

The influence of tourist experiencescape and unique perceptions on destination satisfaction and loyalty: A study of natural and cultural tourism in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose — *This study aims to analyze the role of the tourist experience and unique perceptions of a destination on destination satisfaction and loyalty in natural and cultural tourism models in Indonesia.*

Method — *We employed a quantitative analysis in this study. The study's participants consisted of 100 tourists who had explored various natural and cultural tourist destinations, encompassing sites such as Tanjung Kelayang SEZ, Siak Sri Indrapura, Dieng, Borobudur Temple, Panglipuran Tourism Village, Uluwatu, Bromo Tourism, and the Heritage and Culture Museum. The data analysis method employed in this research is based on the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Model (SEM-PLS).*

Result — *The findings of this study indicate that the variables 'tourist experiencescape' and 'unique perceptions' have a positive influence on destination satisfaction. Additionally, destination satisfaction has a significant and positive impact on destination loyalty. Furthermore, destination satisfaction mediates the relationship between the tourist experiencescape and unique perceptions of the destination on loyalty.*

Contribution — *This research makes a significant academic contribution by addressing a noteworthy gap in the existing literature. Prior studies have not extensively explored the relationships between the tourist experiencescape, unique perceptions of destinations, destination satisfaction, and subsequent loyalty in the context of natural and cultural destinations.*

Keywords: *destination satisfaction, destination loyalty, unique perception, tourist experiencescape, natural and cultural tourism*



INTRODUCTION

Exploring nature and cultural tourism is a valuable means of delving into the cultural background of popular vacation spots and attracting visitors to these locations. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designates specific cultural heritage sites for international recognition, underscoring their significance in preserving cultural heritage. Indonesia, with its extensive history, boasts a rich culture and heritage. Tourism significantly boosts the number of visitors to these sites ([De Simone et al., 2019](#)).

Indonesia is home to 69 UNESCO-registered sites, each featuring historical places or cultures listed on the World Heritage List. The country's cultural tourism encompasses nine tourist sites, nine tentative listings for world cultural heritage, seven tentative listings for world natural heritage, ten intangible cultural heritages, eight Memory of the World documents, 16 biosphere reserves, five registered tours on the Global Geopark Network, two listings on the Global Network of Learning Cities, and three cities on the Creative Cities Network ([KWRIU, 2020](#); [UNESCO, 2021](#)).

Cultural heritage encompasses various elements, including landscapes, historic sites, environments, biodiversity, collections, cultural practices, knowledge, and past experiences, all of which continue to shape national, regional, and local identities and play an integral role in modern life ([Martokusumo, 2017](#)). This study underscores the importance of heritage in tourism, offering an authentic experience that represents a particular region's historical, cultural, and natural resources ([Widyawati, 2018](#)).

[Park & Santos \(2017\)](#) explained that the tourism experiencescape is an impression sensed through active involvement and participation in a particular tourism context and influenced by emotions arising from interactions with the tourism environment. Furthermore, tourists' emotions and impressions can be influenced by various factors, such as images, objects, and sensory experiences like sound, touch, and taste ([Park & Santos, 2017](#)). The goal is to create positive interactions between visitors, service providers, personnel, the physical environment, and facilities, aiming to achieve tourist satisfaction and encourage repeat visits. For example, this concept is applicable in a national park setting, where the attractiveness of a destination drives most recreational and adventure activities ([Chui et al., 2010](#)).

According to [Karagöz & Uysal \(2020\)](#), individuals seek uniqueness that shapes their preferences for products or services, expressing distinction and accomplishment. Uniqueness represents an individual's effort to differentiate themselves from others and enhance their personal and interpersonal identity

(Tian et al., 2001). Assessing unique perceptions of tourist destinations also relies on identifiable characteristics (Kirillova et al., 2014). Consequently, tourist destinations with distinctive characteristics and exciting cultures garner more interest due to their unique perceptions, potentially increasing tourist numbers (Anshori et al., 2020). Tourist visitors aspire to uncover the uniqueness of their destinations (Barretto, 2013). In this context, the unique perception of the destination becomes a pivotal factor in the tourist experience (Kirillova et al., 2014).

Previous research explains that the number of tourists visiting world heritage sites has increased. However, the quality and services provided at tourist attractions have not fully met their expectations (Chang et al., 2014). This highlights the need for tourist destination managers to improve their services and increase visitor satisfaction. Several factors can enhance destination satisfaction and loyalty. For example, destination image (Zhang et al., 2014), trust (Loureiro & Gonzalez, 2008), customer identification (Hultman et al., 2015), destination perceived value (Vinh & Phuong, 2017), and destination brand authenticity (Chen et al., 2020) influence visitor loyalty. However, there is limited research that integrates tourist experiencescape and unique perceptions of destination satisfaction and their impact on tourist loyalty in natural and cultural tourism. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by proposing an integrated research model related to tourist experiencescape, unique perception, and destination satisfaction's effect on loyalty in cultural heritage destinations. Consequently, this study is crucial for further research.

METHOD

This research aims to assess different aspects of creative tourism based on previously studied concepts. A survey consisting of 16 questions was used to collect data and analyze tourists' perceptions regarding unique destinations, their experiences, satisfaction, and loyalty.

Respondents were tourists who had visited natural and cultural tourist attractions in Indonesia, such as Tanjung Kelayang SEZ, Siak Sri Indrapura, Dieng, Borobudur Temple, Panglipuran Tourism Village, Uluwatu, Bromo Tourism, Heritage and Culture Museum, and so on. The survey questions were answered on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The researcher used the Lemeshow formula to determine the sample size, as the population size was unknown. This formula helps calculate the required number of samples for an unknown population (Lemeshow et al.,

1990). The sample size calculated using Lemeshow's formula was 100 samples. Additionally, according to Ghozali (2011), the sample size can be determined by multiplying the number of parameters by 5 to 10. In this study, a total of 16 criteria were measured, indicating that a sample size of 96 was required ($16 \times 6 = 96$ samples). To increase the accuracy of the data, 100 samples were collected. The questionnaires were distributed via an online survey using Google Forms to respondents who had visited natural and cultural tourist attractions. Table 1 presents the questionnaire items for each variable.

Table 1. Items of questionnaire from each variable

Variables	Statements	Item Code
Tourism Experiencescape	I had a wonderful time experiencing the natural and cultural aspects of tourism	TE1
	After visiting this natural and cultural tourist attraction, I had an exciting new experience	TE2
	I am very impressed by this natural and cultural tourism	TE3
	I am delighted to have a new experience in this natural and cultural tourism	TE4
Unique Perception	The tourist attractions I visited had the unique qualities that set them apart from other destinations	UP1
	The tourist attractions I visited have special privileges that are not offered anywhere else	UP2
	The tourist attractions I visited were the most unique tourist destinations in my opinion	UP3
	The atmosphere on this tour was pleasant for me	UP4
	The buildings and architecture of this tourist attraction are interesting	UP5
Destination Satisfaction	Overall, I am satisfied with this natural and cultural tourism	DS1
	The experience gained from this natural and cultural tourism was in line with my expectations	DS2
	A visit to this natural and cultural tourist attraction was the right choice for me	DS3
Destination Loyalty	I intend to revisit this natural and cultural tourist attraction later	DL1
	I recommend visiting this natural and cultural tourist attraction with friends or family	DL2
	I will encourage friends and relatives to visit this natural and cultural tourist attraction	DL3
	I will tell other people I know about my experiences with this natural and cultural tourism	DL4

Source: Authors' compilation (2023)

Researchers often use variance- and PLS-based structural equation modeling to effectively analyze data (Hair et al., 2014). This method enables them to evaluate path coefficients in structural models, even when the data is not normally

distributed (Nitzl et al., 2016). Before testing hypotheses, researchers assess construct validity and reliability using confirmatory factor analysis. This involves examining the loading factor and Cronbach's alpha to ensure that each question item is appropriately grouped according to the variable. Researchers also evaluate construct reliability and the average variance extracted (AVE) to ensure the accuracy of results.

Hypothesis development

Tourist experiencescape and destination satisfaction

The experiencescape, consisting of sensory elements perceived during a consumer's interaction with a product, service, or brand, can be associated with satisfaction (Opoku et al., 2023). According to Piramanayagam et al. (2020), this impact comes from its ability to evoke positive emotions, with elements such as inviting restaurants and friendly staff increasing satisfaction through pleasant emotional experiences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Additionally, experiencescapes facilitate immersive experiences, immersing consumers in the moment and resulting in a more enjoyable and satisfying experience. An example of this is a theme park with immersive attractions (Chui et al., 2010). Furthermore, offering personalized facilities can create memorable experiences that enhance visitor satisfaction. Therefore, our hypothesis is as follows:

H1: Tourist experiencescape has a positive effect on destination satisfaction

Unique perception and destination satisfaction

A tourist attraction is a place that possesses beauty, diversity, cultural richness, and uniqueness, drawing visitors and motivating them to explore. The unique perception of features in creative tourism can encourage visitor satisfaction (Anshori et al., 2020). These destinations provide numerous reasons for tourists to visit and offer activities in the area, enhancing the overall experience. According to Kim & Lee (2015), tourists with a unique perception of a destination, where they experience the desired emotions, are likely to form an impression and feel personally suited to the place, ultimately leading to satisfaction. Additionally, when people's self-concept aligns with their unique perception, their destination satisfaction increases (Kim & Lee, 2015). Therefore, a unique natural and cultural tourism perception has a positive impact on visitor satisfaction. Our hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Unique perception has a positive effect on destination satisfaction

Destination satisfaction and destination loyalty

Tourist loyalty to a destination is when they consistently choose to visit a particular place even though other options are available. In the tourism industry, research shows that satisfied tourists are more likely to revisit the same destination and recommend it to others ([Trimurti & Utama, 2021](#)). These loyal travelers can also act as effective promoters by sharing their experiences with acquaintances, family members, and coworkers. This behavioral pattern encourages increased tourist motivation to destinations. Satisfaction is an essential factor influencing tourist loyalty and is a reliable measure of loyalty in various industries ([Yoon & Uysal, 2005](#)). Therefore, our hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Destination satisfaction has a positive effect on destination loyalty

Mediating effect of destination satisfaction

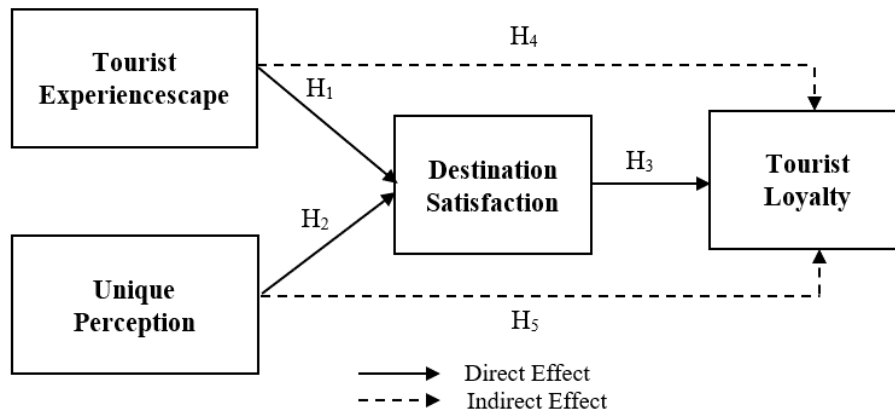
[Chen & Chen \(2010\)](#) note that the tourist experience alone cannot directly influence a visitor's intention to be loyal; instead, it requires a mediating role to indirectly affect destination satisfaction. Based on the research findings, the tourist experiencescape variable indirectly impacts loyalty by increasing destination satisfaction. This implies that enhancing the quality of visitor experiences can lead to increased natural and cultural tourism loyalty. Subsequently, the tourism experiencescape variable significantly and positively affects loyalty. Therefore, our hypothesis is as follows:

H4: Destination satisfaction can positively mediate the relationship between unique perception and destination loyalty

[Kim & Lee \(2015\)](#) suggest that having a unique perception and a memorable destination can increase loyalty through destination satisfaction. In addition, [Anshori et al. \(2020\)](#) add that perceiving a destination as unique may also increase loyalty, depending on how satisfied a visitor is after their visit. Therefore, satisfaction with a destination can mediate the relationship between a unique perception of a destination and loyalty. Our hypothesis is as follows:

H5: Unique perception of the destination positively mediates the relationship between tourist experiencescape and destination loyalty

Figure 1. Conceptual framework model



Source: Developed by the authors (2023)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondents demographic characteristics

Table 2 shows that the respondents in this study were predominantly young women (between 17 and 25 years old), most of whom held bachelor's degrees. The distribution of respondents in terms of tourism categories is balanced between natural and cultural tourism. These characteristics suggest that both natural and cultural tourist attractions are appealing to young tourists. Furthermore, the characteristics of the young respondents in this study align with those found in other tourism studies in Indonesia (Suhartanto et al., 2020).

Table 2. Respondents demographic characteristics

Variable	Description	Frequency	%
Age	17-25	63	63.0
	26-35	12	12.0
	36-45	6	6.0
	>45	19	19.0
Gender	Man	37	37.0
	Woman	63	63.0
Education	Senior High School	21	21.0
	Bachelor	66	66.0
	Postgraduate	13	13.0
Tourism Category	Natural tourism	50	50.0
	Culture tour	50	50.0

Source: Processed data (2023)

Measurement model

The measurement model must first be examined for the evaluation process to ensure the construct's reliability and validity. This is done by evaluating the

outer loading, Cronbach's alpha, and average variance extract (AVE). Table 3 shows that all constructs have values above 0.6 and AVE greater than 0.5, indicating good reliability. Additionally, all Cronbach's alpha values exceeded the recommended level of 0.7, meeting the reliability requirements.

Structural model

The second assessment stage evaluated the structural model's outcome. A bootstrap procedure with 500 iterations tested the significance of indicators and path coefficients. The geometric mean of communal means and R^2 assessed the model's fit. The R^2 value explained that 58.2% of destination satisfaction variance derived from the tourist experiencescape and unique perceptions of the destination. The remaining 41.8% was derived from external variables.

Table 3. Validity and Reliability Testing

Construct Items	Factor Weights	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
Tourist Experiencescape		0.851	0.695
TE1	0.730		
TE2	0.875		
TE3	0.867		
TE4	0.855		
Unique Perception		0.843	0.612
UP1	0.744		
UP2	0.755		
UP3	0.744		
UP4	0.849		
UP5	0.815		
Destination Satisfaction		0.895	0.826
DS1	0.904		
DS2	0.907		
DS3	0.915		
Destination Loyalty		0.896	0.764
DL1	0.864		
DL2	0.916		
DL3	0.884		
DL4	0.828		

Source: Processed data (2023)

Similarly, the R^2 value accounted for 52.7% of destination loyalty variance, attributable to tourist experiencescape, unique perceptions, and destination satisfaction. External variables in natural and cultural tourism explained the remaining 47.3%. The Q^2 value of tourist experiencescape, unique perception,

and destination satisfaction was positive at 0.392, indicating that the proposed model aligned with the data (Chin et al., 2008).

Table 4. Results of Hypothesis Testing and Effect of Variables

Hypothesis	β	t-Values	Ket
- Tourist Experiencescape → Destination Satisfaction (H1)	0.289	2,268**	Accepted
- Unique Perception → Destination Satisfaction (H2)	0.510	4,391**	Accepted
- Visiting Satisfaction → Destination Loyalty (H3)	0.726	15,188**	Accepted
- Tourist Experiencescape → Destination Satisfaction → Destination Loyalty (H4)	0.210	2,207*	Accepted
- Unique Perception → Destination Satisfaction → Destination Loyalty (H5)	0.371	4,124**	Accepted

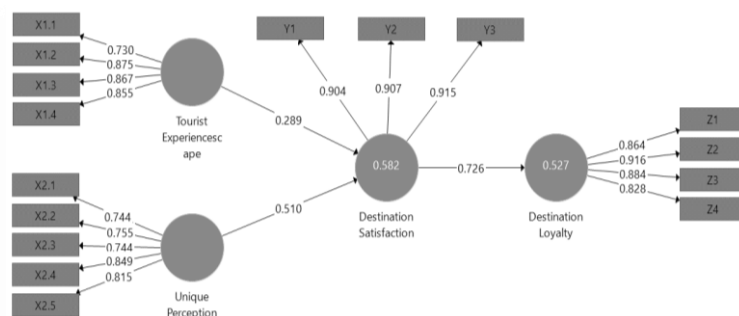
**Significant at $p < 0.01$; *Significant at $p < 0.05$

Source: Processed data (2023)

Standard Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and Average Fit Index (NFI) were used to assess the fit of the model. The SRMR value of 0.081 was lower than the recommended threshold of 0.08, while the NFI value of 0.778 fell below the recommended threshold of 0.90 (Laosirihongthong et al., 2013). Based on these results, the data analysis demonstrated relatively good fit.

The results of hypothesis testing for all variables in the research model are presented in Table 4. As shown in the table, the effect of tourist experiencescape on destination satisfaction is positive (0.289) and significant at $p < 0.01$, with a statistical value of 2.268 (higher than the critical t-table value of 1.97). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is accepted. Similarly, the unique perception variable also has a positive and significant effect ($p < 0.01$) with a coefficient of 0.510 and a statistical value of 4.391 (higher than the t-table value of 1.97), leading to the acceptance of hypothesis 2. Additionally, the destination satisfaction variable exhibits a positive and significant effect (0.726) at $p < 0.01$, with a statistical value of 15.188 (higher than the t-table value of 1.97), and thus, hypothesis 3 is accepted. Figure 2 illustrates the relationships between the variables.

Figure 2. Relationships between variables



Source: Processed data (2023)

Moreover, the indirect effect of the tourist experiencescape on destination loyalty through destination satisfaction is positive ($p < 0.05$) and significant (0.210) with a statistical value of 2.207. Similarly, the indirect effect of unique perceptions on loyalty through destination satisfaction is positive ($p < 0.01$) and significant (0.371), with a statistical value of 4.124. From Table 4, it is evident that the unique perception variable has a more significant influence on destination satisfaction and indirectly on destination loyalty, with a construct coefficient of 0.510, as compared to the tourist experiencescape variable, which has a construct coefficient of 0.289.

Discussion

The role of tourist experiencescape in destination satisfaction

According to the results of this study, the tourist experiencescape plays a crucial role in determining destination satisfaction. The hypothesis has been verified, indicating that an increase in tourism experiences leads to higher destination satisfaction. This result is supported by [Piramanayagam et al.'s \(2021\)](#) research, which found that the tourist experiencescape positively affects destination satisfaction. The study further highlights how various aspects of the tourist experiencescape, such as the condition of the surrounding environment, decorative elements, and signage, significantly impact customer satisfaction ([Artuğer, 2020](#)). The research results show that signs and symbols play a significant role in influencing customer satisfaction, particularly at cultural heritage sites with large areas and various supporting tourist facilities and attractions. In this context, visitors may find it convenient to navigate and determine their destination within the cultural tourism area. Therefore, the importance of installing signs and providing directions at cultural tourism sites is increasing. Additionally, there is a need to improve the overall quality of the tourist experience, with a primary focus on attributes that drive tourist satisfaction, such as accessibility, parking, and directions ([Mendes et al., 2010](#)).

Unique perception's impact on destination satisfaction

The results of research conducted by [Hikmah et al. \(2018\)](#) found that unique perception positively and significantly affects tourist satisfaction. Tourists are drawn to each destination's unique spirit and values, such as exoticism, aesthetics, diverse mystical cultures, and distinctive services. This uniqueness provides varying levels of satisfaction to visitors. Therefore, marketing managers must identify and promote the unique qualities of their destinations

to attract more tourists and enhance their satisfaction. By doing so, they can foster a lasting emotional connection with travelers and differentiate their destination's offerings from those of competitors.

This study reveals that the unique perception of a destination is a crucial factor in shaping the destination's image. It means that the unique qualities of a destination can enhance its overall image. Therefore, tourism marketing managers must identify the distinctive features of their destinations and promote them within their target market. For example, historical tourist attractions dating back thousands of years represent a unique feature of these destinations. Being a cost-effective travel destination is another unique quality that distinguishes it from the competition (Ghafari et al., 2017).

Destination satisfaction's impact on loyalty

The study found that tourists are more likely to exhibit loyalty when they are satisfied with their destination in cultural heritage tourism. This finding is supported by a previous study conducted in Hong Kong by Lu et al. (2020), which indicates that tourist satisfaction plays a critical role in driving destination loyalty. Additionally, Keshavarz & Jamshidi (2018) concluded that tourist loyalty increases when expectations are met. Factors such as pleasure, relaxation, enjoyment, positive feelings, and comfort are crucial contributors to destination satisfaction. Therefore, improving these factors can lead to increased tourist satisfaction and higher destination loyalty, potentially resulting in tourists recommending the destination to others.

Siu et al. (2012) suggest that signs and symbols play a crucial role in guiding tourists and conveying cultural values. A clean and pleasant atmosphere, as well as well-maintained facilities, can have a positive impact on tourist satisfaction. These factors shape a tourist's initial impression of a destination. Adzoyi (2015) found that the tourism experiencescape significantly affects destination satisfaction. Similarly, Artuğer (2020) observed that tools, equipment, aroma, and lighting have a significant impact on satisfaction. Ali & Amin (2014) discovered that physical evidence influences customer satisfaction, based on their study of resort hotels in China.

Destination satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between tourist experiencescape and loyalty

This study reveals that the quality of the tourist experience has an impact on loyalty to natural and cultural tourism. Specifically, the study found that the

tourist experiencescape indirectly affects loyalty through destination satisfaction. In other words, a well-implemented tourist experience can lead to greater satisfaction with the destination, thereby increasing loyalty. The study concludes that there is a significant and positive relationship between the tourism experiencescape and loyalty. It is important to note, however, that while the tourist experience itself may not directly lead to a desire to return, it does play a role in indirectly affecting value and satisfaction ([Chen & Chen, 2010](#)).

Destination satisfaction as a mediator in the relationship between unique perception and loyalty

According to the study, a unique perception of a destination indirectly increases loyalty to natural and cultural tourism through destination satisfaction. This means that the more unique a destination is perceived, the more it encourages satisfaction and, ultimately, increases loyalty. The study concludes that unique destination perceptions positively and significantly affect loyalty, a finding supported by [Kim & Lee's \(2015\)](#) argument that a memorable destination can increase repeat visitors. The study also highlights that a unique perception of a destination must encompass both affective and cognitive components to enhance customer loyalty. [Anshori et al.'s \(2020\)](#) research on beach tourism supports this notion, explaining that the unique perception of a destination, such as rare flora and fauna and the uniqueness of the beach, can drive destination loyalty. Therefore, symbols, atmosphere, cleanliness, and unique perceptions of cultural tourism sites are essential in increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty to these destinations.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the role of the tourist experience, unique perceptions, destination satisfaction, and loyalty in natural and cultural tourism in Indonesia. The findings revealed that the tourist experience and unique perceptions of the destination positively impact destination satisfaction. Additionally, destination satisfaction was found to be positively related to loyalty. The study also found that destination satisfaction could mediate the relationship between the tourist experience and destination loyalty. Furthermore, destination satisfaction positively mediates the relationship between unique perceptions and loyalty. Overall, this study highlights the importance of the tourist experience and unique perceptions in driving destination satisfaction and loyalty among domestic visitors to cultural heritage tourism sites in Indonesia.

The study's managerial recommendations include providing unique and educational tourism experiences, regularly improving destination facilities and attractions, creating relaxing environments, and boosting promotional efforts to enhance tourist satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth. Allocating resources to enhance the tourist experience, focusing on sustainable cultural tourism development, and ensuring diverse supporting facilities, such as recreational spaces, family-friendly accommodations, and local attractions, are also advised for cultural heritage tourism destination managers. Future research could focus on factors such as innovation and the development of exciting content to enhance tourist attraction. Additionally, the reputation of a destination and social factors, such as interactions with locals, feelings of security, and positive social experiences, can impact customer loyalty and satisfaction in heritage tourism destinations.

Future empirical studies could explore moderating and mediating variables affecting the relationship between primary factors and desired outcomes, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing customer loyalty and satisfaction in natural and cultural tourism destinations.

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