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**Analysis, Understanding, and Practice of Community on Sunnah-based
Supplementary Food during the Pandemic Season**

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Abstract

This study examines the community's understanding and practice of sunnah-based supplements during the COVID-19 pandemic, now classified as an epidemic. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected via randomly distributed questionnaires administered to individuals with varying educational backgrounds and analysed descriptively. Findings provide insight into the continued use of sunnah-based supplements for maintaining health and wellness. The study contributes to ethical and nutritional recommendations from an Islamic perspective and enriches social science knowledge by highlighting community health practices during outbreaks. It also offers guidance on disease prevention and health preservation through sunnah-based dietary approaches.

Keywords: Sunnah Food, Community, Pandemic, Food consumption

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1.0 Introduction

Every individual aspires to have a robust, healthy body. To accomplish this, one needs to prioritise a balanced diet, consistent physical exercise, and adequate rest. Moreover, dietary supplements can help meet nutritional requirements, especially when daily intake is insufficient. These supplements, typically composed of concentrated vitamins, minerals, or bioactive substances, are not categorised as traditional food, medications, or goods limited to specific demographics (Sadia Hassan et al., 2020).

Historically, dietary supplements were formulated to address or prevent specific nutrient deficiencies (Norshamliza et al., 2018). Over time, these products have evolved into widely utilised health commodities, produced at scale and globally marketed as elements

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of preventative health strategies. Their use reflects a growing health consciousness and consumer demand for accessible alternative wellness options.

In Malaysia, the prevalence of sunnah-based dietary supplements, items derived from the teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), has risen markedly. This trend intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic as numerous individuals pursued natural and faith-based methods for health maintenance and disease prevention. These supplements generally comprise foods and components referenced in the Qur'an and Hadith, including dates (ajwa), honey, black seed (habbatus sauda'), and olive oil. Their use is often grounded not only in purported health benefits but also in spiritual and cultural significance.

Despite increasing interest, empirical research on the public's comprehension, usage habits, and motivations for consuming sunnah-based supplements remains limited. A primary question is whether the heightened utilisation during health crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is informed by accurate knowledge and evidence-based practices, or by cultural and religious sentiments alone. Lacking a comprehensive awareness of these characteristics poses a risk of misguided application, excessive dependence, or disregard for traditional medical counsel.

This study aims to assess awareness, comprehension, and use of sunnah-based dietary supplements within selected Malaysian communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to examine the religious and health-related factors that influence their intake. Specifically, the study seeks to determine the level of community awareness and understanding of these supplements, analyse their usage patterns during the pandemic, and identify the key motivations underlying their consumption.

This study is significant as it examines the intersection of traditional Islamic health practices and contemporary public health awareness. It contributes to the expanding field of integrative health by demonstrating the compatibility of religious values and scientific health practices. Furthermore, the findings may inform policymakers, educators, and health professionals in developing culturally relevant health education programs that promote the safe and informed use of sunnah-based supplements.

This study offers a contextualised analysis of faith-based health behaviours during a global health crisis, thereby contributing to scholarly discourse on the intersections of religion, health, and community resilience.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualisations of Sunnah-Based Food

The term "sunnah food" is commonly used within the community, primarily because it appeals to product marketers seeking to attract consumers. Nevertheless, this term remains imprecise, as it is not explicitly cited in the Qur'an or the Hadith. Khadher et al. (2015) identify four distinct perspectives regarding the definition of sunnah food:

1. Textual-Based Definition: In Malaysia, people often see sunnah food as any food mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith. This definition is common on blogs and websites. It also appears in Ustaz Fauzi Mustaffa's book, *Rahsia Makanan Sunnah*, which defines it as foods taken directly from these holy texts.
2. Benefit-Oriented View: Some scholars take a broader view. They suggest that any food promoting health and well-being, whether it is in the Qur'an or Hadith, may be categorised as sunnah food because it fits the aims of the Shariah (maqasid al-shariah).
3. Commercially Influenced Perception: Some people define sunnah food primarily as popular commercial items such as dates, pomegranates, honey, raisins, and black seed (habbatus sauda). This idea often stems from limited religious knowledge and heavy media advertising.
4. Process-Based Understanding: Another perspective sees sunnah food as defined not only by ingredients but also by preparation and consumption methods. This includes following Islamic principles: maintaining ritual purity, covering the body properly during preparation, reciting Qur'anic verses, and practising proper etiquette while eating, such as starting with the basmalah, eating with the right hand, and observing Islamic manners.

Wan Nasryuddin (2016) contends that the term "sunnah food" lacks a precise academic definition and is not cited in primary Islamic texts. He further argues that this term should denote natural foods specifically referenced in the Qur'an and Hadith. Therefore, he suggests that terms such as "sunnah-based cuisine" or "sunnah-based food" more accurately indicate the origin and authenticity of these foods. Ultimately, this study emphasises foods authentically derived from the Sunnah while also including beneficial foods that align with Islamic dietary principles.

2.2 Scientific Evidence on Immune-Boosting Supplements During Pandemics

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, dietary supplements were widely advocated as part of efforts to preserve health and enhance immunity. Vitamins and minerals, especially those derived from fruits and vegetables, are crucial for the proper functioning of the immune system (Faeiz Pauzi et al., 2020). The Agensi Nuklear Negara (2020) in Malaysia underscored the need to consume foods rich in essential nutrients, including vitamins A, C, and D, as part of disease-prevention strategies.

Vitamin C has received substantial attention for its role in immune defence. The National Institutes of Health (NIH, 2021) recommended vitamin C during the epidemic to boost immune responses. As an antioxidant, vitamin C improves immune cell function and may help prevent or treat infections. It naturally occurs in citrus fruits and strawberries and is also sold as a commercial supplement. For healthy adults, 100 mg daily suffices to maintain normal immune function (Cerullo et al., 2020). Critically ill patients may need intravenous doses up to 200 mg/kg/day (Andrew WS, 2020). Vitamin C is recognised as a cost-efficient therapeutic option in clinical practice.

Vitamin D is essential for regulating immune responses and is linked to a reduced risk of respiratory tract infections, particularly severe COVID-19 cases. It is mostly produced by sunlight exposure, although it can also be obtained through supplements (MaHTAS, 2020). Epidemiological studies indicate that people with low vitamin D levels are more vulnerable to pneumonia and other respiratory diseases (Andrew WS, 2020). Optimal vitamin D levels have been correlated with a reduced occurrence of upper respiratory tract infections, including influenza and rhinovirus (Bergman P., 2021).

In conclusion, substantial evidence endorses the use of vitamins C and D as integral components of a preventive and curative strategy during the pandemic. Both nutrients are crucial for boosting immune function and mitigating the severity of illnesses. Nevertheless, the use of supplements must be under the direction of competent medical counsel to ensure appropriate dosage, safety, and efficacy.

2.3 Community Perceptions and Practice of Sunnah-Based Supplements

The increasing prevalence of sunnah-based supplements in Malaysia, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflects a growing interest in integrating prophetic traditions with contemporary health practices. This is demonstrated in the study by Abd Wahab et al. (2023), which reports that Malaysian consumers increasingly relied on herbal and prophetic-based supplements during the pandemic. The trend was largely influenced by cultural familiarity with traditional Muslim remedies and the perceived religious legitimacy of natural products such as honey, black seed, and garlic. Nevertheless, empirical research on community perceptions, comprehension, and use of these supplements remains limited. Current discourse is predominantly influenced by commercial tales and anecdotal assertions rather than empirical investigation (Khadher et al., 2015; Wan Nasryuddin, 2016). This has led to widespread use of the phrase 'makanan sunnah' without a clear, consistent definition among the populace.

Prior research indicates that health decisions within Muslim communities are frequently shaped by religious doctrines, notably the Hadith and the deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Habbatussauda, honey, and other substances are ingested not only for their nutritional and therapeutic attributes but also for their symbolic and spiritual significance (Robbi, A. A. M et al., 2022). This behaviour corresponds with the notion of *taqwa* and the conviction that prophetic traditions provide comprehensive direction for both spiritual and bodily well-being.

Nonetheless, the incentives for this consumption are not homogeneous. Certain individuals depend on religious texts, others are swayed by mainstream media, and many are directed by a combination of cultural customs and health trends (Mohd Farhan Md Ariffin et al., 2020). Furthermore, during pandemics, these judgements are influenced by increased uncertainty, a quest for alternative protection, and perceptions of the reliability of Islamic treatments compared to biomedical therapies (Min Min Tan et al., 2022). Although their significance is limited, knowledge exists regarding the manifestation of these behaviours at the community level, particularly during public health emergencies.

Comprehending these patterns is essential, since they offer insights into the interplay between Islamic beliefs and health-seeking behaviours. It also helps determine whether the use of sunnah-based supplements during crises is guided by precise religious understanding, empirical data, or socio-cultural factors. These deficiencies underscore the necessity for context-specific research that examines the lived experiences and decision-making processes of Muslim communities.

In conclusion, while the existing literature acknowledges the religious and therapeutic value of foods associated with prophetic traditions, there is a remarkable paucity of empirical studies on the public's actual interactions with sunnah-based supplements. There is still much research to be done on the links among spiritual motivations, health literacy, and how people respond to crises. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how much people know, understand, and use sunnah-based extra foods during the COVID-19 pandemic. It adds to the broader conversation on Islamic health behaviour and provides useful insights for developing public health plans that account for culture in future catastrophes.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs quantitative research methodology. Quantitative research involves measuring study variables using a structured research design grounded in statistical procedures and numerical quantification (Kamarul Azmi Jasmi, 2012). The survey was designed to assess the community's understanding and usage of sunnah-based supplements during the pandemic.

The questionnaire consists of three sections:

- Section A covers the demographic background of the respondents.
- Section B focuses on awareness and understanding of sunnah-based supplements.
- Section C explores the use of these supplements during the pandemic.

The questionnaire used in this study was developed based on previous literature related to sunnah-based foods, Islamic health practices, and supplement consumption during pandemics (Khadher et al., 2015; Robbi et al., 2022; Wan Nasryuddin, 2020). Items in Sections B and C were adapted and refined to ensure suitability for the Malaysian community context. The instrument underwent a content validation process involving three subject-matter experts in Islamic studies, nutrition, and survey design, who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and alignment of each item with the research objectives. Face validity was also conducted with a small group of respondents to assess language clarity, item comprehension, and layout.

A pilot test was subsequently administered to 30 respondents to assess the instrument's reliability. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The overall instrument achieved an alpha value of 0.947, indicating excellent reliability. Section B, which measured knowledge of sunnah-based supplementary products, recorded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.773, while Section C, which

measured the practice of sunnah-based supplementary products during the outbreak season, recorded an alpha value of 0.884. All values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, demonstrating that the instrument possesses satisfactory internal consistency.

From a sampling perspective, the questionnaire was distributed across communities in Shah Alam, Selangor, and Bangsar, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. A total of 171 individuals voluntarily participated in the survey, with no coercion involved. Ethical clearance for this research was granted by the UiTM Research Ethics Committee.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency tables and mean values, without percentage calculations. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 was used to ensure accurate and efficient data handling, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' feedback.

4.0 Results and Discussion

This study involved 117 participants from diverse academic backgrounds. Most held a bachelor's degree (67%) and were female (69.2%, N=81). Respondents' ages ranged from 18–25 years (28.2%) to 50 years and above (27.4%). The majority were married (52.1%, N=61), had a science education background (25.6%, N=47), earned below RM2000 (47.9%, N=56), and worked in the private sector (42.7%, N=50). Detailed demographic data, including gender, age, marital status, education, income, and occupation, are summarised in Table 1. Although the table lists 217, the actual participant count is 117.

Table 1. Demographic distribution

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1. Gender		
Male	36	30.8%
Female	81	69.2%
2. Age		
18- 25	33	28.2%
26- 33	27	23.1%
34- 41	13	11.1%
42- 49	12	10.3%
50 and above	32	27.4%
3. Marital Status		
Single	48	41.0%
Married	61	52.1%
Widower/widow	8	6.8%
4. Academy Qualifications		
Diploma	25	21.4%
Degree	67	57.3%
Master	9	7.7%
PhD	2	1.7%
Others	14	12.0%
5. Previous Educational Background		
Islamic Education	30	25.6%
Science	47	40.2%
Literature	40	34.2%
6. Income		
Below RM2000	56	47.9%
RM2000- RM3000	32	27.4%
RM4000- RM5000	15	12.8%
RM6000- RM7000	5	4.3%
RM8000 and above	9	7.7%
7. Job		
Private	50	42.7%
Government	18	15.4%
Housewife	9	7.7%
	40	34.2%

(Source:) Researcher's Analysis Based on Survey Data

4.1 The community's comprehension of dietary supplements following the Sunnah.

Table 2 presents the frequencies and average values used to evaluate respondents' comprehension of sunnah-based dietary supplements. There are six questions posed. The findings indicate that three items occur frequently. The respondents' knowledge of sunnah-based supplements, such as honey, milk, dates, and others, has a high frequency, with a mean of 4.62. Specifically, 68.38% of respondents highly agree and 24.79% agree with this information. The subsequent item has a significant occurrence rate, with a mean value of 4.56. Specifically, 69.23% of respondents strongly agreed, and 20.51% agreed, with the statement "I am aware that sunnah-based supplements are optimal for my well-being". The item with the third greatest frequency has a mean of 4.42. This indicates that

57.26% of respondents strongly agreed and 32.48% agreed with the statement "I know that the definition of extra food based on sunnah is any food that has been practised by the Prophet SAW".

The mention of three frequencies of mean values in the statement indicates that the community is beginning to understand the concept of additional food based on the Sunnah, which refers to any food practised by the Prophet SAW. Nevertheless, the society remains committed to the principle that the sunnah-based supplement primarily consists of the food consumed by His Majesty the Prophet s.a.w., including honey, milk, dates, and other such items. However, the community acknowledges that supplements based on sunnah principles are the most optimal choice for their well-being.

With an average score of 3.93, respondents indicated a preference for extra food products that adhere to the principles of Sunnah. 33.33% of respondents strongly agreed, while 35% agreed. Nevertheless, 1.71% of individuals strongly disagree, 5.13% disagree, and 24.83% are uncertain. The average value of 3.69, with 30.77% strongly agreeing and 27.4% agreeing with the statement about the label "Sunnah" on nutritional supplements, intrigued me enough to consider purchasing them. The final item has a mean score of 3.68, with 21.4% strongly agreeing and 3.4% agreeing with the statement "I am a practitioner of sunnah-based supplements".

Considering the three items mentioned, here is a suggestion: while selecting supplementary food, prioritise options that incorporate sunnah ingredients. Secondly, the inclusion of the term "sunnah" in the labelling of a product might serve as a marketing tool or entice consumers when selecting dietary supplements. Furthermore, most respondents do not adhere to the practice of consuming additional foods based on the Sunnah, indicating their limited engagement in this dietary practice. The reason for this statement is that those who wish to select a food supplement product are likely to go for one that adheres to the principles of Sunnah. Therefore, if they do not follow Sunnah-based food supplements, there is a strong likelihood that they will not engage in the practice of using food supplements.

Table 2. Respondent Understanding

Variable	Frequency	Mean
1. I choose Sunnah-based supplemental Food Products		
Strongly disagree	2	
Disagree	6	
Not sure	29	3.93
Agree	41	
Strongly agreed	39	
2. I am Practitioner of Sunnah Food Supplements		
Strongly disagree	47	
Disagree	37	
Not sure	4	
Agree	4	3.68
Strongly agreed	25	
3. The sunnah label attracts me		
Strongly disagree	5	
Disagree	13	
Not sure	31	
Agree	32	3.69
Strongly agreed	36	
4. I know complementary food in Sunnah refers what the Prophet saw practised		
Strongly disagree	2	
Disagree	2	
Not sure	8	
Agree	38	4.42
Strongly agreed	67	
5. I Know That Sunnah-based supplements Are Like Honey, Milk, Dates		
Not sure	8	
Agree	29	
Strongly Agreed	80	4.62
6. I know sunnah supplements are best for me		
Strongly disagree	1	
Disagree	1	
Not sure	10	
Agree	24	4.56
Strongly agreed	81	

(Source:) Researcher's Analysis Based on Survey Data

4.2 The Practice of Food Supplements Based on Sunnah During a Pandemic

Based on narrations found in Sahih al-Bukhari (Chapter al-Tibb) and Sahih Muslim (Chapter al-Salam), five foods are commonly referenced for their health benefits: honey, talbinah, ajwa dates, manna, and habbatussauda (Siti Sarah et al., 2022). However, the pilot study found that talbinah and manna were not widely recognised or consumed by the local

community. Consequently, the final survey focused on three sunnah-based supplements: honey, ajwa dates, and habbatussauda.

Among the three, honey recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.85$), followed by ajwa dates ($M = 3.49$) and habbatussauda ($M = 3.32$). A high mean score ($M = 4.57$) was recorded for respondents' agreement on the freedom to choose sunnah-based supplements, with 71 strongly agreeing, 42 agreeing, and only four expressing uncertainties. This indicates strong acceptance and understanding of these supplements among the respondents.

Honey is widely recognised in both Islamic tradition and scientific literature for its therapeutic properties. It is believed to promote general well-being and treat various ailments (Muhammad Zaidi et al., 2021). In this study, honey emerged as the most preferred supplement during the pandemic. A total of 81 respondents either strongly agreed ($n = 41$) or agreed ($n = 40$) with consuming honey. This preference was influenced by both religious knowledge ($M = 4.40$) and scientific evidence ($M = 4.32$). A well-cited hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) affirms: "There are three methods of treatment: consuming bee honey, cupping, and using a hot iron (kayyah)..." This indicates the value of honey in its pure form. Additionally, honey is increasingly adopted as a natural alternative to refined sugar (Wan Nasyaruddin, 2020; Wan Esma & Hamdi Ishak, 2021).

Ajwa dates were the second most popular supplement, selected by 60 respondents (32 strongly agreed; 28 agreed). These dates are mentioned in several prophetic narrations and are well regarded for their nutritional value. The mean score for belief in ajwa's benefits based on hadiths was 4.25, while recognition through scientific understanding scored 4.20. This suggests that while religious awareness played a strong role in influencing consumption, scientific support further reinforced its perceived efficacy.

Habbatussauda (*Nigella sativa*) was the third preferred supplement. Scientific studies have confirmed the high thymoquinone (TQ) levels, a biologically active substance in the volatile oil extracted from the seeds [23]. In addition, TQ has demonstrated immunostimulatory, gastroprotective, hepatoprotective, nephroprotective, and neuroprotective activities (Ahmad et al., 2013; Aisha Omar et al., 2022). Furthermore, habbatussauda is well known for its immunomodulatory and therapeutic properties, which include anti-inflammatory, anticancer, antibacterial, and lactation-supporting effects. (Wan Esma & Hamdi Ishak, 2021). In this study, 61 respondents consumed habbatussauda, with 20 strongly agreeing and 41 agreeing. The mean score for religious understanding was 4.23, while the mean for scientific support was slightly lower ($M = 4.03$), indicating that faith-based knowledge played a greater role in its selection.

In conclusion, the findings highlight a strong preference for honey, ajwa dates, and habbatussauda among Malaysian respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic. The consumption of these sunnah-based supplements was largely driven by awareness of prophetic traditions and supported by modern scientific findings, illustrating a valuable intersection between faith and health practices.

Table 3. Respondent Practice

	Variable	Frequency	Mean
1.	I choose Habbatussauda during the outbreak season		
	Strongly disagree	15	
	Disagree	13	
	Not sure	28	3.32
	Agreed	41	
	Strongly agreed	20	
2	I know Habbatussauda's benefits from Hadith.		
	Strongly disagree	3	
	Disagree	1	4.23
	Not sure	18	
	Agreed	39	
	Strongly agreed	56	
3.	I know Habbatussauda's benefits from scientific studies.		
	Strongly disagree	3	
	Disagree	2	4.03
	Not sure	27	
	Agreed	42	
	Strongly agreed	43	
4.	I choose honey during the outbreak season.		
	Strongly disagree		
	Disagree	9	
	Not sure	4	3.85
	Agreed	23	
	Strongly agreed	40	
		41	
5.	I know honey benefits from Hadith.		
	Strongly disagree	1	
	Disagree	1	
	Not sure	13	4.40
	Agreed	37	
	Strongly agreed	65	
6.	I know honey's benefits from scientific studies.		

Strongly disagree	1	
Not sure	18	
Agreed	40	4.32
Strongly agreed	58	
7. I choose ajwa dates during the outbreak season.		
Strongly disagree	14	
Disagree	7	
Not sure	36	3.49
Agreed	28	
Strongly agreed	32	
8. I know ajwa's benefits from Hadith.		
Strongly disagree	3	
Disagree	2	
Not sure	13	4.25
Agreed	44	
Strongly agreed	55	
9. I know ajwa's benefits from scientific studies		
Strongly disagree	1	
Disagree	1	
Not sure	25	4.20
Agreed	37	
Strongly agreed	53	
10. Taking sunnah supplements is my decision		
Not sure	4	
Agreed	42	4.57
Strongly agreed	71	

(Source:) Researcher's Analysis Based on Survey Data

The findings of this study may be interpreted through the lens of the Health Belief Model (HBM), which explains how perceived benefits, perceived susceptibility and perceived severity influence health-related decisions (Rosenstock, 1974; Alyafei A, 2024). The strong preference for honey, ajwa dates and habbatussauda during the pandemic reflects the community's perceived benefits of sunnah-based supplements for immunity, supported by both prophetic traditions and scientific literature. The heightened fear of infection during COVID-19 may also have increased perceived susceptibility and severity, thereby reinforcing reliance on faith-based health practices. This alignment suggests that sunnah-based consumption behaviours are shaped not only by religious teachings but also by cognitive health beliefs embedded within cultural-religious frameworks.

The results also correspond with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), which posits that behaviour is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). Positive attitudes toward sunnah-based supplements, coupled with strong religious norms within Malaysian Muslim communities, appear to contribute to high levels of acceptance and practice. The influence of family encouragement, communal endorsement and religious teachings reflects the role of subjective norms, while the easy availability of commercially marketed sunnah products strengthens perceived behavioural control by making such options accessible to consumers.

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study shows that the community's use of sunnah-based supplements during the COVID-19 pandemic was influenced by both religious conviction and growing scientific support, demonstrating a meaningful integration of faith-based health practices with modern public health awareness. Honey, ajwa dates and habbatussauda were widely used due to their perceived benefits for immunity, reflecting a health behaviour pattern driven by religious beliefs, cultural norms, and pandemic-related risk perceptions. These findings contribute to understanding how Muslim communities negotiate between spirituality and evidence-based health responses during health crises. However, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data and sampling restricted to selected areas, which may not fully represent all demographic groups. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal approaches, and qualitative insights to deepen understanding of behavioural motivations. Several practical recommendations arise from this study. Health professionals should provide balanced guidance that integrates scientific evidence with religious perspectives to prevent misinformation. Religious and community leaders can collaborate with healthcare providers to strengthen culturally appropriate health communication. Public health agencies should design educational materials that incorporate both prophetic guidance and medical advice. Finally, increasing health literacy, particularly regarding the safe and informed use of sunnah-based supplements, can support better decision-making and enhance community resilience during future outbreaks.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

Hadith, Halal food

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