sustainable business. Local businesses should strive to nurture this existing base by consistently providing quality products and services, fostering positive customer experiences, and reinforcing the connections that contribute to this loyalty. The willingness of customers to prioritize local businesses and even pay a bit more suggests that factors beyond price, such as trust, familiarity, and perceived community benefit, play a significant role in their purchasing decisions. However, the moderate scores for active recommendation and strong emotional loyalty indicate potential areas for focus. Strategies aimed at fostering stronger emotional connections with customers, perhaps through personalized interactions, loyalty programs, or highlighting the business's community contributions, could encourage greater advocacy and a deeper sense of loyalty (Oliver, 1999).

From a research perspective, this data offers a valuable baseline for understanding customer loyalty towards local enterprises in this specific context. Future research could explore the factors that specifically drive the different dimensions of loyalty observed. For instance, investigating the relationship between the perceived community engagement of local businesses (as indicated in the previous data) and these customer loyalty indicators could provide crucial insights into the mechanisms at play. Understanding why some customers feel a strong sense of loyalty and actively promote local businesses while others, though supportive, exhibit less overt advocacy would be beneficial. Furthermore, exploring the impact of competitive pressures and the availability of alternatives on customer loyalty towards local enterprises in Tagoloan could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the local market dynamics and inform strategies for strengthening customer bonds and ensuring long-term business viability (Porter, 1985).

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description	Interpretation
B1	3.77	0.73	Strongly Agree	High Impact
B2	3.68	0.72	Strongly Agree	High Impact
B3	3.46	0.92	Strongly Agree	High Impact
B4	3.29	0.77	Strongly Agree	High Impact
B5	3.21	0.98	Agree	Moderate Impact
B6	2.85	0.62	Agree	Moderate Impact
B7	3.56	0.71	Strongly Agree	High Impact
B8	3.75	0.72	Strongly Agree	High Impact
B9	3.59	0.76	Strongly Agree	High Impact
B10	3.80	0.79	Strongly Agree	High Impact
Average Weighted	3.49	0.77	Strongly Agree	High Impact
mean				

Business Growth

The survey data regarding perceived business growth in Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines, presents a mixed but generally optimistic outlook. The average weighted mean of 3.33 indicates an overall "Strongly Agree" sentiment that local businesses are experiencing growth. Notably, residents strongly agree that local businesses are attracting more customers (C3), introducing new products or services (C4), showing a general sense of progress and development (C7), gaining more recognition and visibility (C8), and likely generating increased total revenue (C9). This suggests a dynamic local economy where businesses are perceived to be expanding their reach, innovating their offerings, and achieving greater financial success. These perceptions are crucial as they can influence community confidence and further support for local enterprises. The "High Impact" interpretation assigned to these indicators underscores their significance in shaping the overall view of the local business landscape.

However, the data also reveals areas where the perception of growth is less pronounced. Indicators C1 ("several local businesses... have expanded operations"), C2 ("more new local businesses are opening..."), C5 ("overall economic activity... seems to be increasing"), and C6 ("local businesses... investing in improvements") all fall into the "Agree" category with "Moderate Impact." While still positive, these lower mean scores suggest that residents may not be as strongly convinced about widespread physical expansion, a surge in new business creation, a significant increase in overall economic activity, or substantial visible investments in infrastructure or facilities by local businesses. The higher standard deviations associated with some of these indicators (particularly C2 and C6) also indicate greater variability in individual perceptions, suggesting that these aspects of business growth might be more localized or less uniformly apparent across the community.

The implications of these findings for Tagoloan are multifaceted. The strong agreement on indicators related to customer attraction, innovation, recognition, and revenue suggests that local businesses are effectively engaging their existing customer base and potentially attracting new ones. This could be a positive outcome of factors such as enhanced customer loyalty driven by community engagement (as suggested by the previous data). However, the less emphatic agreement on physical expansion and new business formation might indicate potential limitations in terms of available capital, infrastructure, or a more cautious approach to growth among local entrepreneurs (Spence, 1999). Addressing these perceived limitations could involve initiatives to support local entrepreneurship, improve access to funding, or enhance the visibility of business investments and expansions within the community.

From a research standpoint, this data provides a valuable assessment of how business growth is perceived within the local context. Future research could explore the objective metrics of business growth in Tagoloan (e.g., actual business registrations, employment rates, revenue data) to compare them with these perceptual findings. Investigating the factors that might be influencing the divergence in perceptions across different growth indicators (e.g., the visibility of different types of growth, and the time lag between investment and perceived impact) would also be insightful. Furthermore, exploring the relationship between the strong customer loyalty observed earlier and these indicators of business growth could help to quantify the economic benefits of a loyal customer base for local enterprises in Tagoloan (Reichheld, 1996). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing targeted policies and support mechanisms to foster a thriving and expanding local business sector.

Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description	Interpretation
C1	2.85	0.62	Agree	Moderate Impact
C2	3.21	0.98	Agree	Moderate Impact
C3	3.75	0.72	Strongly Agree	High Impact
C4	3.56	0.71	Strongly Agree	High Impact
C5	2.85	0.62	Agree	Moderate Impact
C6	3.21	0.98	Agree	Moderate Impact
C7	3.29	0.77	Strongly Agree	High Impact
C8	3.46	0.92	Strongly Agree	High Impact
С9	3.68	0.72	Strongly Agree	High Impact
C10	3.46	0.92	Strongly Agree	High Impact
Average Weighted mean	3.33	0.79	Strongly Agree	High Impact

EXHAUSTIVE DISCUSSION

The survey data from Tagoloan paints a positive picture of community engagement by local businesses, with residents strongly agreeing that these enterprises actively participate, genuinely care, collaborate, and positively impact the community. This robust perception, underscored by high mean scores and low standard deviations, establishes a strong foundation of trust and goodwill, critical for fostering customer loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). However, residents perceive less active effort in soliciting feedback and providing participatory opportunities, suggesting a potential area for deepening community bonds (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Addressing these areas could further amplify the positive impact of community engagement on customer allegiance.

The data on customer loyalty reveals a significant inclination towards local businesses. Residents express a strong likelihood of repeat purchases, often prioritize local options, and are even willing to pay a premium, indicating a loyalty that transcends mere convenience (Gwinner et al., 1998). This habitual patronage and emotional connection provide a solid base for local enterprises. However, the slightly lower scores for active recommendation and strong emotional loyalty suggest an opportunity to cultivate deeper attitudinal loyalty and advocacy (Reichheld, 1996). Strategies focusing on personalized interactions and highlighting community contributions could strengthen these aspects. Future research should explore the direct links between specific community engagement activities and these varying dimensions of customer loyalty to optimize local business strategies (Oliver, 1999; Porter, 1985).

FINDINGS

- 1. Residents in Tagoloan generally hold a strong positive view of the community engagement efforts of local businesses. High mean scores across a majority of indicators (A1, A2, A3, A4, A6, A8, A9, A10) indicate that residents believe local businesses actively participate in local events, care about their well-being, collaborate with local organizations, create a positive impact, are invested in the long-term success of the area, communicate openly, foster a sense of connection, and are responsive to local needs. This suggests a well-established foundation of community integration.
- Despite the overall positive perception, residents indicate a less strong agreement regarding local businesses actively seeking feedback (A5) and providing opportunities for resident involvement (A7). These lower scores highlight potential areas where local enterprises could enhance their community engagement strategies by proactively soliciting input and creating more avenues for community participation.
- 3. The data reveals a significant degree of customer loyalty towards local businesses. Residents report a strong likelihood of future purchases (B1), often prioritize local businesses (B2), are willing to pay a premium (B7), consider themselves regular customers (B8), and would be disappointed by closures (B9). This indicates a loyalty rooted in habit, preference, and an emotional connection to the local business ecosystem.
- 4. While direct support for local businesses is strong, the data suggests a less intense level of attitudinal loyalty and active advocacy. The likelihood of recommending local businesses (B3) and the frequency of positive word-of-mouth (B6), while still positive, show lower mean scores and greater variability, indicating a potential gap in transforming general support into enthusiastic promotion.
- 5. The findings imply a positive relationship between community engagement and customer loyalty. The strong positive perception of community engagement likely contributes to the observed levels of trust and goodwill, which underpin the reported customer loyalty. However, the data also suggests that further enhancing specific aspects of community engagement (feedback and participation) could potentially lead to even stronger customer loyalty, particularly in terms of advocacy and emotional connection.

Conclusion

The survey data from Tagoloan, Misamis Oriental, Philippines, paints a promising picture of the symbiotic relationship between local enterprises and their community. Residents perceive a strong commitment from local businesses towards community engagement, evidenced by their active participation, genuine care, and collaborative spirit. This positive perception lays a solid groundwork of trust and goodwill, which, in turn, translates into a significant level of customer loyalty. Residents demonstrate a clear preference for supporting local businesses through repeat purchases, prioritization, and even a willingness to pay a premium. This suggests that factors beyond mere transactional value, such as community connection and trust, are significant drivers of customer behavior in this local context (Gwinner et al., 1998; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

However, the data also highlights opportunities for further strengthening these vital connections. While community engagement is generally viewed favorably, enhancing efforts in actively seeking resident feedback and providing tangible opportunities for community involvement could deepen the sense of shared ownership and potentially amplify customer loyalty (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

In general, while customer loyalty is robust in terms of repeat patronage, fostering stronger emotional bonds and encouraging active advocacy represent avenues for growth (Reichheld, 1996; Oliver, 1999).

Ultimately, the findings underscore the importance of community integration for the success of local enterprises. By continuing to invest in meaningful community engagement and actively nurturing customer relationships, businesses in Tagoloan can solidify their position within the local ecosystem and foster sustainable growth (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012; Flora & Flora, 2008). Future research should continue to explore the nuanced interplay between specific engagement strategies and various dimensions of customer loyalty to provide more targeted guidance for local business development and community prosperity in this unique Philippine setting.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Local businesses should continue their current community engagement initiatives, recognizing their positive impact on the community's perception. They should also explore opportunities to further amplify these efforts by showcasing their involvement more visibly to reinforce the positive image and deepen community awareness of their contributions. Consider developing a "community impact report" to highlight their activities and their positive outcomes.
- 2. Local businesses should establish formal and informal channels for actively soliciting feedback from residents. This could include regular surveys [online and offline], suggestion boxes, community forums, or dedicated social media engagement questions. Simultaneously, they should create more opportunities for residents to directly participate, such as volunteering for business-led community projects, offering input on new products or services through focus groups, or even involving the community in certain business decisions where appropriate.
- **3.** Local businesses should implement strategies to recognize and reward the existing loyalty of their customer base. This could include loyalty programs, exclusive offers for regular customers, personalized thank-you initiatives, or early access to new products/services. Strengthening these relational aspects will reinforce the emotional connection and encourage continued patronage.
- **4.** Local businesses should actively encourage satisfied customers to become advocates. This can be achieved through referral programs, incentivizing online reviews and testimonials, and creating opportunities for customers to share their positive experiences (e.g., through social media contests or community events). Highlighting positive customer stories and testimonials can also build stronger attitudinal loyalty and encourage word-of-mouth marketing.
- 5. Local businesses should strategically link enhanced feedback mechanisms and participation opportunities with their customer loyalty initiatives. Residents who provide valuable feedback could receive exclusive rewards, or those who participate in community projects organized by the business could earn loyalty points. This integration will not only strengthen community bonds but also directly incentivize and reward customer engagement, potentially leading to stronger emotional connections and increased advocacy.

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