The influence of applying local wisdom in sustainable differentiation strategy to achieve competitive advantage in the tourism industry

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Abstract. The tourism industry is one of the largest economic sectors in the world. As global competition increases, tourist destinations continue to seek sustainable differentiation strategies to attract more tourists and maintain a competitive advantage. In Indonesia, the tourism sector contributed 5.0% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019 with its extraordinary cultural richness and natural diversity, but even so, Indonesia still faces challenges in utilizing local wisdom effectively to increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations. This research aims to investigate the role of local wisdom in forming a sustainable differentiation strategy to achieve a competitive advantage in the tourism industry. The research method uses a quantitative approach with a population consisting of tourist destination managers, local stakeholders and tourists. Sample selection used stratified random sampling with a sample size of 384 respondents. Data was collected through a structured survey and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to evaluate the relationship between local wisdom, differentiation strategy and competitive advantage. The results of the analysis show that there is a significant positive relationship between local wisdom and differentiation strategy, which shows that utilizing local cultural elements will increase unique tourism offers. In addition, an effective differentiation strategy contributes significantly to achieving competitive advantages such as increased visitor satisfaction, loyalty, positive destination image, reputation and recommendations. This proves that integrating local wisdom into a differentiation strategy can increase the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism, so tourism managers need to integrate cultural heritage into strategic planning to differentiate their destinations effectively.

1. Introduction

The tourism industry is one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world, accounting for 10.4% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which represents 319 GDP and 319 million jobs, about 10% of total employment in 2018 [1,2]. According to the WTTC report,

the Travel & Tourism sector contributes 9.1% to global GDP; an increase of 23.2% from 2022 and only 4.1% below 2019 levels and there are 27 million new jobs which is an increase of 9.1% compared to 2022, and only 1.4% below 2019 figures. Domestic visitor spending increased by 18.1% in 2023, surpassing 2019 levels and international visitor spending recorded a 33.1% surge in 2023 but remained 14.4% below 2019 totals [3]. In the current era of globalization, tourism is not only a major driver of economic growth, but also an important means for cultural exchange and understanding between nations. The strategic role of tourism in the economy of a country is predicted to increase in the future, because tourism can transform itself into the world's largest industry group (The World's Largest Industry), tourism will play a central role in increasing state income, foreign exchange and job creation [4]. As global competition increases, tourist destinations around the world continue to seek sustainable differentiation strategies to attract more tourists and maintain a competitive advantage. One approach that is increasingly recognized as effective is the application of local wisdom in tourism destination differentiation strategies.

Indonesia, with its incredible cultural richness and natural diversity, has great potential in the tourism industry. In 2019, the tourism sector contributed 5.0% of Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 resulted in a decrease in tourism's contribution to GDP by 56% to only 2.2% of the total economy and the Central Bureau of Statistics recorded that foreign tourist arrivals in the first quarter of 2023 cumulatively reached 2.5 million visits, an increase of 508.87% compared to the same period in 2022 [5]. Indonesia has more than 17,000 islands, hundreds of ethnic groups, and thousands of cultural sites, which offer unique opportunities to develop local wisdom-based differentiation strategies. Local wisdom plays an important role in many aspects of Indonesian society, especially in the tourism destination area of Kuta Beach, Bali, ranging from environmental sustainability [6] to conflict resolution [7], competitiveness in small and medium enterprises [8], education [9], and even learning [10]. By integrating local wisdom into its differentiation strategy, Kuta Beach, Bali can leverage its cultural heritage to create a unique and sustainable approach that aligns with the values and traditions of its diverse community, encouraging innovation, inclusiveness, and the preservation of local customs and knowledge [11]. However, even though it has great potential, the tourist destination of Kuta Beach, Bali still faces challenges in utilizing local wisdom effectively to increase the competitiveness of tourism destinations. One of the main problems faced is the lack of use of local wisdom as a strategic element in the differentiation of tourist destinations. Many have not been able to integrate local cultural values and traditions in offering unique and memorable tourism experiences for tourists. This results in low levels of repeat tourist visits and less than optimal competitiveness compared to other countries in the Southeast Asia region. The application of local wisdom can increase the added value and attractiveness of a tourist destination [12].

Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of local wisdom in creating authentic and sustainable tourism experiences. Research has shown that local wisdom, such as the seven-family restriction in Pitu village in Java, Indonesia, contributes to preserving nature and ensuring community safety, attracting tourists through uniqueness [13]. Furthermore, research in Bongkasa Tourism Village in Bali showed that local wisdom mediates the relationship between community empowerment and sustainable tourism development, enhancing the uniqueness of tourism villages in Indonesia [14]. In addition, the utilization of local wisdom in tourism development in Lebak Regency, Indonesia, emphasized the need to integrate traditional practices in tourism experiences and products to optimize regional potential and boost the economy while maintaining cultural heritage [15]. These findings collectively highlight the importance of local

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IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science **1445** (2025) 012025

doi:10.1088/1755-1315/1445/1/012025

wisdom in creating meaningful and sustainable travel experiences that benefit both travelers and local communities. However, research on how these strategies can be effectively applied in the Indonesian context is limited. The novelty of this study lies in the holistic approach that combines elements of local wisdom with sustainable differentiation strategies to achieve competitive advantage in the Indonesian tourism industry. This research aims to explore and identify best practices in the application of local wisdom that can be adopted by tourist destinations in Indonesia. Thus, it can contribute to providing insights and guidelines for the development of sustainable and local wisdom-based tourism strategies, which are expected to increase the competitiveness of Indonesian tourism destinations in the global market. Thus, this research is not only relevant for academics and practitioners in the field of tourism, but also for policy makers who aim to develop a sustainable and inclusive tourism sector.

2. Methods

By the objectives of this study, a quantitative research design with a case study in Indonesia was used. The population in this study consists of three main groups that are relevant in the context of applying local wisdom in differentiation strategies to achieve competitive advantage in the tourism industry in Indonesia, namely: destination managers, local stakeholders, and tourists. Sample selection using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation of each subgroup in the population. The following are details of how to draw samples using stratified random sampling by the research objectives:

a. Tourism destination managers: Tourist destination manager at Kuta Beach, Bali who has a minimum of 3 years work experience in the field of tourist destination management and is involved in planning and implementing strategies based on local wisdom.

b. Local stakeholders: Local government officials responsible for tourism, local entrepreneurs operating in the tourism sector (hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, etc.), community leaders and traditional leaders who influence the local community and members of local tourism associations or organizations.

c. Travelers: Domestic and international tourists above 18 years old who have visited tourist destinations in Indonesia within the last 1 year and are willing to provide feedback on their experiences related to local wisdom applied in tourist destinations, especially Kuta Beach, Bali.

Determination of the sample size is done using the following calculations:

1. Z-score for a 95% confidence level, Z = 1.96
2. Significance level (margin of error): e = 0.05
3. Population assumption (p): p = 0.5
4. Cochran Formula for Sample Size (n):

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IOP Publishing

IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science **1445** (2025) 012025

doi:10.1088/1755-1315/1445/1/012025

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 . p. (1-p)}{e^2}$$

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 \ x \ 0.5. (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n \approx \frac{1,9208 \ x \ 0.5}{0,0025}$$

$$n \approx \frac{0,9604}{0,0025}$$

$$n \approx 384,16$$

Based on the sample size calculation, 384 respondents were obtained, consisting of domestic and foreign tourists, to detect significant differences at a 95% confidence level and a 5% significance level assuming a population variance of 0.5. The data used in this study are primary and secondary data. Primary data in the form of: Perceptions and Opinions (Responses from tourist destination managers, local stakeholders, and tourists regarding the application of local wisdom and its effectiveness in differentiation strategies), practices and strategies (Information on how elements of local wisdom are applied in the management and marketing of tourist destinations), tourist experiences (Data from tourists regarding their experiences and the impact of local wisdom on their satisfaction and loyalty). Secondary data in the form of: Official Documents and Reports (Reports from government, statistical agencies, and tourism organizations on the development and contribution of the tourism sector, as well as the use of local wisdom), Statistical Data (Data from Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), and other sources on tourism statistics, economic contribution, and tourist trends), Media and Industry Reports. The data collection techniques used in this research are: survey (distributing questionnaires to respondents).

This research aims to guide the development of sustainable tourism strategies and local wisdom to improve the competitiveness of Indonesian tourist destinations in the global market. To achieve the first objective, descriptive statistical analysis was conducted by collecting data from questionnaires, interviews, and participant observations. Calculating descriptive statistics of respondents' demographic characteristics (eg, age, gender, education, and occupation). Using measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode) and measures of dispersion (range, standard deviation) and using graphs and tables to visualize the data.

To achieve the first objective, SEM (Structural Equation Modeling) analysis was conducted, with the following steps:

1) Conceptual model development:
    a. Local Wisdom (KL) -> Differentiation Strategy (SD) -> Competitive Advantage (KB)
    b. Latent variables: Local Wisdom (X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5), Differentiation Strategy (Y_1, Y_2, Y_3, Y_4), Competitive Advantage (Z_1, Z_2, Z_3, Z_4, Z_5)

2) Hypothesis formulation:
    H_1: Local wisdom has a positive effect on differentiation strategies in the tourism industry.
    H_2: Differentiation strategy has a positive effect on competitive advantage in the tourism industry.
    H_3: Local wisdom has a positive effect on competitive advantage through the mediation of differentiation strategies.

3) Assumption check: Use statistical tests (e.g. Kolmogorov-Smirnov or Shapiro-Wilk) to check the normality of the data.

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IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science **1445** (2025) 012025

doi:10.1088/1755-1315/1445/1/012025

4) Measurement model evaluation: Ensure factor loadings for each indicator > 0.5 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.5. Make sure the AVE is greater than the squared interconstruct correlations. Ensure Composite Reliability for each construct > 0.7.
5) Structural model evaluation: Evaluate model fit using Chi-square/df fit index (≤ 3), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA ≤ 0.08), Comparative Fit Index (CFI ≥ 0.90), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI ≥ 0.90).
6) Interpretation of results: Interpret the structural path results (path coefficients, p-values).

3. Result and discussion

Based on the data processing results in Table 1, it is known that in the local wisdom variable, local culture has an average value of 4.2, local tradition 4.1, local art 3.9, local craft 4.0, and traditional food 4.3. This suggests that tourists highly value elements of local wisdom, with traditional food being the most valued. The relatively low standard deviation indicates consistency of perception among respondents. Differentiation strategies measured through unique products (3.8), exclusive services (3.9), unique experiences (4.0), and product excellence (3.7) show that tourists consider these aspects important for differentiating tourist destinations. The high average value indicates that the differentiation strategy is effective in attracting tourists. Competitive advantage is measured through visitor satisfaction (4.1), visitor loyalty (4.0), positive image (4.2), good reputation (4.1), and positive recommendation (4.3). These values indicate that the application of local wisdom significantly increases the competitive advantage of tourist destinations. Travelers are satisfied, tend to be loyal, have a positive image of the destination, see a good reputation, and are very likely to recommend the destination to others (Table 1).

Table 1. Variables measured (application of local wisdom in sustainable differentiation strategy to achieve competitive advantage in tourism industry).

Variable	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Local Wisdom					
X_1: Local Culture	4.2	4.0	0.6	3.0	5.0
X_2: Local Tradition	4.1	4.0	0.7	2.0	5.0
X_3: Local Art	3.9	4.0	0.8	2.0	5.0
X_4: Local Crafts	4.0	4.0	0.7	2.0	5.0
X_5: Traditional Food	4.3	4.0	0.6	3.0	5.0
Differentiation Strategy					
Y_1: Unique Product	3.8	4.0	0.7	2.0	5.0
Y_2: Exclusive Service	3.9	4.0	0.8	2.0	5.0
Y_3: Unique Experience	4.0	4.0	0.7	3.0	5.0
Y_4: Product Excellence	3.7	4.0	0.7	2.0	5.0
Competitive Advantage					
Z_1: Visitor Satisfaction	4.1	4.0	0.7	3.0	5.0
Z_2: Visitor Loyalty	4.0	4.0	0.8	2.0	5.0
Z_3: Positive Image	4.2	4.0	0.6	3.0	5.0
Z_4: Good Reputation	4.1	4.0	0.7	3.0	5.0
Z_5: Positive Recommendation	4.3	4.0	0.6	3.0	5.0

The results of the descriptive analysis show that local wisdom (culture, traditions, arts, crafts, and traditional food) is highly valued by tourists and plays an important role in tourist destination differentiation strategies. Differentiation strategies that include unique products, exclusive services, and unique experiences are considered effective in attracting and retaining tourists. The application of local wisdom significantly contributes to the competitive advantage of tourist destinations, as indicated by high visitor satisfaction, loyalty, positive image, good reputation, and positive recommendations.

In Table 2, the results of SEM analysis revealed significant relationships between the latent variables in the proposed conceptual model. The study confirmed that local wisdom plays an important role in the formation of tourism destination differentiation strategies. It was found that local wisdom has a strong influence on the development of differentiation strategies, with a positive and significant influence on aspects such as unique products, exclusive services, unique experiences, and product excellence. This indicates that the application of local wisdom elements can enrich tourism offerings, giving the destination a uniqueness that differentiates it from its competitors. Furthermore, the analysis shows that differentiation strategies have a significant impact on competitive advantage in the tourism industry. Effective differentiation strategies, such as creating visitor satisfaction, loyalty, positive image, good reputation, and positive recommendations, can directly increase the competitive advantage of tourist destinations. The findings confirm that investing in the development of differentiation strategies that are in line with local wisdom can bring significant benefits in achieving the goal of competitive advantage in the tourism industry.

Table 2. SEM analysis results by displaying path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values.

Construct	Latent Variable	Path Coefficients	T-Statistik	P-Value
Local Wisdom (LW)	LW => Unique Product (DS)	0.62	5.28	<0.001
	LW => Exlusive Service (DS)	0.55	4.92	<0.001
	LW => Unique Experience (DS)	0.49	4.15	<0.001
	LW => product Excellence (DS)	0.41	3.60	<0.001
Differentiation Strategy (DS)	DS => Visitor Satisfaction (CA)	0.72	6.81	<0.001
	DS => Visitor Loyalty (CA)	0.68	6.22	<0.001
	DS => Positive Image (CA)	0.58	5.10	<0.001
	DS => Good Reputation(CA)	0.61	5.45	<0.001
	DS => Positive Recommendation (CA)	0.70	6.58	<0.001

The measurement model evaluation results in Table 3 show that the instruments used in this study have adequate validity and reliability to measure the constructs of local wisdom, differentiation strategy, and competitive advantage in the tourism industry. First, for the local wisdom construct, indicators such as local culture, local tradition, local art, local craft, and traditional food have high factor loadings, indicating that they effectively reflect the latent variable of local wisdom. In addition, high composite reliability (CR) and adequate average extracted variance (AVE) values confirm the validity and reliability of this construct. Second, the differentiation strategy construct was also shown to have good validity and reliability. Indicators such as unique products, exclusive services, unique experiences, and product advantages have high factor loadings and show adequate reliability, according to the CR and AVE values obtained. Third, for the competitive advantage construct, indicators such as visitor satisfaction, visitor

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IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science **1445** (2025) 012025

doi:10.1088/1755-1315/1445/1/012025

loyalty, positive image, good reputation, and positive recommendation also show high factor loading and adequate reliability.

Table 3. Measurement model.

Construct	Indicator Variable	Factor Loading	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Extracted Variance (AVE)
Local Wisdom (LW)	Local Culture (X_1)	0.82	0.88	0.68
	Local Tradition (X_2)	0.76	0.84	0.62
	Local Art (X_3)	0.74	0.80	0.58
	Local Crafts (X_4)	0.79	0.86	0.65
	Traditional Food (X_5)	0.85	0.90	0.72
Differentiation Strategy (DS)	Unique Product (Y_1)	0.78	0.85	0.63
	Exclusive Service (Y_2)	0.83	0.88	0.70
	Unique Experience (Y_3)	0.75	0.82	0.60
	Product Excellence (Y_4)	0.72	0.80	0.58
Competitive Advantage (CA)	Visitor Satisfaction (Z_1)	0.87	0.92	0.75
	Visitor Loyalty (Z_2)	0.84	0.90	0.71
	Positive Image (Z_3)	0.89	0.93	0.78
	Good Reputation (Z_4)	0.86	0.91	0.74
	Positive Recommendation (Z_5)	0.88	0.92	0.76

The results of the structural model evaluation in Table 4 confirm the significant relationships between the latent variables in the research conceptual model. The high and statistically significant path coefficients (with P-value <0.001) confirm the strength of influence between the constructs of local wisdom (LW), differentiation strategy (DS), and competitive advantage (CA) in the context of the tourism industry. First, the findings show that local wisdom has a strong influence on the development of differentiation strategies in tourism destinations. The significant positive influence of local wisdom on unique products, exclusive services, unique experiences, and product advantages confirms the importance of integrating local values in the development of unique and differentiating tourism offerings. Furthermore, the analysis confirmed that an effective differentiation strategy contributes significantly to the achievement of competitive advantage in the tourism industry. The high path coefficient between differentiation strategies and competitive advantage aspects such as visitor satisfaction, loyalty, positive image, good reputation, and positive recommendation, indicates that the development of appropriate differentiation strategies can enhance the competitiveness of tourist destinations.

Table 4. Structural model.

Construct	Relationship	Path Coefficients	T-Statistik	P-Value	Variance Explained (R^2)
Local Wisdom (LW)	LW => Uniqe Product (DS)	0.62	5.28	<0.001	0.39
	LW => Exclusive Service (DS)	0.55	4.92	<0.001	0.30
	LW => Unique Experience (DS)	0.49	4.15	<0.001	0.24

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IOP Publishing

IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science **1445** (2025) 012025

doi:10.1088/1755-1315/1445/1/012025

Construct	Relationship	Path Coefficients	T-Statistik	P-Value	Variance Explained (R^2)
	LW => Product Excellence (DS)	0.41	3.60	<0.001	0.17
Differentiation Strategy (DS)	DS => Visitor Satisfaction (CA)	0.72	6.81	<0.001	0.52
	DS => Visitor Loyalty (CA)	0.68	6.22	<0.001	0.46
	DS => Positive Image (CA)	0.58	5.10	<0.001	0.34
	DS => Good Reputation (CA)	0.61	5.45	<0.001	0.37
	DS => Positive Recommendation (CA)	0.70	6.58	<0.001	0.49

Thus, the results of this structural model evaluation provide a solid empirical foundation for the importance of paying attention to and utilizing local wisdom in the development of differentiation strategies to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in the tourism industry. This underscores the need for a holistic and integrated approach in tourism destination management, which recognizes local values as a key driver of successful differentiation and sustainable competitive advantage.

The application of local wisdom in differentiation strategies is very important to do in achieving the competitive advantage of tourist destinations [16]. The data shows that elements of local wisdom such as culture, traditions, arts, crafts and traditional food are highly valued by tourists, with traditional food receiving the highest score. The consistency of perceptions among respondents indicates that these elements are not just mere attractions, but are also decisive factors in creating unique tourism experiences and strengthening the identity of tourist destinations. The research also revealed that differentiation strategies that utilize local wisdom effectively attract and retain tourists through unique products, exclusive services, and unique experiences [17]. The results of the SEM analysis conducted confirm that local wisdom has a significant and positive influence on the development of differentiation strategies, which in turn increases the competitive advantage of tourist destinations. This positive influence is reflected in the level of visitor satisfaction and loyalty, positive image, good reputation, and high recommendations given by visitors. These findings suggest that the application of local wisdom in sustainable differentiation strategies is an important key in achieving competitive advantage in the tourism industry [18]. By placing local wisdom as the core of the differentiation strategy, tourist destinations can offer experiences that are authentic and cannot be found elsewhere, thus increasing competitiveness [19]. The integration of local wisdom in tourism destination development not only enriches tourism offerings, but also provides uniqueness that differentiates the destination from its competitors.

Product differentiation theory supports the finding that local wisdom can be a valuable resource for creating unique and differentiating tourism products and services. In this context, local wisdom is not only considered as a cultural heritage, but also as a key element in differentiating tourism destinations from others. According to [20], product differentiation is one of the five competitive forces that generate competitive advantage. By utilizing local wisdom, tourism destinations can create offerings that are unique and difficult for competitors to replicate, thus creating a solid foundation for long-term competitive advantage. Customer experience theory highlights the importance of unique and satisfying experiences for visitors to tourism destinations. In this context, local wisdom can help in creating an authentic and immersive experience for visitors, which increases their satisfaction and loyalty to the destination. According to [21], the experience economy is closely related to product differentiation, where value is

determined by unique and memorable experiences. By enriching the tourist experience with elements of local wisdom, tourism destinations can increase their appeal to visitors and build a strong customer base.

In addition, a sustainable differentiation strategy that leverages local wisdom also enables tourist destinations to not only attract visitors, but also retain their loyalty [22]. For example, traditional food that is highly valued by tourists reflects how elements of local wisdom can be an effective tool in creating deep impressions and memorable experiences for tourists where this will further contribute to visitor satisfaction, loyalty, and a positive image and reputation of the destination, all of which are indicators of competitive advantage [23]. By implementing this strategy, tourist destinations can continue to stand out in the midst of intense competition and provide a competitive advantage for tourist destinations. Competitive advantage emphasizes the importance of differentiating oneself from competitors to achieve a superior position in the market. In the context of tourism, a differentiation strategy based on local wisdom can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage. According to Nair et al. [24], valuable, rare, inimitable, and irreplaceable resources can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage. Local wisdom can fulfill these criteria, as not all destinations have access to the same local wisdom, and not all destinations can replicate local wisdom from other destinations successfully. Therefore, tourism destinations that can manage and utilize local wisdom well will have a competitive advantage that is difficult for competitors to replicate. In this context, this research makes an important contribution to our understanding of sustainable tourism development strategies. The use of local wisdom in product differentiation not only enriches tourism offerings, but also increases destination attractiveness, strengthens emotional bonds with visitors, and ultimately, increases competitive advantage. The implication is that tourism destination managers need to pay attention to and utilize local cultural heritage in the development of effective differentiation strategies to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

4. Conclusion

The development of differentiation strategies in the tourism industry is crucial in improving the competitiveness of tourist destinations in an increasingly competitive market. By utilizing local wisdom, tourism destinations can create offerings that are unique, authentic, and differentiate from their competitors. Local wisdom has a significant influence on the development of differentiation strategies, with positive influences evident on aspects such as unique products, exclusive services, unique experiences, and product excellence. This confirms that local wisdom can be a valuable resource in creating sustainable differentiation in tourism destinations. An effective differentiation strategy contributes significantly to the achievement of competitive advantage in the tourism industry. A differentiation strategy based on local wisdom can increase visitor satisfaction, strengthen customer loyalty, build a positive image of the destination, improve reputation, and obtain positive recommendations. Thus, it is very important that tourism destination managers pay attention to and utilize local cultural heritage in designing effective differentiation strategies. By integrating local wisdom in the development of tourism products and services, tourism destinations can increase their attractiveness to visitors, strengthen their competitive position, and achieve sustainable advantages in the global market.

Acknowledgement

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