

The Effects of Leisure Agricultural Experience Activities on Satisfaction: Empirical Evidence from Different Tourist Styles in Taiwan

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Abstract: Leisure agricultural activities play an important role in rural tourism. The research presented in this research was used to investigate the impression of leisure agricultural activities on different groups of tourists. Using the four dimensions of the Experience Economy suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999), this research analyzes the impacts of entertainment, educational, aesthetic, and escapism experiences on tourist satisfaction. The data used in the study were gathered by surveying 374 tourists in the leisure agricultural area of Lugu township in central Taiwan. By using factor analysis and cluster analysis, tourists in this study were categorized into two groups, namely, a 'deep experience group' and 'moderate experience group,' based on the degree to which they experienced the activities. Through the use of a structural equation model, the empirical results indicated that the correlation between the activities experienced and the degree of satisfaction were distinctive for each group of tourists.

Keywords: Leisure tourism, Experience economy, Structural equation model, Experience Activities.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the gradual increase of income in Taiwan and the implementation of the two-day weekend, people in Taiwan have begun to pay more attention to leisure activities for the purposes of relieving stress and of broadening their knowledge. People in Taiwan have begun to pursue these activities by means of travel and tourism so that they may pursue spiritual and experiential satisfaction (Sharpley and Jepson, 2011). These activities are also pursued for the purposes of relieving stress and recuperating from illnesses in order to assist the return to work (Valtonen and Veijola, 2011). In response to the rise in tourism, and to attract foreign tourists, the agricultural authorities in Taiwan have promoted leisure agriculture and have developed rural tourism with the expectation of improving farmers' income and encouraging new development in the agricultural sector. Therefore, in 2001, a plan called "one township with one agricultural leisure area" was implemented. In coordination with the Tourism Bureau, this plan aimed to promote local eco-tourism, and to integrate rural resources for the purpose of providing appropriate locations for rural tourism. Since rural tourism is a catalyst of rural regeneration (Su, 2011), it is able to generate employment opportunities and add value to agricultural products, and thus further activate the rural economy. The result should be a revitalized rural economy.

Unlike the general sightseeing industry, leisure agriculture is comprised of agriculture and sightseeing, and consists of the characteristics of rural living, production and ecology. When a society is under the trend of urbanization, rural tourism can provide urban residents with a unique rural opportunity. Therefore, rural tourism has been promoted with rural leisure as a main aspect. After joining the World Trade Organization in 2002, the agricultural sector in Taiwan faced severe challenges. In response to these challenges, many farmers, following the encouragement of the government, changed their modus operandi to be in accordance with the leisure agriculture model so that they could improve their revenue and maintain their competitiveness. (Wu and Tuan, 2004; Lee and Hou, 2004; Chang *et al.*, 2007; Lin, 2005; Shen and Liao, 2005; Shen *et al.*, 2008).

Leisure agriculture is one style of agricultural operation. Its objective is to give nationals the opportunity to experience agricultural life and rural village life. The opportunity to experience specific activities unique to rural agriculture is what makes leisure agriculture distinctive from general leisure. Two of the characteristics of leisure agriculture are that it helps to increase economic value within the agricultural sector in Taiwan and that it helps to propagate the development of the Experience Economy within agriculture.

The original concept of the Experience Economy was put forward by Pine and Gilmore in 1999. The Experience Economy not only explores the relationship between consumption and commodities, but also

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explores the whole process of consumption and value as experienced by the consumer. There are four dimensions to the Experience Economy within leisure agriculture: entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism. Whether an agricultural experience activity can create economic value depends on meticulous arrangements and designs by operators. In addition, tourist feedback is hypercritical. Based on this fact, tourist satisfaction with agricultural experience activities must be fully discussed so that rural tourism may be developed to its fullest potential.

Regarding the topic of satisfaction with agricultural leisure, the related research can be categorized into three varieties: (1) the relationship between travel motivation and satisfaction (Chen and Chen, 2010; Devesa *et al.*, 2010; Wu *et al.*, 2007; Chen *et al.*, 2007), (2) the relationship between service quality and satisfaction (Chang and Ling, 2007), (3) the relationship between consumption style and satisfaction (Chang *et al.*, 2007). A few published articles have utilized the four dimensions of the Experience Economy as the foundation of the analysis. If tourist satisfaction with leisure agriculture is investigated through the four dimensions of the Experience Economy, then operators of leisure agriculture are assisted in evaluating the effectiveness of specific experience activities and may thereby adjust the design of the said activities. Furthermore, tourists' appreciation of agricultural experience activities may vary. In considering the idea of market differentiation, it is appropriate to analyze the various groupings of tourists so that their concept of or preference towards certain agricultural experience activities may be understood. The results can then be used to help leisure agriculture operators improve tourist satisfaction and thus boost the development of rural tourism. The reasons that experience activities can increase the income of the operators are that it will increase the reputation of their agricultural business. After winning a good reputation, a new tourist has not visited the recreation farm would try to visit it. A good reputation can leave the tourists having visited the facility a good memory that will bring them back again. The increase in the number of visiting can have a positive impact on the revenue received by operators.

In brief, this research will analyze the correlation between impression and satisfaction degrees with experience activities so as to identify which activities are more preferred within each grouping of tourists.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1. Research Area

Each leisure agricultural area in Taiwan has its own characteristics. The tourists' degree of impression with each of the Experience Economy's activities may vary. To avoid the impact of regional differences on tourist evaluations, the scope of this study will be focused on the well-known leisure agriculture area in Lugu Township. Lugu Township is nestled in the misty mountain area of Nantou county in central Taiwan. It possesses tremendous recreational resources such as being a production area for the famous Oolong tea. Owing to the fact that it has abundant tourism and agricultural resources; it received approval for a leisure agricultural area plan to be implemented in 2003. This leisure agricultural area plan obtained a grade-A rating based on an evaluation conducted in 2004. In addition, the Sao-Buan-Tian area near Lugu Township was selected as the most beautiful community in a contest hosted by the Tourism Bureau of Taiwan in 2004. In 2006, the Sao-Buan-Tian area received approval from the Executive Yuan's Council of Agriculture to be developed as a leisure agricultural area. With the support of the government, Lugu Township has become a distinguished leisure agricultural area. Because of its abundant recreational resources, Lugu Township is able to serve as a representative area for leisure agriculture. Therefore, this research uses Lugu Township as its main focus.

Research Framework for the Study: Relationship between Experience Activities and Satisfaction.

As stated before, the concept of the Experience Economy was proposed by Pine and Gilmore in 1999. Experience activities are categorized into four major dimensions: entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics. According to past studies (Wu and Tuan, 2004; Tuan, 2006), leisure agricultural activities comprise five major styles: nature and rural settings, ecological education, agricultural operations, rural culture, and agricultural life experiences. It is upon the four major dimensions and the five major styles that the structure of agricultural experience activities were built. Figure 1 shows the effect of the four major dimensions upon visitor satisfaction. A survey investigating visitors' impression and satisfaction degrees in each dimension was conducted. Based upon the survey's results and by using the method of factor analysis, all items in the questionnaire were categorized into four dimensions. The relationships between the degree of satisfaction

and the four major dimensions of the Experience Economy will be further discussed.

Based on a review of the literature, it is found that experience activities might affect visitors' satisfaction. Using survey data collected from guesthouse owners, Oh *et al.* (2007) found that visitors' satisfaction was dependent on the nature of the experience activities in which they engaged. Chou *et al.* (2009) also showed that the marketing of experience activities had a positive impact on visitor satisfaction. In general, the differences in styles together with the differences in dimensions create unique characteristics for activities that in turn affect visitor satisfaction. The ultimate goal is to improve visitor satisfaction and thus improve business reputation.

H1: Entertainment experience has a positive impact on visitor satisfaction.

H2: Educational experience has a positive impact on visitor satisfaction.

H3: Escapism experience has a positive impact on visitor satisfaction.

H4: Aesthetic experience has a positive impact on visitor satisfaction.

The methodology of the structural equation model (SEM) was applied to test these null hypotheses.

2.2. Questionnaire Design

The survey questionnaire had three parts: the visitor's degree of satisfaction, the visitor's experience impression, and the visitor's background. In order to help visitors answer the questionnaire more easily, a highly structured and closed questionnaire was adapted to measure the visitor's experience impression. The questionnaire used in this research is based upon the characteristics of experience activities in rural areas and refers to previous related work such as Oh *et al.* (2007) and Tuan (2006).

There were five major types of experience activities in which visitors engaged and were thus evaluated. The first consisted of natural and rural setting experiences. These included activities such as experiencing a natural waterfall, a Ginkgo Forest in the Dalun mountain area, a farm landscape such as a tea farm, and experiencing the Meng-Zonglin bamboo forest. The second, which consisted of the ecological educational experiences, included activities such as

viewing ecological scenery, bird watching and observing fireflies. The third related to agricultural operations experiences. This involved the tasting and purchasing of local specialty agricultural products (tea and bamboo products) and experiencing the harvesting of crops (tea-picking and mining bamboo shoots). The fourth, which comprised rural cultural experiences, included activities such as visiting rural historic sites and ancient battlefields, experiencing local culture, discovering traditional rural toys, visiting rural festivals, making handicrafts (bamboo art DIY activities), and touring an agricultural exhibition center (bamboo art centers, tea cultural centers). Rural living experiences were the fifth type of experience. The rural living experience included tasting rural meals (such as bamboo shoots, tea cuisine, bamboo rice, bamboo leaves dumplings, and baked sweet potatoes), and visiting a rural guesthouse whilst also having a spiritual experience by taking part in temple activities.

The choice of which activities visitors engaged in was dependent upon the motivation of the visitors. This motivation came from one or more of the four dimensions: entertainment, educational, escapism, and aesthetics. In total, a questionnaire of twenty items was created to survey visitors' perceptions of different experience activities. A Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 was adapted to measure visitors' perceptions ranging from 'very much disagree,' 'disagree,' 'fair,' 'agree,' and 'very much agree,' respectively. The results were used as the basis for statistical analysis.

As for the measurement of the degree of satisfaction, we referred to studies such as Chang *et al.* (2007), Chang (2006), Hu and Jen (2008), and Chen *et al.* (2007). In these studies, the degree of satisfaction is dependent upon visitor perceptions towards the five major styles of experience activities that were encountered as a whole in the Lugu leisure agricultural area.

Information that was gathered in the survey also included socioeconomic background and the visitor's current travel experience in the Lugu area. The socioeconomic background information covered gender, marital status, age, level of education, occupation, area of residence, and average personal monthly income. Information regarding the current travel experience included the number of times the visitor had been to the Lugu area, the per capita consumption expenditure, and the number of people traveling in the group.

3. FACTOR AND CLUSTER ANALYSIS

3.1. Survey Sample and Descriptive Statistics

Our respondents were mostly tourists in the agricultural leisure area in Lugu Township. The locations from which we performed our survey were mainly the three main sites to which the tourists usually go: the Rural Tourist Service Center, the Bamboo Cultural Center, and the Tea Cultural Center. In total, this research surveyed 450 respondents. Among the 450 questionnaires, 76 questionnaires were incomplete, and thus the number of effective questionnaires was 374. The effective return rate was 83.11%.

Factor and Reliability Analysis

In this research, a total of 20 items were asked in order to measure the tourists' perception towards leisure agricultural activities. We performed an item analysis for each of the items asked. Respondents were then separated into the highest 27% and lowest 27% based on rank value. We then conducted a mean difference test to determine if the mean of the two groups was significantly different. This implies that in the survey this research item was furnished with item discrimination. Based on this, factor analysis was conducted using SPSS statistical software. By means

of principal components analysis, the first results of the analysis showed that there were eight items with a factor loading of less than 0.7. These items were subsequently removed from our factor analysis. After removing these eight items, the results of the factor analysis showed that the KMO value was 0.86. This was significant for the Bartlett test. In addition, all items with factor loadings were increased. This implied that the second result was more appropriate.

The remaining twelve items were categorized into four factors based upon the item's characteristics, as Table 1 shows. These four factors are referred to as entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics. This is consistent with the four major factors of the experience economy. The factors' accumulated variance was 79%, which means that these four factors could be considered to be representative of experience activities.

Then a reliability analysis was conducted, as Table 1 shows. All of the factors' Cronbach's α values exceeded 0.8. The credibility as a whole was 0.89. This implies a good credibility and shows that the results of the factor analysis based on our survey sample are reliable.

Table 1: Factors and Reliability Analysis of Experience Activities Items

	Number and Context of Items Asked		Factor Loading	Accumulated Variance %	Cronbach's α
Factor 1: Entertainment	U1	I feel that my experiences in nature or in a rural setting are most enjoyable.	0.87	25.65	0.90
	U2	I feel that ecological education activities are most enjoyable.	0.84		
	U3	I find agricultural operations very interesting and enjoyable.	0.80		
	U4	Experiencing daily life in an agricultural community is enjoyable to me.	0.78		
Factor 2: Education	G1	Ecological experiences help me to gain new knowledge and understanding of the local ecology.	0.83	50.53	0.88
	G2	Experiencing the daily routine of agricultural operations increases my knowledge of agriculture, and provides me with a good learning experience.	0.83		
	G3	Rural life experiences have high educational value to me and provide me with the opportunity to learn something new.	0.82		
	G4	Engaging in activities in nature or in a rural setting promotes the gaining of new knowledge.	0.80		
Factor 3: Aesthetics	S1	When I have the opportunity to enjoy nature or a rural setting, I feel I never want to leave.	0.87	65.01	0.80
	S2	Ecological experiences are beautiful and fascinating to me.	0.80		
Factor 4: Escapism	D1	When I have the opportunity to experience the daily aspects of agricultural operations, I feel like I want to become a farmer.	0.83	79.17	0.80
	D2	Experiencing agricultural life makes me want to become part of the agricultural community.	0.79		

3.2. Cluster Analysis

According to the previous factor analysis results, tourists were categorized into different clusters according to their degree of impression with experience activities. Cluster analysis was thus adopted.

The meaning of cluster analysis is that tourists are divided into different groups based upon their feelings towards an activity. Samples with a high degree of homogeneity are placed in the same group. Samples with a high degree of heterogeneity are sorted into different groups. In this research, among the agglomerative hierarchical methodologies, the Ward method was used for clustering in the first stage.

Based on the principle of cluster analysis, if the increment of the coefficient of the cluster's aggregation was small, this indicated that a sample cluster was characterized by a high degree of homogeneity. After analysis, when the number of clusters was reduced from two to one, the increment in the agglomerative coefficient was 520. This is the maximum extent of the increase. The samples in this research can be divided into two groups.

After the first stage determined that the samples could be divided into two groups, the k means method and the divisive method were used in the second phase. Using the four experience dimensions, the sample was divided into two tourist groupings. There were 180 respondents (48.12%) belonging to the group with a high average value for the four dimensions, and they were referred to as the deep experience group. There were also 194 respondents (51.88%) belonging to the group with a moderate average value for the four dimensions. They were called the moderate experience group. Then a one-way ANOVA was applied to test whether there were differences in the concepts of the four experience dimensions between the two groups. As shown in Table 2, the results indicate that the F-

value was very significant, implying that there were significant differences in the degree of impressions between the two groups within the four experience dimensions

4. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

As depicted in Figure 1, with regard to the research framework, the implicit exogenous variables encompass the following four dimensions: entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics. Implicit endogenous variables are set as satisfaction. The observed variables are composed of questions related to each dimension. The four dimensions are determined by factor analysis. Regarding the degree of satisfaction, six asking items were designed. After factor analysis, dimensions with a factor loading of less than 0.7 were removed from the study. Therefore, only satisfactory ratings with ecological education experiences (A1) and the general environment (A2) remained. Based on these findings, the research used Amos 18 software to conduct the analysis of the relationship between agricultural experience activities and satisfaction.

4.1. Test of Different Groups of Tourists

Using the previous results, respondents were categorized into 2 groups by using cluster analysis. The question asked was, "Is the association between agricultural leisure experience activities and satisfaction the same between the two groups of respondents?" The null hypothesis was that the path coefficients of impression and satisfaction degree are the same for the two groups. This implies that the associated effects on impression and satisfaction degree are the same. This is referred to as the restricted condition. The alternative hypothesis is that at least one path coefficient of impression and satisfaction degree is not the same for the two groups. This is referred to as the 'unrestricted condition.'

Table 2: One way ANOVA for Differences in the Degree of Impressions between Tourist Clusters within Four Dimensions

Dimensions	Mean	Deep experience group	Moderate experience group	F-value
		N=180	N=194	
entertainment	3.93	4.43	3.47	319.52***
education	3.95	4.32	3.61	155.71***
escapism	3.76	4.45	3.56	337.88***
aesthetics	3.76	4.22	3.34	239.96***

Note: *** implies significance at the 1% level, and N is the number of respondents.

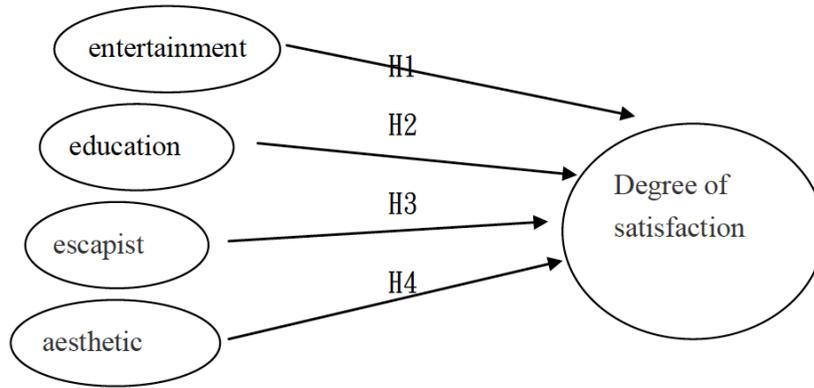


Figure 1: Structure of research.

Table 3: Testing Results under Restricted and Unrestricted Conditions

	Restricted	Unrestricted	Difference	Testing result
χ^2	575.50	619.80	43.30	43.30>9.48***
DF	146	150	4	

Note: ***implies significance at the 1% level.

As Table 3 shows, for the ‘restricted condition,’ the value of χ^2 was 575.50. The degrees of freedom numbered 146. For the ‘unrestricted condition,’ the value of χ^2 was 619.80. The degrees of freedom numbered 150. The difference between the restricted and unrestricted models was 4. The difference in χ^2 for the two models was 43.3, which is much larger than the critical value of 9.48. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that the path coefficients of impression and satisfaction degree are not the same for the two groups.

4.2. Goodness of Fit of Empirical Models

Goodness of Fit estimation results are shown in Table 4. The indicators for the deep experience group and the moderate experience group under the same SEM structure are not much different. The values of χ^2 /d.f., PGFI and RMR are all outstanding. The value of GFI is acceptable. In general, within this research, the goodness of fit of the empirical models is good. The estimated parameters can be used to explain the

association between the experience activities and satisfaction.

4.3. Estimation Results for the Structural Equation Model

The experience effects in terms of the correlations between the experience activities and satisfaction and the estimated parameters are shown in Table 5. For deep experience groups and moderate experience groups, the correlation effect is relatively large between entertainment experiences and satisfaction. This implies that tourists experience more enjoyment from the experience activities provided by leisure agriculture. Regarding escapism, because tourists in deep experience groups are relaxing from the pressure of working in crowded urban environments, the enjoyment of the experience is also excellent. These findings should be emphasized in developing rural tourism.

In comparing the two groups of tourists, tourists in the deep experience group had a higher rate of

Table 4: Goodness of Fit of SEM for Different Tourist Styles

Fitness indicators	Deep experience	Moderate experience	Ideal value of indicators
Chi square/degrees of freedom (χ^2 /d.f.)	3.99	3.88	Between 1 -5
goodness-of-fit index(GFI)	0.82	0.83	near 0.9
parsimony-adjusted GFI (PGFI)	0.57	0.57	over 0.5
root mean square residual (RMR)	0.05	0.04	under 0.05

Table 5: Estimated Results of SEM for Different Tourist Styles

Hypotheses	Path	Deep experience		Moderate experience	
		Estimated parameters	P-value	Estimated parameters	P-value
H1	Entertainment→satisfaction	0.63	0.00	0.66	0.00
H2	Education→satisfaction	0.39	0.00	0.38	0.00
H3	Aesthetic→satisfaction	0.23	0.00	0.45	0.00
H4	Escapism→satisfaction	0.49	0.00	0.41	0.00

satisfaction in the areas of education and escapism than did those from the moderate experience group. This implies that tourists in the deep experience group attached more importance to education and escapism. Tourists in the moderate experience group attached more importance to entertainment and aesthetics. Because the scores for education and escapism were lower, it can be determined that more attention should be given to tourists in the deep experience group.

4.4. Measurement Model Estimation Results

The Measurement Model was used to indicate the association between implicit variables and observed variables. The estimated results of the association parameters between the implicit variables of entertainment, education, escapism, aesthetics, and satisfaction and their corresponding observable variables are shown in Table 6. In the entertainment dimension, the value of each estimated parameter is higher in the moderate experience group than in the deep experience group. This implies that the moderate experience group generally prefers items in entertainment. The estimated coefficients in U2 and U4 are the highest in both groups. This means that both groups prefer entertainment experiences in both ecological education and agricultural living activities. Concerning the coefficients of the path parameters in the education dimension, for moderate experience tourists, the estimated parameter of G2 is the highest. For deep experience tourists, the estimated parameter of G3 is the highest. This implies that tourists in the deep experience group attach more importance to the educational value of experiencing life in rural culture while tourists in the moderate group attach more importance to the educational value of experiencing agricultural operations.

Tourists in both groups received more aesthetic enjoyment from ecological experiences (S2). As for escapism, tourists in both groups attached more importance to D2. This implies that tourists preferred agricultural living as a means of escapism. For tourists

in the deep experience group, the correlation effect on escapism in rural culture (D1) was lower and was much different from D2. This indicates that tourists in the deep experience group attached more importance to D2 than to D1.

For tourists in the deep experience group, their satisfaction with ecological experiences (A1) was relatively high. For tourists in the moderate experience group, overall satisfaction (A2) was relatively high. Based on the above discussion, the estimated path parameters for tourists in the two groups are not the same. This shows a different outcome for the experiences of the two tourist styles.

5. CONCLUSION

According to the results of the factor analysis and cluster analysis used in this research, tourists in the leisure agricultural area can be categorized into two groups according to their degree of impressions with leisure agricultural activities. One group is called the 'deep experience group' and the other the 'moderate experience group.' For tourists in the deep experience group, the average values of the degree of impressions within four dimensions of the Experience Economy were higher. However, the average values of the four dimensions in the moderate experience group were somewhat lower. The results of the restricted condition test indicated that the correlation between activities in the entertainment, education, escapism, and aesthetics dimensions and satisfaction were significantly different within the two groups. Tourists in the deep experience group attached more importance to entertainment and escapism. Tourists in the moderate experience group attached more importance to entertainment and aesthetics. This result suggests that operators in rural tourism should segment markets according to the tourists' groupings. It also suggests that the operators should try to design activities and tourism packages more appropriately so as to increase tourist numbers and extend their length of stay. Moreover, the appreciation of activities within the four dimensions was

Table 6: Estimated Results of Measurement Model

Dimensions and variables	Deep experience		Moderate experience	
	Estimated parameters	P-value	Estimated parameters	P-value
Entertainment				
U1	0.54	--	0.68	--
U2	0.76	0.00	0.90	0.00
U3	0.61	0.00	0.72	0.00
U4	0.75	0.00	0.83	0.00
Education				
G1	0.73	--	0.74	--
G2	0.78	0.00	0.88	0.00
G3	0.80	0.00	0.78	0.00
G4	0.69	0.00	0.70	0.00
Aesthetics				
S1	0.74	--	0.30	--
S2	0.87	0.00	1.07	0.08
Escapism				
D1	0.38	--	0.72	--
D2	0.88	0.00	0.88	0.00
Satisfaction				
A1	0.77	--	0.59	--
A2	0.74	0.00	0.61	0.00

found to vary between the two tourist groups. Among these items, entertainment within ecological education and agricultural living, education in rural life and agricultural operations, aesthetics in ecological experiences and escapism in agricultural living are relatively high according to the extent of the tourists' impressions. Therefore, operators should strive to improve these areas by designing experience activities to improve tourist satisfaction and thus boost rural tourism and increase revenue for leisure agriculture operators.

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