

Service Seeker's Satisfaction of Sainamaina Municipality

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to evaluate the quality of municipal services provided by the local government in Sainamaina, a municipality located in the Rupandehi district Nepal, by assessing service quality dimensions and identifying the key factors that influence citizen satisfaction. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, ensuring fair representation across all 11 wards of the municipality. A comprehensive analysis of the collected data involved descriptive statistics, multiple regression, Pearson correlation, as well as reliability assessments using Cronbach's alpha and Q-plots to examine data normalcy. The study employed the modified SERVQUAL and SERVPERF models to assess municipal service quality in the unique context of Sainamaina. The five service quality dimensions, specifically Reliability, Tangibility, Empathy, Assurance, and Responsiveness, significantly influenced citizen satisfaction. Among these dimensions, Responsiveness and Empathy emerged as the most impactful factors in shaping overall service satisfaction in Sainamaina. The assessment of service quality dimensions in Sainamaina serves as a valuable strategic tool for enhancing the provision of municipal services. By focusing on these critical dimensions, local governments can address the specific needs and expectations of their citizens, ultimately improving the overall satisfaction and well-being of the community.

Keywords: Service, quality, Satisfaction, Local government.

Introduction

Decentralization is a powerful concept that empowers local governments to provide timely and high-quality services to their citizens. While the central government focuses on achieving national economic development goals, local governments take on the critical role of managing growing urban areas and delivering essential services to their residents, in accordance with the charter that guarantees service quality. Despite the challenges involved in securing financial grants from the central government, local governments must ensure effective service delivery to uphold the principles of good governance (Bhagat, C., Mishra, A. K., &Aithal, P. S., 2022).

Failure in providing satisfactory services to citizens can lead to protests and disrupt the democratic process, potentially resulting in frequent changes of government. This instability is detrimental to the nation as a whole.

In Nepal, September 20, 2015 marked a significant milestone in the country's governance history. After extensive negotiations, a political consensus was reached between major political parties, and the Constituent Assembly approved Nepal's new constitution. The 2015 Constitution of Nepal introduced a federal government structure, with a key emphasis on empowering local governments(Bhagat, C., Sharma, B. & Mishra, A. K., (2021) Bhatta, A. K., Shrestha S.K., Mishra A. K. (2018) Pokharel, R., Mishra, A. K., &Aithal, P. S., (2021).

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Problem Statement

In 2017, after a 15-year gap, the Nepali people elected local representatives with high expectations for the future. During these elections, campaign promises included the popular slogan "Singhadarbarkoadhikargaunthaunma" (the power enjoyed by the central government is now decentralized to local governments). However, the success and effectiveness of this new governance structure in delivering services as expected by citizens remain open questions. The hopes and aspirations tied to the strengthened local governments and their capacity to fulfill citizens' expectations are areas of concern. The journey of this evolving governance model and its impact on the delivery of local services is a subject of great interest and importance(Mishra & Magar, 2017);(Mishra, 2019);(Mishra & Chaudhary, 2018);(Mishra & Jha, 2019);(Chiluwal & Mishra, 2018)

Research Objective

The primary objective of this research is to evaluate the quality of municipal services provided by the local government in Sainamaina, a municipality located in the Rupandehi district of Lumbini Province, western Nepal, by assessing service quality dimensions and identifying the key factors that influence citizen satisfaction.

Literature Review

Some of past works in relation with the present study are reviewed as foundation which are discussed and summarized. The early exploration of service quality concepts originated from the Nordic school, which initially considered service quality from two fundamental dimensions: technical quality (pertaining to what the customer receives) and functional quality (concerning how the customer receives the service). While technical quality is objective and quantifiable, functional qualities, which encompass the experiential aspects of service delivery, are intricate and challenging to assess.

The concept of service quality has been a subject of significant interest and discussion in marketing iterature, marked by ongoing debatesover its definition and measurement, with no clear consensus emerging (Wisniewski, 2001). One common definition characterizes service qualityas an organization's ability to meet or exceed customer expectations, involving a comparison between what customers expect from a service and their perception of how the service was delivered (Zeithaml et al., 1990). If expectations surpass actual performance, perceived quality falls short of satisfaction, leading to customer dissatisfaction (Parasuraman, Zeithaml& Berry, 1985). It's important to note that service quality is a subjective perception shaped by a variety of opinions and references rather than a single standard. Consequently, it is widely accepted that service quality significantly impacts the satisfaction of service recipients, prompting many organizations to prioritize quality as a guiding principle to remain competitive and demonstrate their value.

Service quality research has attained global significance, attracting scholars from various disciplines and backgrounds, and continues to be a subject of exploration and investigation.

SERVQUAL and SERVPERF Model

The SERVQUAL model, introduced by American marketing scholars Valarie Zeithaml, Leonard Berry, and A. Parasuraman in 1988, has been widely utilized for assessing service quality and customer satisfaction. This model was initially developed to analyze the dimensions of service and perceptions of service quality, with the central concept being that service is considered good when perceptions meet or surpass expectations, and problematic when perceptions fall short of expectations. Although originally intended for service firms and retailers, SERVQUAL has evolved to encompass a broader perspective of service, extending beyond basic customer service. It is now widely adopted for measuring service quality, even in the context of local government. However, it has not been without criticism from various researchers.

Several theoretical and operational concerns have been raised about the SERVQUAL model. Notably, F.

Buttle (1994) critiqued SERVQUAL, raising concerns about its applicability. Taylor (1994) argued that Parasuraman's approach to assessing quality through the relationship between expected and experienced quality might not be the most appropriate method. Over time, a few alternative variants of the scale have been proposed. One such model, 'SERVPERF,' was introduced by Cronin and Taylor in the early nineties, which can SERVQUAL.

be considered a modified or condensed version of the original Cronin and Taylor (1992) concluded that service quality measurement could be based solely on perceptions, eliminating the need for gap analysis between expectation and perception. This perspective can also be applied to the measurement of citizens' satisfaction perceptions. Practices in Municipalities and Reports

According to the annual reports of Jinka Town Municipality for 2015 and 2016, the majority of its inhabitants expressed both direct and indirect complaints, indicating that the municipality was failing to meet the service needs and requirements of its customers (AshenafiGaemi, 2015). When local institutions are unable to satisfy the needs of citizens, this may result in reduced support for local governments and increasing dissatisfaction with the way local authorities deliver their services within their jurisdiction (Lopez, 2011). The recent report published by International Transparency Nepal (CPI 2021) also identifies local governments as a problem area, as perceived by citizens. There are theories that explain how citizens respond to poor service (Dowding, 2000), such as how dissatisfied residents in a town may embark on protests, as demonstrated by South African research (Artinskon, D. 2007).

Measuring public services from a local perspective is essential to understand citizen satisfaction more closely. "How satisfied are the citizens?" is a fundamental question, and The Americas Barometer Insight Series, conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) in 23 countries in the Western hemisphere, seeks to answer this question by surveying the public. In this survey, a sample of 33,809 respondents was asked to rate the services provided by their municipality on a scale ranging from "very good" to "very poor" (Montalvo, 2009).

A similar approach to making such inquiries within the context of Nepalese municipalities is needed to comprehend the reality. To determine the level of citizen perceptions of municipal service quality, an instrument that empirically examines attitudes toward quality and satisfaction with municipal services is essential. The SERVPERF scale (Donnelly M., 1999), which is widely used, serves to evaluate the perceived quality of services. The citizen's charter, introduced in Nepal as one of the quality assurance strategies in the public sector, aims to enhance the quality of government service delivery, increase citizens' satisfaction, and improve the efficiency of the bureaucratic apparatus at the local level (Acharya, S., 2010). The effectiveness of the citizen's charter in delivering services and enhancing citizen satisfaction in the context of Sainamaina is an area that remains to be explored. Well-structured surveys can provide valuable information to make more informed decisions, formulate better policies, and offer services that are more responsive to citizen preferences and needs (Pokharel, T. et al., 2017).

Nepal is now divided into seven provinces, further subdivided into 293 urban municipalities and 460 rural municipalities. These newly established municipalities are larger in size and vested with greater authority, signifying their commitment to the people of Nepal. Local-level elections were held in three phases from May to September 2017, and provincial elections took place in November and December 2017 (Diagnostic Study, 2017).

Instrument for Survey

The data collection process utilized a structured questionnaire comprising three distinct parts. Part 1 focused on gathering demographic information about the respondents, including details such as name, gender, age,

educational level, and the frequency of their visits. Part 2 provided guidelines and instructions to the respondents. Part 3 contained 25 specific statements and questions designed to assess the respondents' perceptions of the service quality provided by the municipal council. In this study, the SERVQUAL scale, developed by Parasuraman et al. (Shiu, E., 1999), and the SERVPERF scale introduced by Cronin and Taylor (J. Joseph Cronin, 1994), were used in their entirety. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores on this scale signified a higher perception of service quality.

The final three questions in the questionnaire aimed to gather information regarding respondents' overall satisfaction with the services provided by the municipal council. Originally prepared in English, the questionnaire was translated into Nepali to ensure respondents' comprehension. The accuracy of this translation was verified during the questionnaire's pretesting stage. A pilot study involving 10 respondents from wards 3 and 4 was conducted to assess the instrument's appropriateness, the relevance of its items, and the language's level of difficulty for respondents when answering the questions. Based on the feedback received from the respondents during the pilot study, several modifications were made to the questions to enhance their clarity and understandability. Additionally, observations and interviews were conducted to gather supplementary information for the research.

Data Collection

The study was conducted with residents of Sainamaina, with the aim and purpose of the research being thoroughly explained to them. In Sainamaina municipality, the total number of households amounts to 12,392, and the population stands at 78,477 (source: http://citypopulation). The survey was conducted during the months of September and October in 2021 AD. A sample of 450 respondents was selected for the survey, with the assistance of field assistants who were students. Respondents who were literate were provided with the questionnaire and asked to complete it on the spot. Key individuals were also interviewed using a structured open-ended questionnaire. A combination of convenience and random sampling methods was employed in the survey.

To ensure better understanding among respondents, the questionnaire was administered in the Nepali language. While this may seem straightforward, it is essential to consider, as highlighted by Millar (as cited in Folz, 2010), that "one of the most common mistakes made in citizen surveys is asking the wrong people the right questions." Toavoid potential bias in responses stemming from immature political etiquette in the country, a deliberate process of inclusion and exclusion was undertaken.

Efforts were made to verify that respondents were genuine residents who frequently visited the Sainamaina municipal office. A total of 216 respondents were deemed suitable, while the rest were rejected based on criteria of validity and reliability. Consequently, the response rate for the survey was 60%, and of those, only 54% met the criteria for acceptance. It's worth noting that a significant challenge faced during the field survey was the constraint of limited financial resources due to the costly nature of this work.

Analytic Procedure

A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed to respondents, resulting in the collection of 270 completed questionnaires. Through a rigorous screening process, 216 of these questionnaires were considered valid, while the rest were rejected. IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 was employed to analyze the data from these 216 valid questionnaires.

The analysis encompassed several techniques:

- Descriptive statistical analysis was used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and to assess their perceptions of municipal service quality.
- Pearson correlation, Anova, and regression analysis were conducted to investigate correlations,

evaluate differences between groups, and identify factors influencing the outcomes.

 To ensure internal consistency and data normalcy, the Cronbach's reliability test and Q-plot analysis were applied.

Both primary and secondary data sources were utilized in this study, with the SERVPERF model serving as the framework for measuring service quality. The five dimensions of reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibles were employed as independent variables, while client satisfaction was the dependent variable. A typical 5-level Likert scale (with 5 indicating the highest level of satisfaction and 1 representing thelowest) was used to gauge the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

The collected data were entered and analyzed using statistical tools, with a significant reliance on SPSS 25 to generate the necessary outputs. In addition, the normalcy of the data distribution was assessed and found to be within acceptable levels. To ensure the reliability of the data, the Cronbach's alpha test, as introduced by Cronbach in 1951, was also conducted.

ANOVA

We used a one-way ANOVA for demographic variables of participants, including gender, age and educational attainment, and the results of our

Findings

Table: 1 Demographic Profile of the Sample

Characterist ics	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male Female	1	56%
		2	44%
		1	
		9	
		5	
Age	17 to 30yrs	5	23.1%
	31 to 59 yrs	0	69.9%
	60 and above	1	6.9%
		5	
		1	
		1	
		5	
Education	School education Upto 10	3	16.2%
	Upto 12	5	23.1%
	Diploma and above	5	31%
		0	29.7%
		6	
		7	
		6	
		4	

Frequencyof visit.	Onetime	0	2.3%
	Sometimes Frequently	5	28.%
		4	68.9%
		5	
		1	
		1	
		1	
WARDNO	Ward1Ward 2 Ward 3 Ward 4 Ward 5 Ward 6	2	12.5 %
	Ward 7 Ward 8 Ward 9 Ward 10	7	14.4 %
	Ward11	3	10.2%
		1	12%
		2	10.2 %
		2	06.5
		2	% 06
		6	%
		2	06.5 %
		2	07.4 %
		1	05.1 %
		4	09.3 %

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of the respondents' demographic profile. The sample consisted of 216 respondents of males (56%) and females (44%), with the largest age group between 31 to 59 years old (69.9%). Regarding the level of education, most of the respondents were 12 level standards of education (31%), whereas 29.7% had completed diploma level and above education, and 16.2 % had school level(literate). The majority of respondents 68.9 % were the frequent visitors who received service from the office of the municipality. 28% were reported to have taken services "some times" whereas 2.3% had experienced the service for the first time.

Dimensionality of Service Quality Service Reliability

As to examine the reliability of service and that sainamaina office perform its intended function adequately, we take into consideration the promised service, problem solving, timely service, and error free works. To assess the municipal ability to perform service in a reliable way, 5 questions were included in the questionnaire and represented as REL1, REL2, REL3, REL4, REL5.

In the service dimension of reliability, the mean score is found 3.03 with S.D 0.81 and r = 0.453. Most of the citizens felt that municipal is not providing services as promised. Service seekers state that they had to go time and again to get the work done. Citizens claimed that the problems are not addressed properly by the municipal office. only a small portion (26.1%) of our respondents reported that they are served well in time by the municipal. However, 51% of respondents agreed that office maintain good records and services are error free.

Responsiveness

Responsiveness: The willingness of municipality to help service seekers, such as service information (RES6), quick response to service (RES 7), willing to help (RES8) and complaint handling (RES9) to public are referred to as Responsiveness. The responsiveness variables are denoted as RES 6, RES7, RES8 and RES9 and Altogether 4 questions were included in the questionnaire. The Municipal employees are found

responsive towards the provision of service information. The mean score is 3.05 with S.D of 0.74 and correlation coefficient (r) =0.615. The relative importance of this dimension as indicated by Standardized Beta Coefficients (β =.44; p<.001) and is evident that it has the strongest impact on satisfaction.

Assurance dimension

The assessment of employees' behavior towards clients, confidence, courteous and knowledge of employees of sainamaina municipality and their ability to inspire trust and instill confidence in public is termed as assurance. To measure the citizens' perception, 4 questions were included in the questionnaire and represented as ASS10, ASS11, ASS12, and ASS13. Significant portion in our study sample ie 52.2% of the respondents perceived that the employees at the municipal office are courteous while providing service to the clients. Citizens perceived that employees in the municipal are able to convey trust and instill confidence. It was found that employees had ability to inspire and they are aware of the citizen's problems. The mean score of Assurance dimension is found 3.26 with S.D 0.37 and Correlation coefficient r = 0.37. This factor is found having no impact in the service seeker satisfaction.

Empathy

To what extent the municipal care the service receivers and provide individualized attention is referred to as empathy. in order to assess the empathy as one of the service quality dimension of service seekers satisfaction, 4 questions were intended in questionnaire and which represented indiscriminate service (EMP14), client best interest (EMP15), understand clients need (EMP16), and conveniently available staffs (EMP17).

The analysis of data found service receivers perceived that they are not treated fairly and equally and feel discriminated in the service provision of the municipality. Significant number of people ie 55.3% do not agree that individual attention and care provided by service provider to the clients. Citizens feel that municipal does not understand the needs of the service receivers. The mean score of this dimension is 2.94 which is the lowest among the five variables. Empathy is found to have high association with client satisfaction ie r = 0.52.

Tangibles

To check the citizens perception towards the appearance of physical facilities and equipment (TAN 18), office building (TAN 19) personnel (TAN 19) and placement of equipment and materials (TAN 21), 4 questions were included in the questionnaire and represented as TAN18, TAN19, TAN20, TAN21. The mean score of tangible variable is calculated as 3.50 and SD 0.74 with correlation coefficient (r) =.423. Remarkable numbers of the service seekersi.e 59.7% (TAN18) responded that municipal office is attractive. The professional appearance of the employees (TAN19), most of the respondents ie74.1 % indicated that employees look professional and attractive and in contrast a small portion of respondentsi.e 2.8 % remarked that staffs are not professional. In study 43% (TAN21) observed that materials and things are in the right place.

Service Seekers Satisfaction

To determine the overall client satisfaction, we had collected the responses as represented by SSS 22, SSS 23 and SSS24. The overall client satisfaction Mean score is calculated as 3.41 with S.D 0.63 and significantly correlated with all the service quality dimensions. When asked as what opinion they hold about and how they ranked sainamaina overall, about 51.4 % responded "Good" and 11.5% indicated as "Very Good". Most of the service seekers are found satisfied with the municipal office. About 19.4% are found dissatisfied and 1.9% as very dissatisfied with the municipal.

Correlations of the Perceived Quality Dimensions and Satisfaction

A Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to determine the amount of association between the studied variables. It was observed that all Servicequality variables correlated in a positive and significant manner with satisfaction significantly (p < .001). The analysis indicated a high correlation between satisfaction and responsiveness (r = .615), followed by empathy (r = .522), reliability (r = .453), tangibility (r = .423) and assurance (r = .347).

Service Quality Dimension and its Impact

As the sample size used for the study is not large, it is considered to use regression analysis to test the impacting service factors on client satisfaction. The adjusted R square is .393 which depicts that independent variable define dependent variable by 39.3%. There is no case of Multicollinearity as VIF is less than 10. The table 4 below shows the stepwise regression.

Statistics on variables that entered the regression equation and that, collectively explained the portions of the variance in the dependent variable are summarized in Table above. The overall F-test for the final regression model was significant (F =28.89, p < .001), with five service quality dimensions entered the resulting equation: Reliability (β = .105, p < .001), Responsiveness (β = .446, p < .001), Empathy (β = .177) and assurance (β = -.019, p<.001). The explanatory power of this model, as reported by the adjusted R2 value was .393, suggesting that 39.3 percent of the variability in the subjects' overall satisfaction was predicted by the service quality dimensions. This effect size can be considered as significant. The relative importance of the service quality dimensions was indicated by their Standardized Beta Coefficients.

The coefficients value shows that Responsiveness with 38.1% and Empathy with 12.7% and reliability with 8.2% are the better predictors of citizens satisfaction. Responsiveness with p-value 0.000 less than 0.005 suggests that sainamaina municipal inform about the services, willing to help and respond to the citizens enquiries. Responsiveness and Empathy are significantly correlated to service seeker satisfaction. However, Reliability, Assurance and tangibility are the least predicting variable for satisfaction. It has p-value more than 0.005 suggest, don't have significantrelationship with satisfaction, whereas Assurance with coefficient value of -0.19 is a negative predictor of satisfaction. Therefore, based on above result, the following equation can be formulated:

$$Y = b0 + b1 X1 + b2 X2 + ... + bnXn S = 1.643 + 0.381(RES) + 0.127(EMP)$$

Where,

S= Satisfaction, RES= Responsiveness, EMP= Empathy

Table 2: Stepwise Regression

Model	Predictor	Bcoefficient	Beta(β)	t-value	p-value	F-ratio	Adj stedR2
1	Consistant	2.347	0	15.724	0.000	55.26	0.202
	Reliability	0.353	0.453	7.434	0.000		
	Constant	1.627		10.289	0.000	68.81	0.384
2	Reliability	0.115	0.147	2.249	0.026		
	Responsiveness	0.453	0.530	8.104	0.000		
	Constant	1.589		8.306	0.000	45.73	0.387
	Reliability	0.110	0.141	2.076	0.039		
3	Responsiveness	0.446	0.522	7.575	0.000		
	Assurance	0.23	0.230	0.358	0.721		
	Constant	1.643		8.608	0.000	36.28	0.396
	Reliability	0.082	0.105	1.515	0.000		
4	Responsiveness	0.381	0.446	5.879	0.000		

	Assurance	0.019	0.19	0.288	0.01		
	Empathy	0.127	0.177	2.283	0.03		
5	Constant	1.643		8.0104	0.000	28.890	0.393
	Reliability	0.082	0.105	1.435	0.007		
	Responsiveness	0.381	0.446	5.750	0.000		
	Assurance	-0.019	-0.19	0.285	0.776		
	Empathy	0.127	0.177	2.226	0.002		
	Tangibility	0	0.000	0.001	1.000		

Note: t-value > 1.64, p < 0.1; t-value > 1.96,

To test for the possible presence of multicollinearity problem, a correlation matrix was run among the five independent variables. The intercorrelations among the five independent variables found ranging from 0.317 to 0.665. Thus, it was concluded that there were no high intercorrelations existed among these variables. However, the absence of high correlation does not imply lack of collinearity because the correlation matrix may not reveal collinear relationships involving more than two variables.

Therefore, the tolerance values of the independent variables were assessed number while the regression analysis was run using the conventional tolerance value of 0.1 as the cut-off point for high multicollinearity. The analysis showed that all independent variables in the regression equation had high tolerance values ranging from 0.469 to 0.667.

We used a one-way ANOVA for demographic variables of participants, including gender, age and educational attainment, and the results of our ANOVA indicated no significant difference in the sample mean regarding age, gender, educational level and satisfaction.

Conclusions

In this comprehensive study assessing municipal service quality in Sainamaina, several significant findings emerged:

- Reliability of Services: A notable portion of citizens expressed dissatisfaction with the municipal services'
 reliability. Many reported needing to make repeated visits to get their work done, indicating a disconnect
 between the service promises and delivery. Moreover, concerns were raised regarding the municipal
 office's ability to address problems adequately.
- **Responsiveness:** While the citizens acknowledged that the municipal employees were responsive in providing service information, the overall mean score for this dimension suggests room for improvement. The provision of prior information about services was generally appreciated, highlighting a positive aspect of service delivery.
- Assurance: The citizens had a positive perception of the employees at the municipal office in terms of
 their courtesy and ability to convey trust and confidence. This aspect of assurance was generally wellreceived by the service seekers.
- Empathy and Fair Treatment: On the downside, many citizens felt they were not treated fairly and
 equally. A significant percentage of respondents believed that individual attention and care were lacking in
 service provision, indicating perceived discrimination and a lack of understanding of service receivers'
 needs.
- Tangibility and Infrastructure: Sainamaina Municipality received praise for its tangible aspects and infrastructure, including the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and technologies. The well-equipped and attractive appearance of the municipal office was appreciated by the service seekers.

- Overall Client Satisfaction: The study's overall client satisfaction was measured with a mean score of 3.41, indicating a generally positive response. Around 51.4% of respondents rated the services as "Good," and 11.5% considered them "Very Good." This suggests that most service seekers are satisfied with the services provided by Sainamaina Municipal Office.
- **Regression Model:** The regression model showed a significant overall F-test (F = 28.89, p < .001), with five service quality dimensions included in the equation: Reliability, Responsiveness, Empathy, and Assurance. The adjusted R-squared value was 0.393, indicating that 39.3% of the variability in overall satisfaction was predicted by these service quality dimensions. Responsiveness had the strongest impact on satisfaction (β = .44, p < .001), followed by Empathy (β = .177, p < .001).
- In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the quality of municipal services in Sainamaina. While some dimensions of service quality, such as tangibility and assurance, received positive feedback, there is room for improvement in reliability, fairness, and responsiveness. The findings emphasize the significance of these service quality dimensions in influencing overall client satisfaction. Addressing the areas that need enhancement can lead to more satisfied and content service receivers and contribute to the improvement of municipal services.

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