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Child Labor in the Digital Era: A Study of Children Working as Content Creators in Indonesia

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Abstract: Child Labor in the Digital Era: A Study of Children Working as Content Creators in Indonesia. This study aims to analyze the legal status and forms of legal protection for children working as content creators in the digital era in Indonesia. The increasing involvement of children in digital content production activities that generate economic value has created new legal issues, particularly regarding their classification as child workers and the potential for exploitation. This research uses a normative legal method with statutory and conceptual approaches through the analysis of national regulations and relevant international legal instruments. The results show that children's activities as content creators substantively fulfill the elements of employment because they are structured, repetitive, and generate economic benefits. However, Indonesian positive law has not specifically recognized or regulated this type of work, resulting in a legal vacuum. Legal protection for child content creators requires limitations on work activities, proper income management, privacy protection, and the strengthening of the roles of the state, parents, and digital platforms. The study concludes that adaptive legal reform is urgently needed to provide legal certainty and optimal protection for children in the digital era.

Keyword: Child Labor, Content Creator, Legal Protection, Digital Era

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to various aspects of human life, particularly in the patterns of work and children's economic participation.(Clark & Jno-Charles, 2025) In the current digital era, children are no longer merely media consumers but have also become active content producers across various platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. This phenomenon has given rise to the term "kidfluencer," referring to children who work as content creators with the potential to generate economic income. In many cases, kidfluencer activities involve structured work processes, including content production, schedule management, and commercial collaborations with well-known brands. This condition reflects a transformation of child labor from conventional informal sectors into the digital sector.(Aldiansyah & Ronaboyd, 2025)

However, unlike traditional forms of child labor, these digital activities are often not perceived as “work” because they are viewed primarily as entertainment. Consequently, such practices frequently escape regulatory attention and legal supervision. Therefore, this situation raises a fundamental question regarding whether such activities may be categorized as a new form of child labor in the digital era (Novianty & Rachmawati, 2020).

From a normative perspective (*das sollen*), various national and international legal instruments emphasize the importance of protecting children from economic exploitation. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and national regulations in Indonesia underline that children must be protected from work that may interfere with their physical, mental, and social development (Rizki Gusti & Wardani, 2023). Furthermore, Indonesian labor and child protection laws establish clear limitations regarding minimum working age and permissible forms of employment. In principle, children should not be involved in exploitative or profit-oriented work activities. Nevertheless, these regulations were fundamentally designed to regulate conventional forms of labor. The rapid development of digital technology has created a legal gray area that has not been fully accommodated within the existing legal framework. As a result, there is a discrepancy between prevailing legal norms and actual practices (Sukma & Ruslan, 2025). This condition reflects a gap between *das sollen* and *das sein* within the scope of digital child labor.

From an empirical perspective (*das sein*), various studies indicate that children who become content creators are continuously involved in repetitive content production processes. Research demonstrates that kidfluencer activities involve emotional labor, creative work, and significant performative pressure (Amandha et al., 2022). In addition, parental involvement in managing children’s accounts raises concerns regarding control, income ownership, and the potential for exploitation. In Indonesia, this phenomenon has developed rapidly alongside the increasing penetration of social media and the digital economy (Diniati et al., 2022). However, such practices are often perceived merely as family activities or forms of creative expression. In reality, there are indications that these activities possess characteristics similar to those found within the entertainment industry (Abidin, 2017). This condition demonstrates that child labor in the digital era possesses dimensions that are more intricate than traditional forms of child labor. Therefore, a more comprehensive analysis is required to clearly capture these dimensions.

Furthermore, existing literature demonstrates that regulations concerning digital child labor remain highly limited and insufficiently adaptive to technological developments. This is reflected in the fact that child protection within the influencer industry continues to face significant challenges, particularly regarding the definition of work and the boundaries of exploitation (Putri et al., 2025). At the same time, there is a regulatory vacuum within the Asia-Pacific region, including Indonesia, concerning the governance of child influencers. Other studies further indicate that digital platforms do not yet possess policies specifically designed to protect children as workers. This issue is exacerbated by the flexible and informal nature of digital labor, which makes supervision and monitoring increasingly difficult. Such conditions demonstrate the urgent need to reconsider the concept of child labor in the digital era. Without an adequate regulatory framework, children remain vulnerable to forms of invisible exploitation.

Based on these conditions, there is a clear research gap in the study of child labor in the digital era, particularly within the Indonesian setting. Most existing studies continue to focus on child labor within traditional sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and other informal industries. Meanwhile, studies concerning children working as content creators in the digital era remain relatively limited and fragmented. Previous research has generally discussed legal or ethical aspects separately without integrating social, economic, and cultural dimensions. In fact, Indonesia’s social, legal, and cultural characteristics play a significant

role in shaping kidfluencer practices (Ariyanti & Ramadhan, 2023). Therefore, research capable of addressing this legal vacuum is urgently required. The novelty of this study lies in its examination of digital child labor from legal, social, and economic perspectives simultaneously. This research does not merely regard content creator activities as a phenomenon of digital culture but also as a form of labor with the potential to violate child protection laws. Moreover, this study specifically focuses on Indonesia, which possesses unique dynamics in the development of the digital economy. This research also seeks to reconceptualize the definition of child labor within the digital sphere. Accordingly, this study offers a new perspective in understanding the transformation of child labor in the digital era. This novelty is expected to provide a foundation for the development of more adaptive policies (Nur et al., 2025).

This study has several limitations. The limited availability of empirical data regarding the number and conditions of children working as content creators in Indonesia constitutes a significant challenge. Furthermore, the private and non-transparent nature of digital labor complicates the data collection process. This study is also unable to encompass all variations of platforms and types of content involving children. In addition, the continuously evolving nature of technology means that the findings of this research may rapidly become outdated. Another limitation concerns the potential bias in data interpretation, which depends upon the researcher's perspective. Despite these limitations, this study seeks to provide valid and meaningful analysis. Moreover, this research possesses both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of the concept of child labor by incorporating digital dimensions. Practically, it may serve as a foundation for policymakers in formulating regulations that are more adaptive to technological developments. Thus, this research is not only academically relevant but also socially significant. Ultimately, this study is expected to serve as an initial foundation for building a more child-friendly digital ecosystem.

Based on the foregoing background, this study examines two main research problems, namely the legal status of children working as content creators and the forms of legal protection available for child workers serving as content creators in the digital era. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to analyze the legal status of child content creators and to examine the forms of legal protection that should be provided to children engaged in digital content creation activities in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employs a normative legal research method, namely research that focuses on the analysis of applicable legal norms. This approach is conducted through the examination of various laws and regulations, legal doctrines, and legal principles relevant to the issue of child labor within the digital sphere (Disemadi, 2022). Normative legal research utilizes secondary data consisting of primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials. Primary legal materials include statutory regulations such as Indonesian child protection and labor laws, as well as international legal instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Secondary legal materials consist of academic literature, scientific journals, and previous studies discussing the phenomenon of child influencers and digital child labor. Meanwhile, tertiary legal materials include legal dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other supporting sources (David Tan, 2021).

The approaches applied in this study include the statutory approach and the conceptual approach. The statutory approach is used to analyze various regulations governing child protection and labor, particularly those related to digital activities (Rusdiana et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the conceptual approach is employed to understand the concept of child labor from the perspective of modern law, including the expansion of the meaning of work within

the digital economy. The collection of legal materials is conducted through library research by systematically tracing relevant sources. Furthermore, the legal materials are analyzed qualitatively using a descriptive-analytical method by describing and interpreting legal norms in order to answer the research problems. The results of the analysis are subsequently used to formulate recommendations regarding the ideal form of legal protection for child workers in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Legal Status of Child Workers Engaged as Content Creators

The phenomenon of children working as content creators raises complex normative issues from a legal perspective (Abidin, 2025). Conceptually, the legal status of child workers has traditionally been understood within the scope of conventional employment characterized by clear employment relationships. However, the development of digital technology has blurred the boundaries between play, self-expression, and work. In this regard, children acting as content creators are not explicitly recognized as workers, despite the fact that their activities possess economic value and involve structured production processes. Therefore, a normative analysis is required to determine whether such activities may be qualified as a form of employment (Permanasari, 2021). This is essential to ensure legal certainty and adequate legal protection. Accordingly, clarity regarding the legal status of child content creators is necessary to protect children from potential exploitation.

Normatively, the status of child workers is regulated through various statutory provisions. Indonesian labor regulations, particularly Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower as amended through the Job Creation Law, generally prohibit the employment of children except under strictly regulated circumstances. In addition, Indonesian child protection laws emphasize that children must be protected from economic exploitation. These provisions indicate that national law has established clear normative limitations concerning children's involvement in work activities. Nevertheless, such regulations have not explicitly addressed employment within the digital sector. This condition creates a normative vacuum in determining the legal qualification of children as content creators and consequently gives rise to ambiguity in the application of the law. Therefore, legal interpretation becomes essential in addressing issues concerning children acting as content creators.

On the other hand, an activity may be categorized as work when it fulfills the element of generating economic value. In the case of child content creators, children are involved in content production activities that generate income through advertising, endorsements, and platform monetization. Such activities are conducted repeatedly and systematically, which constitutes a characteristic feature of employment. Furthermore, the involvement of parents, managers, or agencies in organizing these activities demonstrates the existence of a working relationship, although not always in a formal sense. Accordingly, substantively, content creation activities may be classified as a form of work. Therefore, children engaged in such activities may normatively be categorized as child workers.

From the perspective of international law, the Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a strong normative framework. The convention emphasizes that children have the right to protection from economic exploitation and hazardous work. In addition, International Labour Organization Convention No. 138 and Convention No. 182 establish provisions regarding minimum working age and the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. In this regard, activities undertaken as content creators must be assessed to determine whether they satisfy the criteria of permissible work. If such activities interfere with children's education, health, or development, they may be categorized as a form of exploitation. Consequently, a child-rights-based approach becomes essential in evaluating the legal status of child content creators. This demonstrates that international legal norms remain highly relevant in

addressing gaps within national law (Lewoleba & Syalsabila, 2024). Therefore, harmonization between national and international legal frameworks constitutes an important necessity.

Within the framework of Indonesian positive law, the criteria concerning child workers are principally regulated under Indonesian manpower legislation as amended by the enactment of the Job Creation Law. These provisions affirm that employers are generally prohibited from employing children under the age of eighteen. However, the law also provides limited exceptions for children performing light work under strict conditions. This demonstrates that Indonesian labor law does not entirely prohibit children from working but rather places such activities within a framework of child protection. Consequently, Indonesian legal policy emphasizes protection rather than absolute prohibition. In the context of child content creators, these provisions are relevant in determining whether digital activities satisfy the legal elements of employment under labor law.

Furthermore, Indonesian labor law provides that children between the ages of thirteen and fifteen may only perform light work insofar as it does not interfere with their physical, mental, and social development. This provision indicates that the primary consideration in permitting children to work lies in the impact of the activity upon the best interests of the child. In practice, child content creators are frequently required to participate in content production for specific durations, follow instructions, maintain performance standards, and face public pressure through social media exposure (Nasanta & Wahyudi, 2024). Such conditions may negatively affect children's mental health and psychological development if not adequately supervised. Excessive content production may also interfere with children's rights to play, study, and rest. Therefore, even if content creation activities are categorized as light work, their implementation must still comply with legal standards of child protection. In this context, the state bears an obligation to ensure that children's digital activities do not evolve into disguised forms of economic exploitation. Accordingly, the interpretation of "light work" must be conducted carefully and contextually in light of contemporary digital developments (Fatmawati & Lewoleba, 2024).

In addition to age requirements, labor legislation also establishes several conditions that must be fulfilled when children are employed. These requirements include written parental consent, employment agreements between employers and parents or guardians, limited working hours, daytime work schedules, guarantees of occupational safety and health, and clear employment relationships (Nassar et al., 2026). Such provisions demonstrate that Indonesian law has in fact provided normative parameters for assessing the legality of child labor. However, within the context of child content creators, many of these requirements are often not adequately fulfilled (Rotimi et al., 2024). Numerous digital content activities are carried out without clear employment agreements because they are perceived merely as family activities or entertainment. Substantively, however, economic benefits are generated through platform monetization, endorsements, and digital advertising. Therefore, these relationships cannot merely be regarded as private family activities. Accordingly, the economic dimension of children's digital activities should serve as the basis for the stricter application of labor protection standards.

On the other hand, Indonesian labor law also pays special attention to the worst forms of child labor by prohibiting children from engaging in activities that endanger their health, safety, or morality. In the sphere of digital content, exploitation may arise when children are compelled to produce certain forms of content for economic purposes. Such risks may include emotional exploitation, invasion of privacy, cyberbullying, and exposure to age-inappropriate content. In some cases, children may lose their private sphere because their daily lives are continuously exposed through social media platforms. This demonstrates that modern forms of exploitation do not always involve physically hazardous labor but may also

occur through digital pressure and the commercialization of children's identities. Therefore, the concept of the worst forms of child labor must be interpreted progressively to encompass technology-based exploitation. Accordingly, legal protection for child workers must be expanded in line with the development of contemporary digital labor patterns.

Based on these provisions, the legal status of children acting as content creators may fundamentally be classified as child labor when the activities fulfill the elements of work, generate economic benefits, and involve structured forms of activity. Recognition of this status is important to ensure that children receive legal protection equivalent to that afforded to child workers in other sectors. In this regard, legal analysis should not be confined solely to the formal existence of employment relationships but must also consider the substantive nature of the activities performed. Digital activities that continuously generate economic value essentially constitute forms of labor within the modern digital economy. Therefore, the application of labor law to child content creators becomes relevant as an instrument of legal protection. In addition to providing legal certainty, such an approach may also prevent hidden forms of exploitation within the digital content industry. Consequently, the reinterpretation of labor law constitutes an important step toward maintaining a balance between digital economic development and the protection of children's rights in Indonesia.

The principal issue in determining the legal status of child content creators lies in the blurred distinction between private and commercial activities. Many children's activities on social media initially begin as personal expression but later develop into commercialized activities. In such circumstances, it becomes difficult to determine whether the activity constitutes work. Moreover, the involvement of parents as account managers may create conflicts of interest, as parents may simultaneously function as protectors and beneficiaries of economic gain. This further complicates the construction of the legal relationship involved. Therefore, clear legal criteria are necessary to determine employment status within the digital sphere.

From the perspective of legal doctrine, the concept of child labor must be interpreted dynamically in accordance with societal and technological developments. Law cannot remain static in responding to social transformation and technological progress. In this regard, reinterpretation of the definition of work by incorporating digital dimensions becomes necessary. Digital activities generating economic value should be regarded as forms of labor. Such an approach is consistent with the increasing dominance of the digital economy. Consequently, the law must be capable of accommodating emerging forms of work in order to maintain its relevance within modern society.

Moreover, normative approaches must also consider the principle of the best interests of the child. This principle constitutes the primary foundation of all policies relating to children (De Stefano, 2015). Accordingly, content creation activities must be evaluated based on their impact upon children's welfare. If such activities provide benefits without interfering with children's development, they may be considered permissible. However, where indications of exploitation exist, restrictions must be imposed (Jaya, 2020). This approach emphasizes the need to balance children's rights to self-expression with protection from exploitation. Therefore, normative legal analysis should not merely adopt a legalistic perspective but must also incorporate value-based considerations in order to produce fair and proportionate policies.

Furthermore, the legal status of child content creators is closely related to the issue of employment relationships. In many cases, no formal employment agreement exists between children and the relevant parties, thereby complicating the direct application of labor law provisions. Nevertheless, substantively, employment relationships may still be identified through the existence of work, remuneration, and instructions. Therefore, the absence of

formal agreements does not eliminate the substantive legal relationship. This is essential to ensure that children continue to receive legal protection.

At the same time, digital platforms that provide spaces for content creation activities also possess an important role. Normatively, platforms have not yet been fully regulated as parties responsible for child protection. In fact, platforms derive economic benefits from user activities, including those conducted by children (Agus Riwanto, Satryo Sasono, Andina Elok Puri Maharani Airlangga Suryanegara, 2022). Therefore, the expansion of legal responsibility toward digital platforms becomes necessary. This may be achieved through regulations establishing specific obligations for platforms in protecting children, such as the implementation of special protection standards for accounts involving minors. Consequently, legal protection should not rest solely upon parents or the state.

The absence of specific regulations concerning child content creators in Indonesia demonstrates the existence of a legal vacuum. This condition results in ambiguity in legal interpretation and dependence upon subjective interpretation, thereby creating potential inconsistencies in the application of law. In the long term, such circumstances may disadvantage children as legally vulnerable subjects (Perdana, 2018). Therefore, the establishment of regulations specifically governing child content creators is urgently required. Such regulations must accommodate the unique characteristics of digital labor while remaining adaptive to technological developments. Accordingly, the law may provide both legal certainty and optimal protection.

Overall, the normative analysis concerning the legal status of child workers engaged as content creators demonstrates the urgent need for legal reform. Substantively, content creation activities fulfill the criteria of work possessing economic value. Therefore, children involved in such activities should be recognized as child workers within the legal framework. Such recognition constitutes the basis for providing adequate legal protection. Consequently, legal reform represents an essential step toward developing a child protection system that is responsive to the realities of the digital era.

Forms of Legal Protection for Child Workers as Content Creators in the Digital Era

Legal protection for children working as content creators has become an important issue amid the rapid development of the digital economy. (Sri Novita, 2022) In this regard, children do not merely function as subjects of self-expression but also as participants in economic activities that potentially expose them to exploitation. Therefore, a legal protection framework capable of addressing the issues surrounding child content creators is urgently required. Legal protection should not only be repressive in nature but must also adopt preventive measures. Such an approach is essential to ensure that children continue to enjoy their rights optimally. Furthermore, legal protection mechanisms must be capable of adapting to the dynamic characteristics of the digital environment. (Faridah & Afiyani, 2019) Accordingly, strengthening legal protection for children in the digital era is essential to achieving legal certainty and justice.

Normatively, legal protection for children has been regulated under various national legal instruments. Indonesian child protection laws emphasize that every child has the right to protection from economic exploitation and abuse (Agus Riwanto, Satryo Sasono, Andina Elok Puri Maharani Airlangga Suryanegara, 2022). In addition, Indonesian labor legislation establishes limitations concerning children's involvement in work activities. Nevertheless, these provisions have not explicitly regulated children's activities within the digital sphere. Consequently, the existing legal framework has not been fully effective in responding to the phenomenon of child content creators (Siregar et al., 2024). Therefore, a progressive interpretation of existing legal norms is necessary. Such interpretation aims to broaden the scope of legal protection so that it remains relevant to conditions in practice. Thus, the law

may continue to provide protection even in the absence of specific regulations. One important form of legal protection concerns regulations relating to age limitations and the types of work that may be permitted for children. In the context of content creation activities, it is necessary to determine whether such activities may be categorized as light work or work requiring special supervision (Islam et al., 2024). This determination is important to ensure that such activities do not interfere with children's education and development. In addition, clear limitations regarding working hours are required to prevent children from experiencing excessive fatigue or pressure. Such regulations must also take into account the psychological vulnerability of children to public pressure through digital exposure. By establishing clear limitations, the risk of exploitation may be minimized. Therefore, such regulations constitute an essential component of legal protection.

In addition to limitations on work activities, legal protection must also encompass the management of income generated by children. In many cases, income derived from content creation activities is managed by parents or other parties without transparent mechanisms. Such conditions create the potential for economic exploitation of children. Therefore, regulations should require that a portion of children's income be reserved for their future interests. This model has already been implemented in several jurisdictions as a form of financial protection for child performers (Castonguay & Messina, 2022). Furthermore, supervision regarding the use of children's income is equally necessary. Accordingly, children's economic rights may be protected more effectively. Such protection is also important to ensure fairness for children as subjects generating economic value.

The role of parents is also highly significant because parents bear primary responsibility for the welfare of their children. However, in practice, parents may simultaneously become parties capable of engaging in exploitative conduct. Therefore, legal protection mechanisms must regulate the role of parents proportionally. Parents should act as protectors safeguarding children from exploitation for economic gain. In this regard, the state must provide clear guidelines concerning the limitations of parental involvement. Furthermore, effective supervisory mechanisms regarding children's digital activities are required. Consequently, parental roles may operate in accordance with the principle of the best interests of the child. This is essential to maintain a balance between parental rights and responsibilities.

Furthermore, legal protection must also involve the role of the state as the primary regulator. The state bears an obligation to formulate regulations that are adaptive to technological developments. In this regard, the government should establish specific policies governing child content creators. Such policies must encompass aspects of protection, supervision, and law enforcement. In addition, the state should conduct public awareness campaigns regarding the risks and implications of children's involvement in digital content creation. Through active governmental involvement, legal protection may operate more effectively.

On the other hand, digital platforms also bear responsibility for ensuring the protection of children. As providers of digital spaces, platforms possess a strategic role in regulating user activities. Therefore, digital platforms should adopt child-friendly policies, particularly regarding monetization systems and content regulation. For example, platforms may limit certain categories of content involving children or provide parental supervision features. Moreover, platforms must ensure transparency regarding monetization systems involving minors. Accordingly, child protection should not depend solely upon state regulation. Collaboration between digital platforms and the state is essential in creating a safer digital ecosystem. This reflects a multi-stakeholder approach to child protection.

Legal protection must also include the protection of children's privacy and personal data. In their activities as content creators, children become vulnerable to exposing their

private lives to the public. Such exposure creates risks relating to data misuse and violations of privacy (Leng, 2018). Therefore, strict regulations concerning the protection of children's personal data are necessary. Such regulations must guarantee that children's data are not used for commercial purposes without valid consent. In addition, parents should receive education concerning the importance of safeguarding children's privacy. Through these measures, digital risks may be minimized through stronger privacy protection in the digital era.

Moreover, supervisory and law enforcement mechanisms constitute an important aspect of legal protection. Without effective supervision, existing regulations cannot function optimally (Livingstone & Third, 2017). Therefore, specialized institutions or mechanisms overseeing the activities of child content creators are required. Such supervision may be implemented through cooperation between government institutions, child protection agencies, and society. Furthermore, law enforcement measures must be applied clearly in cases of violations. This is important in creating deterrent effects and preventing exploitative practices (Zahn & Cabrelli, 2017). Accordingly, legal protection should not remain merely normative but must also be effectively implemented in practice.

Overall, legal protection for children working as content creators must be firm, comprehensive, and sustainable. Such protection should encompass not only legal aspects but also social and cultural dimensions (Archer & Delmo, 2025). Synergy among various stakeholders is necessary to create a safe environment for children. Furthermore, existing regulations must continuously develop and adapt in accordance with technological progress. Without legal reform, the law will lag behind social realities. Therefore, adaptive legal approaches constitute an essential step toward ensuring optimal child protection in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

The legal status of children working as content creators may normatively be classified as child labor, even though it has not yet been explicitly regulated under Indonesian legislation. The activities carried out by child content creators fundamentally fulfill the elements of employment because they generate economic value, are conducted in a structured manner, and involve other parties within the production process. However, these developments have not been adequately accompanied by an adaptive legal framework, resulting in a legal vacuum and ambiguity in the application of the law. The gap between *das sollen* and *das sein* demonstrates that positive law still lags behind the transformation of work patterns in the digital era. Therefore, reinterpretation and reformulation of the concept of child labor are necessary in order to accommodate the evolving realities of the digital environment. Recognition of this legal status constitutes an important step toward ensuring adequate legal protection for children.

Furthermore, the forms of legal protection for children working as content creators must be clearly designed by encompassing various aspects, including limitations on work activities, income management, privacy protection, as well as supervision and law enforcement mechanisms. Such protection should not solely become the responsibility of the state but must also involve parents and digital platforms as integral parts of the digital ecosystem. The absence of specific regulations in Indonesia reflects the urgency of establishing policies that are more adaptive and responsive to technological developments. In addition, protective measures must be grounded in the principle of the best interests of the child while maintaining a balance between children's rights to self-expression and protection from exploitation. Therefore, synergy among regulation, education, and supervision is required to create a safer digital environment for children. Accordingly, optimal legal protection will contribute to safeguarding children's rights and welfare in the digital era.

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