# Determining Satisfaction of Social Media Use Among Iraqi Audiences Toward Religious Issues

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to determine the level of satisfaction on social media use among Iraqi audiences in fulfilling their need for information on religious issues and Islamic topics. This research highlights the role of new media in spreading religious awareness among the public as electronic media is no longer used to just monitor an event and communicate information; rather, it has the power to influence the behaviour of users - hence becoming the pressure and control factors as well triggering event thus creating motivation to prepare an individual in regards of their faith at the same time. A questionnaire was distributed to Iraqi audiences and the results demonstrate the importance of social networking platforms towards shaping attitudes and perceptions towards the practice of Islam and how it has become an integral part of individual behaviour as well as their daily lifestyles. This research was guided by the theory of Uses and Gratification (U&G), where representation of knowledge and information-seeking behaviours influence public opinions on religious issues through the use of social networking sites. Further to this, the results of this search indicate that the motives of social media platform use by the Iraqi public are mostly cognitive and enhanced their knowledge of religious issues.

Keywords: New media, religious issues, social media, uses and gratifications theory, media influence.

## INTRODUCTION

Media played different roles over time, for every era there was a different yet prominent media outlet. The technological and digital race in new media has made it an important tool for spreading information and entertainment, educating the public and increasing their awareness about pertinent issues (Dinis Sousa et al., 2020). To understand this point, it is important to first look at how humans learn things, build ideologies, and adopt different attitudes towards public issues and the characteristics of life, what more religious issues (Garner, 2021). New media capabilities make it the most influential way to introduce ideas and perspectives by transmitting messages implicitly and unconsciously. Information, topics, news stories, movies, et cetera may permeate the subconscious of new media users on social media platforms, and establish opinions and perspectives on more pertinent topics (Tosca & Klastrup, 2019). This technique is likened to preparing fertile ground to nurture seeds that may be sowed later when the time is right. As the human mind is constantly and continuously bombarded with certain ideas, that it finally begins to accept them (Herdiansah et al., 2018).

Social media has since been used to spread religious concepts and teachings, and it has become clear that nowadays that individuals have the luxury to access them through social media sites due to its advantages and characteristics (Tsuria & Yadlin-Segal, 2021). Most importantly, the

abundant knowledge where the media works to provide the public with information about news and events could help individuals achieve their goals (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). Through what is exposed in large quantities of information across infinite space and around the clock through various electronic media images, they may contribute, directly or indirectly, to adopt comforting ideas and this is reflected in the behaviour of individuals in their interactions with each other toward some issues -and the most powerful role new media is to influence the behaviour of the target audience (Pop et al., 2022). These methods also contribute to building convictions and trends about a specific issue in an individual, as well as it has a major role in influencing social upbringing, which in turn affects the intellectual, social, and psychological building of the human being (Walther, 2021). On this basis and through this research, this research sought out to determine the levels of satisfaction among the Iraqi Muslim public when they use new media to gather information about Islam and religious issues. By adopting the theoretical concept of Uses and Gratifications (U&G) model, this research evaluated the role that the media plays in promoting concepts and beliefs of Islamic value and consolidated them to find the determinants of the satisfaction that the public obtained when using new media.

The significance of studying audience satisfaction towards religious issues in Iraq is due to the dominion of Islam as a religion in the nation state. Looking into the technological and information development in which social media use becomes imperative, the contents broadcast or presented in social media pertaining religious content could create advantages and disadvantages towards the society, particularly avid social media audiences. Henceforth, deliberating on the satisfaction of social media use in regards of obtaining knowledge on religious matters is essential to uncover insights on new media opportunities for Iraqi audiences.

At present, there is limited literature on studies related to the uses and gratifications of social media for religious and ideological issues in all their dimensions. Generally social media aims to provide and broadcast content; specifically, how such content reaches, consumes, influences, convinces, and how the public negotiates them. This research would have practical and theoretical implications. The practical importance of the research came from its content, where it involved studying the general landscape of electronic media or 'new media' and the extent of audience interest in religious issues. This research intends to explore how the audience utilise the media and to clarify the degree of dependence displayed by Iraqi Muslim audiences in acquiring religious information from social media platforms. Additionally, the research is significant because of the great importance social media brings to audiences, especially the youth who are digitally savvy and are regularly on social media (Luthfi et al., 2022). As for the theoretical importance of this research, it revolves around the concept of Theory of Uses and Gratification (U&G). It will be adding new experience to the levels of influence on the public through and discover how audiences negotiate and navigate sensitive and taboo issues like religion (Hasan & Haron, 2013).

From this standpoint, this research revolves around several questions; 1) what satisfaction do Iraqi individuals get from their use of social media; 2) the types of content of Islamic religion issues on social media selected by the public; and 4) levels of gratification the Iraqi Muslim social media use towards religious issues. This research further aims to explore and discuss the capabilities of electronic media as a tool in shaping a more modern and progressive Islamic society following increased information seeking of the divine religions on new media platforms.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### The Role of the New Media in Spreading Religious Awareness

The media is the mediator that contributes to the upbringing of individuals of all ages (D'Arienzo et al., 2019). This makes the media a fundamental pillar of the educational social process, as its impact is reflected on all individuals and groups that make up this society (Abbas et al., 2019). Cultural values, life ideologies, and other important beliefs are built, organized, and transmitted to individuals through new media platforms represented by social networking sites (Islam, 2019). Therefore, the media in the Islamic educational sense should be ideal and realistic, which is commensurable with its role for informative and educational media content.

The role that is played by the media in religious issues is substantial. Generally, there are some common principles shared by conventional and Islamic in media use, such as the element of trust, responsibility, equality and respect. The use of media and technology should be in line with the Islamic teaching such as acts of worship and cultivating faith (Misman et al., 2019). It has become an essential part of the life of a Muslim because it is based on the foundations and principles of the great Islamic teachings. All religions seek to create a suitable educational environment for the upbringing of individuals in a normal manner without imbalance or contradiction which are the inherent characteristics of the media content, and its contents broadcast in some media outlets, whether they are in the form of a news article, a cultural or social program, a series, a video clip, or a picture (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020). Authentic Islamic educational media always adhere to the values, standards, rules, and principles of the religion. Electronic media is no longer content with just monitoring the event and communicating information, but has become the power, influence, pressure, and control factors, making the event and preparing for it at the same time (Aljehani, 2019).

Religious content on new media is intended to provide the masses with the facts of the religion. This includes specialised religious or general media pages created and operated by influencers using social media sites to spread and communicate with the public to form a more organic perception on religious truths to create awareness, and to influence their beliefs, worship, and dealings. Besides demonstrating the truth and modifying forms of audience behaviours in such legitimate ways, methods, and scientific means, it also reveals the faces of falsehood and exposes audiences on negative practices in Islam (Weng, 2018). As discussed by scholars, social media platforms play a very important role in spreading the teachings of religion by bridging gaps of time and space. Its educational opportunities erase borders through digital technology and enable audiences who live in different places of the world to access information on Islamic teachings and literature. Furthermore, new media is making a big impact to the world at large by providing information to one's doorstep. Both Muslims and non-Muslims can enjoy talk shows of great scholars and access information on Islam. They can attend lectures and lessons and even participate in them. Hence, exerting more effort to spread Islam and its teachings using media and technology could lead to the emergence of spreading awareness of Islam to audiences outside of the religion (Woodward & Kimmons, 2019).

### Internet, Social Media and Religious Issues

In the last three decades, interest of scholars on the impact of the Internet and digital culture has grown rapidly, marked by the emergence of a quantum of studies on new media, religion, and digital culture (Campbell, 2013). The Internet has made available many digital spaces that are used by Muslims globally as the Internet and social media are being turned into platforms of discourse on Islam (Fakhruroji, 2015). The popularity of Islamic practices over the Internet has also increased significantly in Arab and Asian Islamic countries due to the growth of communication technologies and social media. Social media platforms have provided great opportunities for Muslims to present religious issues of the Islamic faith in a visual and textual form, including people's expressions of piety and exploring new forms of religious and social practices, thus social media has become a focal point for presenting Islamic issues and topics (Slama, 2017).

One of the most important religious issues that emerged from the development of the Internet in contemporary Islam is the emergence of Islamic education on the Internet. The abundance of Islamic information and knowledge not only sparks new directions in the practice of Islamic learning, but also creates other broader socio-cultural practices (Fakhruroji, 2019). This research argues that the use of social media and the Internet is not just an exercise in knowing the Iraqi public's use of these platforms, but it also includes three broader social and cultural phenomena. First, the practice of Islamic learning is a form of religious participation since the Internet has enabled us to continue practicing in accordance with their teachings. Second, it is the practice of Islamic learning as an expression of their Islamic identity. Third, it is Islamic learning as part of their efforts to maintain Islamic networks in a global context.

Studies have focused on how religions present their practices online, considering the advantages and disadvantages of public perception on such activities. Indeed, scholars have analysed religious participation online as well as its relationship with an individual's social dimensions (Fakhruroji, 2019). In recent years, one of the most important transformations in the field of Islam in Muslim countries, including Iraq, is the increasing reliance of Muslims on social media when practicing their religious rites. More importantly, Muslims themselves often view their online activities as part of their religious endeavours to improve their religiosity. Social media is particularly relevant in this regard because, perhaps unlike other media, it is deeply ingrained in users' daily lives (Horst & Miller, 2012). Media studies have also discovered the effectiveness of social media users, such as the extent of these theoretical shifts that inspired the use of social media to enforce the intention of information seeking. While it is open to debate, it seems clear that these conditions of new approaches in Islamic studies on social new media provide a useful direction on the latest Islam dynamics in staunch Muslim countries such as Iraq (Husein & Slama, 2018).

## New Media Satisfaction According to the Theory of Uses and Gratification

The key theory of this study is the Theory of Uses and Gratifications, which is connected to the research subject as it discusses problems related to media selection, usage, and user satisfaction. Therefore, it is suitable for the study of electronic communication media. This theory was presented by Elihu Katz, Michael Gurevitch, and Hadassah Haas, an approach that contributes to an understanding of why and how media users actively seek to identify specific media to meet specific needs (Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973). Additionally, the theory helps understand why and

how media users actively want to have specific satisfaction with it, rather than the content. It is an approach that a social and psychological communicator used to explain why people use the media and what they do with it. The theory further states that new media users are aware of their social and psychological desires, henceforth they are keen on finding specific media that satisfy their information seeking desires (Ruggiero, 2000). Palmgreen (1984) considered three goals in developing the Theory of Uses and Gratification. First, it is to explain how individuals use mass communication to meet their needs, and this is what people do with the media. Second, it is to discover the underlying motivations of individual media users, while the third goal is to recognize the positive and negative consequences of individual use of social media.

Furthermore, Rubin (2002) also summarized different the motivations and needs. First, media users seek to use it for cognitively. It includes the use of media to obtain information, knowledge, and understanding. Second, media users intend to use it for emotional needs. It involves using the media to preserve emotion, pleasure, and feelings. Third, media users intend to use it for complementary personal needs. It entails using the media to achieve credibility, stability, and prestige. Fourth, media users intend to use it for complementary social needs. It aims to use the media to interact with family members and friends. Fifth, media users intend to use it to release tension. It revolves around using the media as an escape and distraction.

Both Heath and Bryant (2013) argued that the essence of applying a specific theory of communication to particular situations is to observe and speculate on people's behaviours. Therefore, in the field of communication technologies, it is expected that the uncertainty can be reduced by simply targeting the use of specific media for communication. Thus, applying the theory of uses and gratification to study simultaneous or asynchronous computer-mediated communications such as e-mail and social media sites is appropriate and is assumed to solve the problems of communication dissatisfaction in virtual communications (Liu & Lee, 2016).

Therefore, it was unanimously agreed to use communication media such as social networking sites, instant messengers, e-mail and social interaction platforms are common among users. These motives ranged between relationship preservation, information search, style, fun, and other purposes. Other factors were also found to influence individual users' needs and psychological motivations for using certain media such as positivity, openness, safeguards, social networks, and performance predictions (Stafford & Schkade, 2004). Other factors that were found to influence users' motivation towards communication technologies as a matter of particular interest, critical mass, and subjective criteria. Research has also demonstrated affiliation, pleasure, self-esteem, and reciprocity as factors behind people's use and satisfaction of various social media. Psychological concepts such as expressing affection, expressing negative feelings, obtaining appreciation, gaining entertainment, and achieving cognitive impulses were later included as factors affecting their uses of certain media, as a means of communication and gratification (Zheng & Lee, 2016). Further, scholars added intrinsic motivation as another factor that influences individuals' media choice, and they also added self-development, ease of use, broad exposure, and relaxation as other factors affecting individuals' communication technology choices. Corus Perez, Royce Mavi, and Sans Blas (2014) established socialisation and recreation as factors that stimulate motivations towards the use of certain media. While from the perspective of mobile application use, factors such as human contact and social benefit have been cited as the underlying drivers of consistency with particular media use (Mantymaki, & Riemer, 2014). Moreover, the recent study by Archana Krishnan and Daniel Scot Hunt (2015) include factors such as socialisation, relationship development, and maintenance as uses and gratifications derived by various social network users. Later, social and information needs such as human messaging interaction and interactions between human beings has become drive factors of the use of specific social networks. The need for documentation was subsequently identified as one of the vital drive factors for users' continued use of specific social media (Basak & Calisir, 2015).

## METHODOLOGY

The research used the survey method to collect data and information about the subject at hand, intending to determine its current situation and identify its strengths and weaknesses, and to know the extent of the validity of the situation or the extent of the need to introduce basic partial changes (Creswell, 2009). The questions posed were aimed at how audiences use social media, their purpose of using social media, what they get from using social media and what satisfaction gained by the social media use. The research was conducted in the city of Baghdad, Iraq. Baghdad is the capital of Iraq, which has various doctrines and groups hence random sampling was applied in this study. It fell within the framework of the non-probability type of samples, henceforth 270 respondents were contacted. The study included 197 male participants and 73 female participants and were distributed through social media platforms.

## Pre-Test

In order to test the validity of the survey, it was presented to 10 participants. Based on their response the scale was re-applied to the members of the survey. This task was repeated two weeks after the first application, and the calculation of the reliability coefficient between the two applications was 0.88, which is a high stability coefficient suitable for the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

## A. Demographic Variables

## 1. The Gender of the Respondents:

The respondents participating in the research within the selected sample, whose total number was (270), were distributed according to the gender variable. (197) male respondents contribute to the percentage of 73%, representing the largest part. From the research sample, there are only (73) female respondents; who contribute to the percentage of 27% of the total sample. These results indicate that the majority of the respondents are males. See Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Shows the percentage of males and females participating in the study

## 2. Ages of the Respondents:

The age groups of the respondents were divided between different levels. The number of those whose ages ranged from 18-30 years was sixty-four (64) participants, while the number of those whose ages ranged from 31-40 years was eighty-one (81) participants. The number of participants whose ages ranged from 41-50 years old was sixty-seven (67), and the number of participants whose ages were from 51-60 years old was fifty-eight (58). These data indicate that the majority of the participants are those who have reached the stage of full mental and cognitive maturity.

## 3. Educational Qualification:

The levels of academic achievement of the research participants were distributed between different levels or degrees. The number of those who have secondary education or less is one hundred and eight (108) participants with the percentage of 40%, while those who obtained a bachelor's degree is one hundred and thirty-eight (138) participants with the percentage of 51%, and the number of participants with higher education is twenty-four (24) with the percentage of 9%. These results indicate that the majority of the participants in this study are literate, and this helps in the robustness of desired results for the research.

## 4. Marital Status:

It was found that one hundred forty-two (142) of the participants are married, and their percentages make up 53%. Besides that, seventy-nine (79) participants are in a single category, which contributed to 29 %, and the rest three (49) of the participants, came from the divorced and widow's category that contributed to 18%.

**B.** When asked about the extent of their interest in following up on religious topics and issues that are published on social networking sites, the respondents' answers indicated that one hundred sixty-two (162) participants chose a lot of interest in following up on religious issues and topics that are published on social media and their percentage make up 60% of the total sample

while thirty-eight (38) participants chose little of interest in religious issues, which contributed to 14% and the rest seventy (70) participants chose not interested in religious topics published on social media, which contributed to 26% of the total sample. These results indicate that the Iraqi public attaches great importance to religious issues and is keen to follow them on social media. See Figure 2.



Figure 2: Shows the percentage of those who are interested in following religious issues that published on social media

**C.** When asked about the question on which of the networking platforms are preferred by the participants in following religious topics and issues, one hundred and twenty-four (124) participants, which contributed to 46% of the total sample went to choose Facebook while one hundred and sixteen (116) of the participants, which contributed to 43% of the total sample preferred to follow religious issues through YouTube. As for the other social media platforms, only thirty (30) participants, who contributed to 11% of the total sample answered that they preferred to follow religious topics through Instagram or Twitter. We conclude that the Iraqi public prefers to follow religious issues and topics primarily through Facebook and YouTube, as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Shows which of social media platforms that the public prefers to follow religious issues through

**D.** When asked about which media styles they prefer to follow through social networking sites, it is evident that one hundred and seven (107) participants, who contributed to 40% of the total sample prefers to follow videos on social media. Another eighty-nine (89) participants, which contributed to 33% agreed that they prefer photos, and seventy-four (74) participants, which contributed to 27% follows the news and articles category. Based on that, we conclude that the Iraqi society prefers to follow the videos and pictures primarily through social networking sites, as shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Shows the media methods or (media styles) that respondents prefer to follow on social networking sites

**E.** When asked about the extent to which the topics with Islamic content published on the social networking sites have affected their behaviour towards religious issues, there were one hundred nineteen (119) participants, which contributed to 44% answered that there was a significant impact on their behaviour. As for those who were slightly affected, the number shows of one hundred and five (105) respondents, which contributed to 39%, and there were forty-six (46) participants, which contributed to 17% of the total samples who said that religious topics did not affect them on their behaviour. These results indicate that social networking sites have a great influence on the behaviour of social media users towards religious issues. See Figure 5.



Figure 5: Shows the influence of social media users on their behaviour towards religious issues

**F.** When asked about the question on what level does the social media platforms satisfy their knowledge needs in religious issues, there were one hundred and fifty-seven (157) participants, which contributed to 58% of the total sample agreed that the religious topics presented by social media satisfy their knowledge needs towards religious issues while eighty-one (81) participants, which contributed to 30% went to choose not to the required level and the rest thirty-two (32) participants, which contributed to 12% stated that religious topics published on social media did not meet their knowledge needs and the direction of religion. These results indicate that social networking sites contribute significantly to satisfy social media user's knowledge needs in terms of religious issues, as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6: Shows the extent to which social media contributes to meeting users' knowledge needs regarding religious issues

**G.** When asked about the motives of the Iraqi public's use of social media sites in religious issues, it shows that one hundred nineteen (119) participants, which contributed to 44% of the total sample agreed that they use social media sites to promote religious culture. Another one hundred and three (103) participants, who contributed to 38%, agreed that the motives for their use of electronic platforms in religious issues are cognitive motives, and forty-eight (48) participants, who contributed to 18% of the total sample, mentioned that they use social networking sites in order to increase their religious awareness. The data indicates that the Iraqi public's motives from their use of social platforms are cognitive motives that enhance their knowledge of religion, as shown in Figure 7.



Figure 7: Show the motives of the public's use of social media platforms in religious issues

*H.* When asked about to what extent are the topics with Islamic contents has been contemporized, but yet still maintain its authenticity from their legitimate sources from the viewpoint of the respondents, it shows that one hundred nineteen (119) participants, which contributed to 44% of the total sample agrees that the information are characterized by a great degree of modernization yet still maintain its authenticity from the legitimate sources. Another eighty-seven (87) participants, which contributed to 32% agrees that the information is characterized to only certain extent, and sixty-four (64) participants, which contributed to 24% of the total sample mentioned that the information are not characterized`` at all in terms of modernization and keeping its authenticity. The respondents' answers indicate that the sophistication of their Islamic cultural awareness and the accuracy of their follow-up towards Islamic contents in media messages, as shown in Figure 8.



Figure 8: Shows to what extent are the topics with Islamic contents have been contemporised but yet still maintain its authenticity from their legitimate sources from the viewpoint of the respondents

*I*. When asked to what extent social media contribute to increasing religious awareness among the Iraqi public, it shows that one hundred thirty (130) participants, which make for 48% of the total sample tended to agree that the social networking sites contributes significantly to increase Islamic religious awareness. Another eighty-eight (88) participants, who make for 33% answered that it contributes to a moderate degree, and fifty-two (52) participants, which make for 19% of the total sample chose that it contributes to a weak degree. The participants' answers reflect the great role of the social networking site in increasing religious awareness among the Iraqi public, as shown in Figure 9.



to increasing Islamic religious awareness among the public

*J.* When asked the electronic media provide support and reinforce the Islamic culture and its principles, it is evident that one hundred and thirty-five (135) participants, who contributed to 50% of the total sample agree that the contents offered by social media sites did reinforce Islamic culture. Another seventy-five (75) participants, who contributed to 28% agrees that social media sites enhance Islamic culture to some extent, and the rest sixty (60) participants, which contributed to 22% thinks that social media sites did not reinforce Islamic culture. The participants' answers indicate that the religious content provided by social media reinforces and supports Islamic culture for the Iraqi public, as shown in Figure 10.



Figure 10: Shows to which extent the electronic media presented support and enhanced Islamic culture among the Iraqi public.

### **CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

The research highlights how digital technology is used for the awareness of Islamic religious issues. The participation that emerges in the practice of Islamic learning online can be recognised by the way Muslims increasingly living their religion in the context of electronic culture as they navigate their way into new practices. Practicing Islamic learning online also expresses their faith and identity as Muslims. The assimilation of media logic through participation in religious activities on social media has become an experience of simplifying and reducing the doctrinal matters and enhancing opportunities of digital technology in employing media messages with Islamic religious significance. Through the Internet and a number of platforms such as websites and social media, the uses and gratifications of Iraqi Muslims audience have diversified; as they are able know the exact direction of the Qibla or the exact prayer times with their new media application and discussions. They can also access the Quran online, read important hadith collections and books on Islam, and listen to religious lectures via social media.

Through the analysis of the results, it was found that the new media has a major role in increasing the Islamic religious awareness of the Iragi public. These results indicate that the Iragi public attaches great importance to religious issues, which have topics of Islamic content and is keen to follow them on social media. In addition to that, it can be concluded that the Iragi public prefers to follow religious issues and topics Islamic primarily through Facebook and YouTube more than other social platforms. It was also found that the Iragi public prefers to follow videos and pictures more than other media methods available on new media platforms. The research also found that social networking sites have a great influence on the behaviour of users of social media platforms in regards to religious issues, and it also indicates that social networking sites contribute significantly to the satisfaction of social media user knowledge needs. Besides that, motives of use by Iragi public are cognitive that enhanced their understanding of religion. The Iraqi public believes that the topics with Islamic content have been modernised but yet still maintain authenticity from legitimate sources. In addition, it was also found that the Islamic cultural awareness of respondents has been enhanced. It can be concluded that religious content enabled by social media reinforces and supports Islamic culture for the Iraqi public.

This research demonstrates the importance of social networking platforms and how it has become an integral part of the daily behaviour. Theory of Uses and Gratification (U&G), was applied to examine the levels of social media influence towards religious issues among the users. Based on the analysis, the determinants of Iraqi public satisfaction with the use of social media sites towards religious issues and topics are cognitive and behavioural gratifications.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and of the study, creating an Islamic media reference through social media outlets acts as an umbrella of which the Islamic media discourse matures. Moderation needs to be practised in Islamic media discourse, so that it does not tend towards exaggeration, excess, and extremism, neither does it lack through leniency. To establish an Islamic media discourse through social media, it is based on dialogue, persuasion, controversy and according to the requirements and necessity of each case, and this includes introducing Islam to its truth and addressing other civilisations, regimes, and references globally.

The content of the media message should contribute to building the personality of the individual based on religious, ideological, ethical, behavioural, cultural, and intellectual Islam, and have a high degree of power and influence to counteract the counter-media. Building an Islamic media discourse that balances spirituality and materialism so that it contributes to building the personality of the recipient according to this budget for considerations of this world and the hereafter. Henceforth the necessity of establishing a news agency, satellite stations, and information centres with a balanced Islamic identity and belief is imperative to motivate audiences to seek information about Islam and religious issues.

### BIODATA

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