

The Double-Edged Sword of Influencer Marketing: Insights from Skincare and Makeup Brands

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing has become a dominant promotional strategy in the skincare and makeup industry. Study shown that influencer marketing relies on the psychological effect of social proof, whereby individuals tend to imitate some behavior or preference in individuals with whom they can identify. However, questions remain, does the investment truly pay off? While a viral post can boost brand visibility, attract new customers, and increase profits, influencer campaigns also carry risks, including controversies, financial losses, and potential damage to brand reputation. This study examines the effects of influencer marketing by analyzing how influencer credibility, perceived authenticity, customer trust, perceived negative and brand image. This finding highlights the double-edged nature of influencer marketing where convenience-driven engagement must be balanced with authenticity to maintain customer trust. Data were obtained from 160 respondents and examined to evaluate the proposed hypothesis.

Keywords: Brand Image; Consumer Perception; Influencer Marketing; Make Up Brands; Skincare Brands; Social Media.

INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing has rapidly transformed the digital context, especially within the skincare and makeup industry. Today, users commonly encounter influencer-generated promotional content across social media platforms that reveals influencers unboxing or showcasing their “holy grail” routines. Beauty content has become so widespread that many individuals aspire to become influencers themselves, eager to review and promote cosmetic products. A single enthusiastic review from a trusted creator can boost sales almost overnight, demonstrating the powerful impact of digital marketing on consumer purchasing decisions (Lim et al., 2025; Kee et al., 2025). Grounded in the principles of Social Network (SN) theory (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Granovetter, 1973; Gulati, 1998; Granovetter, 1983), examine that the behaviors and characteristics of influencers that encourage followers to migrate to the brand’s social network.

As a result, brands are investing billions into influencer partnerships, hoping to capitalize on this modern “gold rush” of online visibility and engagement. Despite the widespread use of influencer marketing, many beauty brands struggle with consumer skepticism toward paid endorsement. Not all reviews are authentic, paid, scripted, or exaggerated, creating an illusion of popularity rather than genuine consumer trust. This raises concerns about the long-term effectiveness of influencer-driven promotions, as authenticity and transparency are increasingly critical in shaping consumer behavior (Kee et al., 2024a; Nair et al., 2021).

While previous studies examine the effectiveness of honest influencer content can strengthen brand credibility, excessive reliance on paid endorsements may backfire and damage consumer trust. Influencer marketing is, therefore, a double-edged sword. For every brand that succeeds through influencer content, another struggles due to forced endorsements, inauthentic messaging, or campaigns that fail to resonate with audiences. Misaligned sponsorships, gimmicky product pushes, or influencer apologies after controversial promotions can diminish brand reputation. The challenge lies in balancing the “pros”, such as increased visibility and engagement, with the “cons,” including skepticism, content fatigue, and perceived dishonesty (Ganatra et al., 2021).

Today, social media is no longer a novel phenomenon, it has become deeply embedded in everyday life and organizational practices. However, its pervasive use represents a double-edged sword, offering significant benefits while simultaneously posing notable risks and challenges (Anwar et al., 2022a, 2022b; Kee et al., 2022; Lok et al., 2024; Teh & Kee, 2021; Xia et al., 2025). Basically, this study aims to analyze both the advantages and disadvantages of influencer marketing in the beauty industry, with a particular focus on skincare and makeup brands active on social media platforms such as Instagram for micro influencers. Most prior studies examine TikTok (Nair et al., 2022) or macro influencers.

Beyond merely assessing the current landscape, this research seeks to develop practical recommendations for brands to attract consumers organically, authentically, and sustainably. The significance of this study lies in its potential to guide brands on how transparency, genuine engagement, and strategic influencer partnerships can promote long-term consumer trust and loyalty. Therefore, this study aims to examine the advantages and disadvantages of influencer marketing in the skincare and makeup industry by identifying key factors that influence customer trust and satisfaction. This research also contributes to the influencer marketing literature by highlighting the conditions under which influencer campaigns enhance or undermine consumer confidence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influencer Marketing, Consumer Trust, and Brand Loyalty

Influencer marketing has become one of the most powerful digital strategies for skincare and makeup brands to strengthen visibility, build trust, and enhance long-term customer loyalty. Consumers often perceive social media influencers as more relatable, authentic, and trustworthy than traditional advertising, making influencer recommendations highly persuasive (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). This authenticity creates a strong sense of trust between influencers and their followers, increasing the likelihood of positive brand evaluations. When influencers provide honest reviews or demonstrate real product usage, it reinforces brand credibility and can significantly improve consumer trust and loyalty (Kee et al., 2025; Ruiz et al., 2020). However, trust can be easily damaged. Excessive promotional content, insincere endorsements, or exaggerated claims may lead to consumer skepticism toward both the influencer and the brand. Prior research highlights that customer trust is a critical driver of brand loyalty, and once trust is compromised, consumers may disengage from the brand altogether (Lew et al., 2025; Liang et al., 2023). As influencer marketing evolves from celebrity endorsements to everyday individuals with strong digital influence, credibility and authenticity become essential factors that determine whether influencer marketing brings positive or negative brand outcomes (Abbasi et al., 2024; Kee et al., 2024b). Brands that maintain transparency and communicate genuine value are more likely to build sustainable customer loyalty, a competitive advantage that is increasingly important in the digital marketplace (Xia et al., 2025). Based on the above, it is hypothesized:

H1: Influencer credibility has a positive influence on customer trust

Influencer credibility is a key factor in determining consumer trust in beauty products, according to Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). Credibility encompasses perceived expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, which together form persuasive strength in digital endorsements. Through regular content sharing and interactive communication with followers, influencers foster relational closeness and authenticity in contrast to traditional celebrity endorsements (Freberg et al., 2011). This parasocial connection lessens skepticism about promoted goods and raises perceived sincerity. Empirical studies demonstrate that consumers are more likely to trust skincare recommendations from influencers who transparently share product experience, demonstrate ingredients, and provide honest reviews (Hudders et al., 2021; Jin & Muqaddam, 2022). As trust is a primary determinant of perceived product risk and purchase confidence in the beauty industry, especially for skincare items applied directly on the skin, influencer credibility becomes a key driver of consumer trust. Thus, we hypothesize that higher influencer credibility positively influences customer trust toward beauty brands.

H2: Perceived effectiveness of influencers positively influences customers' purchasing behavior.

Influencers have become one of the main sources influencing consumers' purchasing behavior in this digital globalization. Prior studies indicate that consumers tend to trust and follow influencers whom they perceive as authentic as those who appear genuine, transparent, and consistent with their values. According to Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), individuals are more likely to model behaviors from people they admire and perceive as authentic especially influencers. When consumers view influencers as authentic, they are more likely to try their recommendations and not think too much about their purchasing decisions. Furthermore, based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986),

perceived authenticity can enhance message processing through the central route, leading to stronger attitude formation and purchase intentions. Therefore, authenticity plays a role in shaping consumers' purchasing behavior.

H3: Authenticity in influencer content contributes to the development of a positive brand image among consumers.

Authenticity is a key determinant of successful influencer marketing. Consumers tend to connect with influencers who communicate transparently and share genuine experiences rather than scripted advertisements. According to Audrezet et al. (2020), authenticity fosters emotional attachment between the influencer, the brand, and the audience. This will lead to a stronger brand image because many people would like to try it. Within the beauty sector, influencers who demonstrate product usage sincerely and give honest reviews contribute to the perception of brands as credible and relatable influencers. Furthermore, authenticity creates a sense of trust. When influencers consistently show genuine enthusiasm, use products in their daily lives and express honest feedback, audiences perceive their recommendations as more reliable. This helps brands establish long-term loyalty and a positive reputation among consumers. Brand integrity, transparency and social responsibility are aspects that make consumers purchase from the brand. Hence, authentic influencer content not only improves credibility but also strengthens brand image and consumer trust over time.

H4: Over-commercialization decreased the consumer confidence towards the endorsed brand.

Excessive commercialization could potentially stimulate customer skepticism. When there are too many products reviewed by the same influencer, it shows that their motives are not honest. Consumer confidence in both the influencer and the associated brands tends to fall. According to Evans et al. (2017) and Lou & Yuan (2019), over-commercialization undermines the perceived authenticity of influencer content by decreasing persuasiveness. This may lead the consumers, especially those in the beauty industry, where trust and relatability are important, to question the credibility of the product endorsements. Consumers will start to doubt if the influencer promotes too many brands in a day. While it should actually be the opposite, as much as influencers concentrate on paid collaboration rather than recommending products, audiences perceive their content is just to gain profit and satisfy their passion, not really to help the followers. This perception might create negative attitudes towards both the influencer and the brand. Over time, this can lower the engagement rate and undermine the authority of the influencer, damaging brand reputation. Thus, commercial partnerships and genuine storytelling relationships are important for balance to keep consumer confidence and long-term marketing effectiveness.

Figure 1 presents our research model. **Figure 1** illustrates the proposed research framework, which examines the effects of influencer credibility, authenticity, effectiveness, trust, brand image and over-commercialization on customer satisfaction. The framework reflects the double-edged nature of influencer marketing, whereby positive attributes enhance satisfaction, while excessive commercialization diminishes consumer confidence.

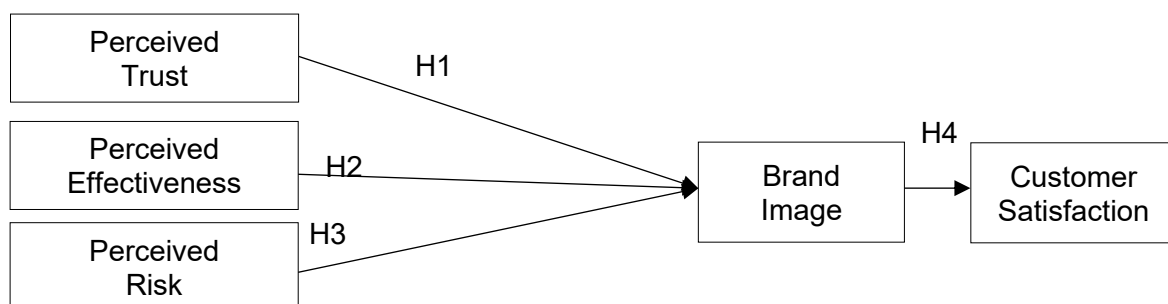


Figure 1 Research Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

Data were collected through an online survey administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire targeted individuals with exposure to influencer marketing in the skincare and makeup context. To enhance reach and diversity of responses, the survey link was disseminated through social media platforms, including WhatsApp and Telegram. A total of **160 usable responses** were obtained and retained for analysis. Data were analysed using reliability testing and multiple regression analysis.

Measures

All constructs were measured using established scales adapted to the context of influencer marketing in the beauty industry. Unless otherwise stated, respondents indicated their agreement using Likert-type scales. Reliability for each construct was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Exposure to influencer content was measured using a four-point frequency scale (Never, Sometimes, Often, Always), which is appropriate for capturing behavioral frequency without a neutral midpoint (Kankaraš & Capecchi, 2024). Items assessed both exposure and behavioral engagement with influencer content. Sample items included: "How often do you see influencer posts about skincare or makeup on social media?" "How often do you watch or read product reviews by influencers before buying?" "How often do you purchase a product because of an influencer's recommendation?" and "In the last three months, how many times have you bought skincare or makeup products because of influencer content?" These items captured general exposure, pre-purchase information search, conversion from awareness to action, and recent purchasing behavior.

Trust and Credibility of Influencers were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, adapted from Lock and Seele (2017). The scale assessed perceptions of influencer authenticity, transparency, and expertise. Sample items included: "I trust influencers who use the product in their daily routine more than those who only post advertisements." "I find influencers' product reviews to be honest and genuine." "Influencers who disclose paid sponsorships are more trustworthy." "I am more likely to trust influencers who have professional expertise in skincare or makeup." and "I check other sources before buying after seeing an influencer's recommendation." The scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.628$).

Perceived effectiveness was measured using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) to assess respondents' evaluations of influencer marketing outcomes for brands (Ünalmiş et al., 2024). Sample items included: "Influencer posts increase my awareness of new skincare or makeup brands." "I remember brands more easily when influencers repeatedly promote them." "Influencer marketing increases my intention to purchase a product." "I believe brands receive good value from paying influencers." And

“Influencer campaigns help brands connect better with younger consumers.” The scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.685$).

Perceived risk and negative perceptions associated with influencer marketing were measured using a five-point Likert scale (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Items reflected concerns regarding credibility, overclaiming, reputational spillover, and overexposure. Sample items included: “I worry that influencers sometimes make false or exaggerated claims about products.” “Paid promotion posts feel less genuine than unpaid content.” “If an influencer is involved in a controversy, I would consider avoiding the brands they promote.” “Influencers often make beauty products sound like they will work perfectly for all skin types, which feels unrealistic.” and “Excessive influencer promotions make a brand appear less authentic.” This construct exhibited strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.752$).

Brand fit and long-term brand image were measured using a five-point Likert scale adapted from prior research on influencer–brand congruence (Kilumile et al., 2025). Sample items included: “I prefer influencers whose image matches the brand’s image.” “If an influencer continuously endorses a skincare or makeup brand, I am more likely to perceive the brand as established and reliable.” “Brands with long-term influencer partnerships appear more committed to product quality.” “I am more likely to follow a skincare or makeup brand that is consistently associated with a trusted influencer.” “Seeing influencers promote many competing skincare or makeup products makes me doubt the effectiveness of any of them.” These items captured perceived congruence, signaling effects of long-term partnerships, brand credibility, and skepticism toward excessive endorsements. The scale demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.784$).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Most respondents were between 16 and 20 years old, accounting for 38.1% of the sample. The sample was predominantly female (78.8%), with males representing 21.3%. In terms of occupation, students constituted the largest group (62.5%), followed by a small proportion of unemployed respondents (7.5%). With respect to monthly spending, nearly half of the respondents reported expenditures in the range of RM50 to RM100 (47.5%), whereas a smaller segment reported spending above RM250 (9.4%).

Table 1: Respondents’ Profile (N=160)

Response	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	126	78.8
	Male	34	21.3
Age	16-20	61	38.1
	21-25	54	33.8
	26-30	15	9.4
	31-40	16	10.0
	Above 40	14	8.8
Occupation	Student	100	62.5

	Unemployed	12	7.5
	Working adult	48	30.0
Monthly spend	Above RM250	15	9.4
	RM151-RM250	18	11.3
	RM50-RM100	76	47.5
	Below RM50	51	31.9

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics, measures of reliability, and zero-order correlations among the study variables. All tested variables demonstrate high levels of reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.62 to 0.78.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, and Zero-order Correlations for All Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
Trust	0.628			
Perceived Effectiveness	0.333**	0.685		
Perceived Risk	0.344**	0.496**	0.752	
Brand Image	0.439**	0.543**	0.628**	0.784
Number of Items	3	5	5	5
Mean	4.70	2.57	2.50	2.54
Standard Deviation	1.18	0.96	0.91	0.98

*Note: N=160, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. The diagonal entries represent Cronbach's coefficient alpha*

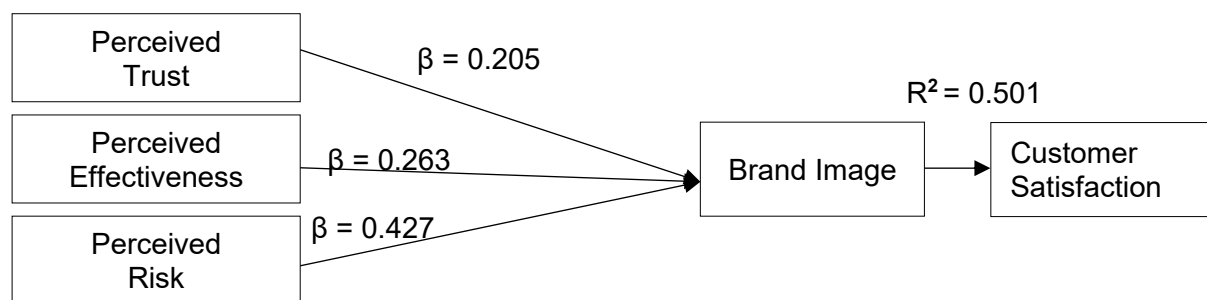
Table 3. Regression Analysis

Brand Image Level towards Influencer Review (R² change = 0.501)		Beta
Trust		0.205**
Perceived Effectiveness		0.263***
Perceived Risk		0.427**

*Note: N=160, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.*

The results of the regression analysis are presented in **Table 3**, examining the relationship between Brand Image and several independent variables: Perceived Trust, Perceived Effectiveness and Perceived Risk. The R² value of 0.501 suggests that 50.1% of the variance in the brand image affect from influencer review that can be explained by Perceived Risk. Perceived Risk has the strongest influence on customer satisfaction (0.427***). Perceived Effectiveness and Trust has a significant direct effect on brand image (0.263***) and (0.205**) Overall, the model highlights the critical role of Perceived Risk in driving Brand Image, while identifying the lesser contributions of other variables. The summarized output of the hypothesized model is illustrated in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2. Hypothesized Model



DISCUSSION

The results of this study significantly contribute to understanding customer experience and satisfaction towards influencer review, using skincare and make up as a case study. This section discusses the findings in relation to existing literature and research hypotheses. This study offers a unique insight into what the 'double-edged sword' of influencer marketing might look like by specifically identifying which factors are at play in relation to customer satisfaction.

Perceived Trust and Its Impacts

The study reveals a strong relationship between perceived trust and brand image (H1) which subsequently influences customer satisfaction. Trust is particularly critical in online platforms where physical interaction is absent, as consumers rely on influencers' credibility and honesty. According to Mayer et. Al. (1995), trust is defined as "the willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a specific action important to the trustor. In the context of influencer marketing, higher perceived trust reduces uncertainty, fosters positive consumer perceptions, and enhances confidence in product recommendations. As a result, consumers are more likely to interact with their favorite brands that leading to greater user engagement and leading to higher levels of satisfaction.

Perceived Effectiveness and Its Importance

Perceived effectiveness plays an important role in determining how influencer reviews shape consumer perception and brand image. When influencer content is perceived as effective in delivering clear, accurate, and relevant information, consumers are able to evaluate products and make purchase decisions. Effective influence reviews enhance consumers' understanding of product benefits and usage and strengthening brand image and customer satisfaction. When consumers perceive influencer content as genuinely helpful rather than purely promotional, they are more likely to develop perception towards the brands. In addition, perceived effectiveness strengthens the persuasive power of influencer marketing by increasing consumers' engagement. As a result, effective influencer communication not solely improves consumers' evaluation of the product but also enhances their overall satisfaction with the brand and increase the reputation of the brand.

The Role of Perceived Risk

The study confirms that perceived risk has a negative impact on brand image and customer satisfaction (H3 and H4). High levels of perceived risk, such as concerns about misleading information, product quality or exaggerated claims, can reduce consumers' trust in influencers and brands. Waller et al. (2005) highlights that controversial advertisements can offend or alienate certain customer segments, potentially damaging brand reputation and consumer loyalty. This alienation can lead to boycotts or negative

word-of-mouth, undermining the brand's market position (Goh et al., 2013). Additionally, perceived risk can discourage repeat purchases and long-term brand loyalty. Consumers who experience dissatisfaction due to high perceived risk may engage by negative assumptions, particularly through social media platforms that can affect brand reputation. Therefore, managing perceived risk is essential for brands to maintain positive customer satisfaction and sustainable influencer marketing strategies.

Brand Image and Customer Satisfaction

Brand image plays a crucial role in shaping customer satisfaction, as positive brand perceptions enhance consumers' overall evaluation of products and services. Influencer reviews contribute significantly to brand image by shaping consumers' beliefs and expectations. When influencers successfully communicate trustworthy, effective, and low-risk information, a favorable brand image is formed, which in turn leads to higher customer satisfaction. This finding aligns with existing literature suggesting that a strong brand image acts as a mediator between marketing communication and customer satisfaction.

Practical Implications

This study offers several practical implications for marketers and brands operating in the skincare and makeup industry. Firstly, strengthening perceived trust should be a key priority by collaborating with credible and authentic influencers. Secondly, brands should focus on improving the effectiveness of influencer content by ensuring that reviews are informative, transparent, and aligned with actual product performance. Additionally, reducing perceived risk through honest disclosures, clear product information, and realistic demonstrations can help improve brand image and customer satisfaction. Overall, these strategies can enhance the long-term effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns

Theoretical Implications

This study offers actionable insights for influencer marketing in makeup and skincare industry to enhance customer satisfaction and brand image in long term period by implementing several key strategies. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the influencer marketing and consumer behavior literature by highlighting the combined roles of perceived trust, effectiveness, risk, and brand image in shaping customer satisfaction. Firstly, strengthening perceived trust is essential. Additionally, improving effectiveness is vital for creating a seamless user experience. The findings extend existing theories such as Social Influence Theory and Social Learning Theory by emphasizing that consumers are more influenced by trusted and effective sources while being cautious of perceived risks. This study also provides empirical support for the importance of perceptual factors in explaining customer satisfaction in digital and social media contexts.

CONCLUSION

This research gives an all-rounded insight into the factors that affect customers' experiences and satisfaction with regard to towards influencer review, using skincare and make up as a case study. The results highlight perceived trust, perceived effectiveness, perceived risk and brand image significantly influence user perceptions and behaviors.

This study underlines the importance of perceived trust in customer experience and satisfaction. These factors minimize user uncertainty and build confidence in the platform. When consumers perceive influencers as credible and reliable, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards the brand and feel satisfied with the

information received. In contrast, perceived risk negatively influences customer experience and satisfaction, as concerns over misleading information or exaggerated claims increase skepticism and reduce consumers' confidence in influencer content.

Furthermore, perceived effectiveness contributes to improved consumer understanding and evaluation of products, strengthening brand image and overall satisfaction. A positive brand image, shaped through trustworthy, effective, and low-risk influencer communication, ultimately enhances customer satisfaction and supports favorable consumer perceptions towards the brand.

Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of managing trust, effectiveness, and perceived risk in influencer marketing strategies to improve customer satisfaction and brand image. The findings offer valuable insights for marketers and brands seeking to optimize influencer collaborations and strengthen long-term relationships with consumers in the competitive skincare and makeup industry.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample size was limited to 160 respondents, and most of the participants were students aged between 16 and 20 years. Due to this, the results may not fully represent the opinions and experiences of other demographic groups such as working adults, older consumers, or individuals with different income levels. The focus on a younger age group may influence the findings, as younger consumers may have different attitudes toward influencer marketing compared to other groups. Second, the study relied on self-reported data collected through questionnaires. This method may lead to response bias, as respondents might provide answers that they consider socially acceptable rather than their true thoughts or experiences. In addition, some respondents may have misunderstood certain questions, which could affect the accuracy of the data and the reliability of the results. Also the majority gender is comes from female. Finally, this study examined only selected variables, including trust, perceived effectiveness, perceived risk, and brand image. Other factors that may influence customer experience and satisfaction, such as content quality, or frequency of exposure were not included.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the study, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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