THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS OF MOBILE TELECOMMUNICATION SERVICE PROVIDERS IN KENYA

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One of the most important questions faced by business leaders in the strategic management process is a choice of how to adopt a market penetration strategy whereby a firm gains more usage from existing customers and also seeks to attract customers from existing competitors. The mobile service industry has recently experienced a quick succession of mobile service innovations, in deciding on the optimal timing of each service launch, carriers need to consider a complex array of technological, regulatory, and strategic factors. In spite of wide-ranging research on market penetration strategy, very little empirical research has observed the relationship between the market penetration strategies and competitiveness in mobile telecommunication sector. Based on this background, this study sought to investigate market penetration strategy and competitiveness of mobile telecommunication service providers in Kenya. The study population consists of all the mobile Service providers in Kenya which according to a list obtained from Communications Commission of Kenya as at July 2010 are four. Given the small number of firms a census study was conducted. The data for this study was collected from primary sources using a semi-structured questionnaire. The findings of the study the study revealed customer experience management correlates positively with organizational competitiveness which implies that customer experience management impacts directly on organizational competitiveness. This study is significant since it is hoped that findings and recommendation of the study will provides a greater understanding of appropriate framework for customer experience management and organizational competitiveness. In this sense, the study will contributes to knowledge in terms of effective customer experience management and its contribution to organizational performance.

Key words: customer experience management and organizational competitiveness

Introduction

Developing a market strategy allows an organization to align resources to greatest opportunities with a goal of increasing revenue and market share and achieving a sustainable competitive advantage. A marketing strategy is a plan, which combines product development, promotion, distribution, and pricing. It essentially identifies the organization's goals, and explains how they will be achieved within a specific timeframe.

The central argument of this research is that the organizational competitiveness of a telecommunications service provider emanates from strategy implementation. There is considerable support for this argument; competitive advantage is realized based on three factors (Sudarshan D, 1995): the firm's marketing strategy, implementation of this strategy and the industry context (Porter's Model, 1979). The purpose of competitive strategy is to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) and thereby enhance a business performance (Bharadwaj,etal 1993). One of the major objectives of marketing strategy is to enhance the long-term financial performance of a firm.

According to Ansoff (1957), a firm may choose one of four product-market growth strategies, including market penetration, market development, product development, or diversification. Ansoff suggests the safest growth option is to adopt a market penetration strategy whereby a firm gains more usage from existing customers and also seeks to attract new customers in their existing market. A slightly riskier option may be to adopt the market development strategy of attracting new types of customers for the current products of the firm from either new channels of distribution, or new geographic areas. Alternately, a firm may engage in product development by producing entirely new products, different versions of existing products, or different quality levels of existing products to be sold in its current markets. The riskiest strategy overall is suggested to be a diversified approach where new products are developed for new markets. Ansoff's product-market expansion grid provides a useful though not exhaustive framework for looking at possible strategies to cope with the problem of strategic windows and finding way of creating overlapping strategic windows.

Mobile phone services in Kenya have operated as a duopoly with Safaricom and airtel Kenya (formerly Kencell , Celtel and Zain) taking the lead since 2000. The original intention of the Kenya Communications Act (KCA 1998) —to liberalize telecommunications in Kenya—has largely been met. Growth was tremendous: from 17,000 mobile subscribers in 1999 to 29.7 million by June 2012. In December 2007, France Telecom acquired 50% of Telkom Kenya and proceeded to launch its Orange brand in Kenya in September 2008. Now called Telkom Orange, In November 2008 Econet was launched, bringing to four the total number of operators.

A price war has characterized Kenya's mobile communications market in 2008 and 2009, following the market entry of the third and fourth network, Econet Wireless Kenya (EWK, in which India's Essar acquired a stake), and Telkom Kenya under the Orange brand with its new majority shareholder, France Telecom. Subscriber growth is now forecast to slow over the coming years, and rapidly falling ARPU(average revenue per user) levels have driven one of the incumbents, Airtel, deeper into negative earnings, leaving only the market leader, Safaricom, with a net profit, although reduced. The operators are developing new revenue streams from third generation broadband and mobile banking services. With market penetration rates in Kenya's broadband and traditional banking sector still extremely low, the mobile networks have an opportunity to relive the phenomenal growth rates seen in the voice sector in recent years.

Statement of the Research Problem

Confronted with the fierce competition in today telecommunication marketplace, there have been many marketing strategies for service providers to plan and implement with evidence that shows consumers tend towards other competitors when they cannot be satisfied with the service quality. However, Safaricom Ltd has maintained its dominance in defiance of the price war championed by airtel, Yu and Orange has captured in the CCK report (June 2012) Safaricom had subscription market share of 64%,airtel 16.5%,Orange 10% and Yu 9%.

In view of the above the challenge for telecommunication service providers is to attract more customers, focus on building good quality relationship with customers, make customers satisfied, build trust, and step by step obtain organizational competitiveness, through customer experience. The current study therefore endeavour's to establish the relationship between market penetration strategies and organizational competitiveness in the mobile telecommunication service providers in Kenya.

Research Focus

This study is significant since it is hoped that findings and recommendation of the study will benefit different stakeholders as explained herein. Firstly, this study will provides a greater understanding of appropriate customer experience management and organizational competitiveness. In this sense, it contributes to and extends knowledge in terms of effective strategy implementation and its contribution to organizational performance.

Secondly, there is growing calls for companies to be more customer oriented, there has been widespread concern that, firms can no longer compete solely on providing superior value through their core services, but rather they must enter into the realm of customer experience management, creating long-term, emotional bonds with their customers (Bitner, Ostrom, and Morgan, 2008). This research contributes to marketing literature by advancing and utilizing comprehensive metrics to assess customer experience management.

Thirdly, the study focuses on organizational competitiveness and customer experience management strategies. This is useful in the understanding of the critical benefits accruing from an effective customer experience management which creates superior customer value and how it impacts organizational competitiveness.

Theoretical Framework

Pepper, et al (2004) defines Customer Experience Management as the totality of an individual customer's interactions with a company and its brand over time. It provides a company the opportunity to explore the variety of interactions customers have and to develop and implement a consistent, satisfactory experience—from initial exposure to a brand, product or service, through customer support interactions and ultimately, through replacement when they make a repurchase decision.

Metcalfe, Bowman (2009) laments that in today‛s highly competitive and commoditized world, companies need a way to differentiate themselves from the competition. What‛s more, the economic volatility is shrinking the customer base overnight. Customers are lost but not necessarily to the competition. A company‛s ability to consistently deliver positive customer experiences is one of the last remaining competitive advantages.

According to Rauen et al **(**2009) they argued that the ability to deliver a customer experience consistently aligned around customer needs and intentions has a significant impact on a company's ability to create customer loyalty. In turn, loyal customers have a demonstrable impact on the top line, by buying more or buying more frequently and referring other customers to the company. In a time of economic uncertainty—when customer confidence is low and customer behavior increasingly difficult to predict—mastering this ability is important.

The researcher provides a framework of analyzing organizational competitiveness beyond profitability, sales revenues and market share .He provides positive word of mouth, customer loyalty and customer satisfaction as indicators of organizational competitiveness. A promotional technique that is becoming very important in turbulent markets is word of mouth. Word-of-mouth (WOM) is probably the oldest mechanism by which opinions on products, brands, and services are developed, expressed, and spread (Lau et al, 2001). File,et al (1992) define WOM as recommending the firm and the service to others. Specifically, Anderson (1998) refers to positive WOM as relating pleasant, vivid, or novel experiences, recommendations to others, and even conspicuous display. Numerous researches reinforced the contention that positive WOM is a cherished outcome in marketing. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) found positive word-of-mouth seven times more effective than newspaper and magazine advertising, four times more effective than personal selling, and twice as effective as radio advertising in influencing consumers to switch brands.

Doyle (1998) takes this a step further; maintaining that satisfied current customers will generate word of mouth that will guarantee the acquisition of new customers. Rice (2001) reports on how word of mouth is becoming more important, quoting various research studies that indicate the significance of word of mouth. He claims that ‘80% of brand decisions are influenced by someone other than the marketer of the brand’, ‘65% of people seek advice from friends or family’, and ‘word of mouth and referrals are the primary sales and marketing tools for 61% of small companies in the USA.’ Misner (1994) maintains that word of mouth is important for relationship building and that networking and rewarding referrals encourages word of mouth. The growing importance of word of mouth is further supported by Dye (2000, 146) who sees ‘buzz’ (as he calls word of mouth) as a phenomenon that ‘will dominate the shaping of markets’ due to increasing globalization, developments in mobile telephones, the continuation of consumers’ associations with brands, and rising disposable income.

The researcher has considered customer loyalty as a measure of organizational competitiveness emanating from customer experience management as depicted in figure 1.Customer loyalty represents the repeat purchase, and referring the company to other customers (Heskett et al. 1994). He also stated that customer loyalty is a figure that may be measured directly as measuring the actual repeated sales to customers. According to Duffy (2003) loyalty is the feeling that a customer has about a brand which ultimately generates positive and measurable financial results. Improvements in retention and increasing in the share of the company are the obvious economic benefits of customer loyalty.

According to Feick,et al (2001), customer loyalty has been measured as the long-term choice probability for a brand or as a minimum differential needed for switching. Several earlier studies identified customer loyalty in several ways such as attitudinal approaches focused mainly on brand recommendations, resistance to superior products (Narayandas, 1996), repurchase intention

(Cronin & Taylor, 1992) and willingness to pay a price premium (Bitner & Zeithaml, 2003). Czepiel and Gilmore (1987), define service loyalty as a specific attitude to continue in an exchange relationship based on past experiences. Their definition implies that levels of service loyalty can be assessed by attitudinal measures such as the ones based on intentions to re-patronize a service provider. Such attitudinal measures have an advantage over behavioral measures (e.g. repeat patronage) in that they can provide greater understanding of the factors associated with the development and modification of loyalty (Oliva et al., 1992).

Further, the researcher has considered customer satisfaction as a measure of organizational competitiveness which is generally regarded as customer reaction to the state of fulfilment and customer judgment of the fulfilled state (Oliver, 1997). Customer satisfaction is totally concerned with the services provided to and perceived by the customers, if there is high matching between perceived and provided services than customer satisfaction level is very high that directly leads to high customer loyalty for cellular service provider (CSP) and vice versa. There are many benefits for a company from a high customer satisfaction level, they capture a high market share and able to maintain and sustain it: a basic and core policy of every business that heightens customer loyalty and prevents customer switching behavior, increases customer price tolerance, reduces marketing cost (Fornell, 1992).

Researchers have also identified customer satisfaction from a multi-dimensional nature and view overall satisfaction as a function of satisfaction with multiple experiences with the service provider (Sureshchandar *et al.*, 2002).Heavy investments are made to maximize level of customer satisfaction but only increasing the resources alone cannot lead to increased levels of customer satisfaction (Karthik et al, 2006). Thus there must be other factors leading to improve customer satisfaction as pointed by Gunnar and Malin (2006) that customer satisfaction is achieved through good qualitative and quantitative services. These qualitative and quantitative services must meet and satisfy the customer requirements in order to maximize the level of customer satisfaction that leads to customer loyalty. Sendecka (2006) found that more customized, specific or better-tailored services that meet customer's needs and expectations would lead to high level of customer satisfaction. Value-added services offered by mobile service providers can increase both customer satisfaction and total usage which in turn reduce churn rate, increase revenue and repurchase of entire service in future (Henkel et al, 2006).

Another study suggests that call quality, value added services and customer support play a significant role in building customer satisfaction for cellular service subscribers and they tend to keep using current service as the level of the customer satisfaction is high that leads to customer loyalty (Kim et al, 2004).

The researcher as considered market share as a measure of organizational competitiveness for the purpose of this research. The relationship between market share and profitability is perhaps the most-studied single phenomenon in business policy. Although, it has been some decades since the first published studies report a positive market share profitability association (Gale, 1972, Shepherd 1972), the nature of this relationship continues to receive a great deal of attention (Buzzell and Gale, 1987, Jacobson 1988a, Cool et al., 1989, Boulding and Staelin, 1990, Venkatraman and Prescott, 1990 Schwalbach 1991, Szymannski *et al.*, 1993, Fraering and Minor, 1994). While we observe that many practitioners hold the view that higher market share leads to higher profits, research findings indicate that the market share-profitability association is dependent upon strategic and competitive settings, and spurious effects account for at least a sizable component of the measured association.

Some studies indicate that low share businesses can be quite profitable (Woo, 1982, Schwalbach 1991). Moreover, a spurious correlation between market share and industry profitability has been found by Jacobson (1988a), Rumelt and Wensley (1981) and Jacobson and Aaker (1985). On the other hand, the dominant finding of prior research is a significant positive relationship between market share and profitability. O'Regan (2000) has shown that firms with increased market share are likely to have higher performance and in particular achieve enhanced financial performance, greater customer satisfaction and retention. This applies to all firm sizes. To ensure competitive advantage, firms need to consider market share in conjunction with overall profits.

Jacobson and Aaker (1987) found product quality had a positive influence on return on investment, market share and price. An investigation of 65 firms in the furniture industry (Forker *et al.*, 1996) discovered that quality – defined as conformance to specification – was significantly related to sales growth and the return achieved on the sales growth. These findings indicate the powerful impact that better conformance can have on reducing costs and through better product quality attracting, and retaining customers.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

Meyer and Schwager (2007) lamented that it is important to look beyond customer satisfaction measures to find out how to achieve it. He pointed out that customer satisfaction is essentially a series of customer experiences. Organizations can deconstruct their customers' experience to understand what influences customers and to discover where there's room for improvement. The authors say this can be done by looking at customer "touch points".

Companies are increasingly focusing on creating a holistic and delightful experience to win and retain customers in an ever competitive market (Pine and Gilmore 1998). For the effective use of products, users rely on the service as much as on the product itself. For instance, when customers buy a mobile phone, they do not simply wish to purchase a communication device. They seek to obtain a means to communicate over a distance at any given place and time. This objective can only be achieved by the simultaneous presence of high quality products (provided by the handset manufacturer) and high quality service (provided by the network operator). A low quality handset not only affects the customer satisfaction with the handset manufacturer, it may also lead to dissatisfaction with the network operator. While studies on the way in which quality affects customer satisfaction have been going for more than two decades, most of the research on how quality affect satisfaction and loyalty in the past has focused largely in pure product (Garvin 1988, Grönroos 1983, Steenkamp 1990) or pure service settings (e.g. Brady and Cronin 2001, Oliver 1997, Parasuraman *et al.* 1985).

According to Rauen et al (2009) shows that organizations throughout the world that can deliver a customer experience that is consistently aligned with customer needs and intentions are well positioned to improve customer loyalty, drive customer advocacy and generate higher profits. Consequently, we propose that, to the extent that a firm can create a superior customer value through enhanced customer experience management, the more it is likely to attain sustainable competitiveness. The relevant null hypothesis is stated as

Ho: There is no positive relationship between customer experience management and organizational competitiveness.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework and hypothesis of the study.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the relationship between customer experience management and organizational competitiveness

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT

General Service Quality Deliveries

- Reliability
- Assurance
- Tangible
- Empathy
- Responsiveness

Specific mobile Service Deliveries

- Network access
- Service access
- Customer service
- Service retainability
- Value added services
- Service integrity

$\xrightarrow{\textbf{Ho}}$

ORGANISATION COMPETITIVENESS

- Positive word of mouth
- Customer satisfaction
- Customer loyalty
- Market share
- Profitability
- Turnover (sales turnover)

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study used descriptive and correlational census research design as it sought to generate quality information regarding how customer experience management influences organisational competitiveness. The study aimed to describe and establish the association among the key study variables, namely customer experience management and organizational competitiveness. This study design was cross-sectional in nature as the research respondents were interviewed once. Cross-sectional studies have been found to be robust for effects of relationship studies (Coltman, 2007; O'Sullivan and Abela 2007; and Raman and Kumar, 2008).

Population of the Study

This is a census study of all mobile telecommunication service providers in Kenya as at January 2011 and still in existence by the anticipated time of data collection in the year 2011 were studied. A complete list of the mobile service providers obtained from Communication commission of Kenya indicates that there are four firms namely Safaricom Ltd, Airtel, Telkom/Orange and Essar Telkom (yu).

Sample Size

In order to produce statistically valid results through the utilization of multivariate analytical techniques, a large sample size is required. (Hair, Anderson, Talham and Black, 1995). For the purposes of this research the sample consisted of Marketing Managers and customers. The choice of the Marketing Manager was purposive. Purposive sampling technique also called judgment sampling is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. The researcher decides what need to be known and sets out to find who can and willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Bernard 2002, Lewis et al 2006).

Data Collection and instrument

Data collection is the process of collecting information related to the study from the respondents using data collection instrument. Data collection also requires that the study identifies the procedure adopted in collecting information related to the study. The following subsections describe data collection instrument and data collection procedure adopted for purposes of the study.

In order to achieve the stated objectives data collection instrument was used. That is, questionnaire. This instrument was ideal for the study as it helped to elicit or collect primary data. Quite often, the questionnaire is considered as the heart of a survey operation (Hair, et al, 1995). The questionnaire was designed based on five point Likert-type scales. The questions were constructed to generate data in answer to specific target research questions and help to achieve the objectives of the study. Closed-ended questions were used to save time and to motivate the respondent to answer. Conscious effort was made to select only literate subscribers as respondents because of the use of self-administered questionnaires as data collection instrument.

Measurement of Variables

The key variables of this study are independent variables and dependent variables. The independent variables Customer experience management and dependent variable organizational competitiveness.

According to O'Sullivan and Abela (2007) common market and financial measures of output in firm-level marketing performance studies have been profit, sales growth and market share. However, Eccles (1998) suggests that the leading indicators of business performance cannot be found in financial data alone. For instance, customer satisfaction often reflects a company's economic condition and growth prospects better than its reported earnings do. According to Rauen et al **(**2009) they lamented that the ability to deliver a customer experience consistently aligned around customer needs and intentions has a significant impact on a company's ability to create customer loyalty. In turn, loyal customers have a demonstrable impact on the top line, by buying more or buying more frequently and referring other customers to the company. Consequently, this study operationalized organizational competitiveness in terms of customer behaviour outcomes and, market and financial outcome.

This study was guided by Jayachandran et al (2005) who suggest that the performance of an organizational action designed to obtain competitiveness is more meaningful when it is assessed in relation to the competition since firm gain competitiveness over their rivals. At the same time, Ambler (2000) points out that the performance output metrics adopted as competitive measures are only relevant if the company understands their score relative to that of competitors. Coltman (2007) also argues that to develop some sense of comparativeness, it is important for respondents to assess performance relative to that enjoyed by competitors. This is useful because, taken in isolation, an organization's performance, whether strong or weak, contains only limited meaning. A summary schedule of measurement scales operationalizing the study variables, namely market penetration strategy implementation, customer experience management, organizational competitiveness and contextual factors are depicted in Table 3.These items constitute the measures used in formulating the research instrument in appendix1 and II.

Validity and Reliability of Measures

An extensive review of the relevant existing conceptual and empirical literature on market penetration strategy, customer experience management, organizational competitiveness and contextual factors produced measures for each variable as previously outlined in table 3.These measure were used to construct the questionnaire in appendix1. Therefore, the measurement scale which was used in the questionnaire are deemed to have fact and construct validity because they reflect the key components of market penetration strategy, customer experience management, organizational competitiveness and contextual factors as described in the extent literature and also since they are validated measure previously applied in related studies. In order to ensure content validity, the preliminary questionnaire was pre-tested on a pilot to a set of customer for comprehension, logic and relevance. Respondents in the pre- test were drawn from customer internet service providers, which are similar to those in the actual survey in terms of background characteristics, familiarity with the topic of research and attitudes and behaviour of interest. The pre-tested internet service providers were not part of the target population of the study so as to avoid biasness in the assessment biases. As recommended by Malhotra (2007), the questionnaire pre-test was prepared through personal interview in order to observe the respondents reactions and attitudes. All aspects of the questionnaire were tested including question contents, wording, sequence, form and layout, question difficulty and instructions. The feedback obtained was used to revise the questionnaire before administering it to the respondents.

Reliability is defined as be fundamentally concerned with issues of consistency of measures (Bryman and Bell, 2003). There are three prominent factors related to considering whether a measure is reliability: stability, internal reliability and inter-observer consistency. In this study, internal reliability was considered. Bryman and Bell (2003) suggested that a multiple-item measure in which each answers to each questions are aggregated to form an overall score, the researcher ensured that all the indicators are related to each other.

The questionnaire was tested for reliability by using Cronbach coefficient alpha to determine the internal consistency of the items. This is a method of estimating reliability of test scores by the use of a single administration of a test (Patterson and Sharma 2004). For the purpose of this study, the items were considered reliable when they yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above. This figure is usually considered desirable for consistency levels (Bryman and Bell, 2003)). However, the Cronbach's coefficient alpha that is less than 0.70 implied that the research instruments was not dependable and the researcher make necessary adjustment before using the instruments to collect data

Results and Discussion

The relationship between customer experience management and organizational competitiveness

To establish the relationship between customer experience management and organizational competitiveness, the mean aggregate response of the customer experiencing management of general service and specific service quality deliveries was correlated with the mean aggregate response of organizational competitiveness. Table 4.10 shows that there was a highly significant positive correlation between customer experience management and organizational competitiveness.

Table Relationship between customer experience management and organizational competitiveness.

		Customer Experience Management	Organizational Competitiveness
Customer Experience Management	Pearson Correlation	1	.574**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	200	199
Organizational Competitiveness	Pearson Correlation	.574**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	199	199

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results indicate that customer experience management has a direct influence on organizational competitiveness. Thus the higher the level of customer experience management the higher the level of organizational competitiveness and vice versa.

Conclusions

The finding in the study that customer experience management has a positive relationship with organizational competitiveness supports the views of Rauen *et al* (2009) that the ability to deliver a customer experience consistently aligned around customer needs and intentions has a significant impact on a company's ability to create customer loyalty. In essence, this loyalty is likely to lead to the company's competitiveness.

Besides, as noted by Doyle (1998), satisfied customers tend to generate word of mouth which in turn guarantees the acquisition of new customers. These views are further supported by Rice (2001) who reports on how the word of mouth is becoming more important as a phenomenon that will dominate the shaping of markets. Customer experience management possibly explains why safaricom remains the market leader. Indeed one is likely to see an Mpesa outlet in almost every locality. The satisfaction realized from the availability of this service may explain; the customer's loyalty directed to this provider. Indeed this motion is consistent with the views of Oliver (1997), that customer satisfaction is totally concerned with the services provided to and perceived by the customers. Consequently if there is high matching between perceived and provided services, their customer satisfaction level is very high leading to high customer loyalty to the service provider and vice versa.

Furthermore, the aggression put into customer experience by Safaricom and Airtel through clarity of network and value added services may also explain their positions in competitiveness. This is consistent with the findings of Kim et al .., (2004) that call quality, value added services and customer support play a significant role in building customer satisfaction for cellular service subscribers and they send to maintain the level of customer loyalty.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Despite the fact that this study produced important results, it also faced certain limitations which in turn offer opportunities for further research. First, the selection of factors included in the conceptual framework is not exhaustive. Certainly, other factors could provide additional knowledge into the effect of market penetration strategy on organization competitiveness.

The study variables namely market penetration strategy, customer experience management; contextual factors and organization competitiveness are not optimal. Future researchers may still establish other relevant measures of these variables and even change the conceptual framework to set out different interrelations between these variables in order to bring more knowledge in the field of market dynamics.

Second, like most empirical research, the findings of this study are based on information generated from customers and managers of the mobile service providers which is self-reported data. The information that an organization generates is not the only source of information about its market penetration strategy and organizational competitiveness. It may be prudent to combine internal information with those collected from external sources namely competitors, current and potential customers, relevant government agencies and private sector. To address this limitation, future researchers can combine the viewpoints of all stakeholders in the industry in order to generate more valid conclusions.

Third, the research did not explore the sensitive issues of pricing in the mobile service providers. Studies can be conducted in future on the pricing policy in mobile telephony.

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