

From Execution to Curation: Generative AI Adoption and the Reshaping of Design Work in the Creative Industries

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Abstract: Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is rapidly transforming work processes in the creative industries, particularly in design-related activities where experimentation, speed, and originality are central to value creation. While existing studies have explored the technical capabilities and economic potential of GenAI, less attention has been given to how design professionals incorporate these tools into everyday practice and how their perceptions shape patterns of adoption. Inspired by technology adoption theories, particularly the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), this paper investigates how professional designers interpret and integrate GenAI into their work. The study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach, based on 10 semi-structured interviews with designers working in agency and freelance contexts in Brazil. Data were analyzed through content analysis combining inductive coding with conceptually informed interpretation. The findings reveal three central themes. First, GenAI is frequently perceived as a co-agent in the creative process, often described as an "assistant" or "intern" operating under human supervision. This perception reflects the role of perceived usefulness and performance expectancy, core constructs in TAM and UTAUT, in supporting the integration of AI tools into creative workflows. Second, designers identify important tensions and limitations, including aesthetic homogenization, loss of creative singularity, and uncertainty regarding authorship and copyright. These concerns illustrate how perceived risks and ethical considerations may shape adoption dynamics beyond purely instrumental factors. Third, GenAI is widely understood as a productivity lever that accelerates operational stages, expands experimentation, and redistributes effort toward more strategic and conceptual tasks. The findings suggest that GenAI adoption in design can be partially explained by traditional acceptance constructs such as usefulness and effort expectancy. Also, its adoption unfolds within a broader transformation of creative labor, in which designers increasingly shift from execution to curation of AI-generated outputs while navigating tensions over originality, autonomy, and institutional pressure to use technology. This study contributes to current discussions on digital transformation, technology adoption, and innovation in the creative industries.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence; Creative Industries; Technology Adoption; Technology Acceptance Model; Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology

1. Introduction

In recent decades, digital technologies have driven transformations across productive, cultural, and creative sectors. More recently, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has intensified this movement by enabling the creation of texts, images, videos, and code from large volumes of data and user prompts, thereby enhancing efficiency, innovation, and creative capabilities (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Daugherty et al., 2023). Its economic impact is estimated to reach trillions of dollars globally (Chui et al., 2023).

Creative industries (such as advertising, marketing, design, and digital production) are particularly sensitive to these transformations, as they combine artistic and commercial logics in content production (Anantrasirichai and Bull, 2022). In this context, GenAI tends to reconfigure creative work by automating tasks, expanding expressive possibilities, and demanding new professional competencies (Božić, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2025). At the same time, its adoption raises challenges related to authorship, ethics, originality, and professional adaptation (Appel, Neelbauer, and Schweidel, 2023; Öztaş and Arda, 2025).

Despite the growing popularisation of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, and DALL·E, their incorporation into the everyday practices of creative professionals remains at an early stage and is still in the process of stabilisation (Öztaş and Arda, 2025). In this context, although recent literature has advanced in explaining adoption through models such as TAM and UTAUT, gaps remain in understanding how these technologies are effectively integrated into creative processes and how they reconfigure designers' work in practice.

Addressing this gap, this study aims to understand how design professionals have adopted generative artificial intelligence and how they perceive its impacts on creative work. Based on semi-structured interviews with designers operating in different contexts of the Brazilian market, the article contributes by: (i) identifying patterns of GenAI incorporation into creative processes; (ii) analysing emerging tensions related to co-agency, authorship, and aesthetics; and (iii) discussing the reconfiguration of the designer's role, particularly the shift from execution to curation and creative direction. In doing so, the study advances the understanding of technology adoption beyond predictive models, highlighting how GenAI integration unfolds as a sociotechnical process within creative practices. Additionally, it offers practical implications for professionals and organisations by clarifying the limits and possibilities of using generative AI in creative contexts.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 GenAI Adoption

In recent years, advances in deep neural networks have enabled the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), a subfield characterised by the ability to produce original content, such as text, images, videos, and code, based on patterns learned from large volumes of data, often with quality comparable to human production (Lim et al., 2023). These systems are based on deep learning models, such as large language models (LLMs) and generative adversarial networks (GANs), which, in addition to processing information, generate new data instances from user inputs (Gupta et al., 2024). In the case of LLMs, such as OpenAI's GPT, this capability manifests as the production of coherent, contextually relevant text from prompts, significantly expanding the possibilities for interaction and creation (Chui et al., 2023).

It can be inferred that the popularisation of GenAI was driven by the launch of ChatGPT in 2022, which made these capabilities widely accessible, followed by the rapid expansion of specialised tools such as Midjourney, DALL-E, and Stable Diffusion for generating multimodal content. More recently, the emergence of generative AI agents has been observed, which go beyond content production by incorporating capabilities for planning and executing complex tasks autonomously. These systems interact with different tools and digital environments, approximating the role of assistants or collaborators within workflows (Chui and Roberts, 2024; Mollick, 2023).

Given this integration of GenAI into workflows, there is an increasing demand to understand both its technical capabilities and the conditions that sustain its adoption in practice. In this sense, classical technology acceptance models, such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT/UTAUT2), have been used to explain the intention to use digital systems, including generative AI tools (Liu et al., 2025; Huy et al., 2024; Ghimire and Edwards, 2024). In summary, TAM proposes that technology adoption is mainly influenced by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989). In contrast, UTAUT extends this perspective by incorporating performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Recent studies in the context of GenAI confirm the relevance of these factors, showing that perceived performance gains, ease of use, and institutional pressures positively influence usage intention, while ethical and privacy concerns may act as inhibitors (Liu et al., 2025; Ghimire and Edwards, 2024).

In the literature on creative industries, the use of these theoretical frameworks has advanced the understanding of why professionals adopt digital tools. In the field of design, for example, studies based on TAM find that external factors such as facilitating conditions (e.g., infrastructure/support) and the quality of outcomes influence the intention to use generative tools for creation in art and design (Zhu, Ren, and Shen, 2025). Liu et al. (2025) proposed and tested an extended UTAUT model to explain the intention to use AI-based creativity support tools, with 435 participants from creative industries. This approach included four UTAUT constructs (performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions), three risk factors (ethical concerns, privacy, and dependency), one contextual factor (regulatory environment), and two user demands (interactivity and personalisation). The results indicated a positive effect of performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and regulatory environment on intention to use; a negative effect of ethical and privacy concerns; and interactivity and personalisation as antecedents of effort expectancy. Facilitating conditions and concerns about dependency did not directly predict intention (Liu et al., 2025).

These results confirm that TAM and UTAUT theories are important tools for understanding technology adoption by users, providing an appropriate theoretical foundation for the objective of this research. Therefore, this study draws on the core constructs of both models, such as perceived usefulness, performance expectancy, perceived effort, and social influence, to understand professionals' perceptions of this emerging technology.

2.2 Generative AI in the Context of the Creative Industry

The introduction of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into creative contexts has brought significant changes to work routines and the very nature of content production. Studies indicate that its applications span the creation, analysis, enhancement, and manipulation of information, with particular emphasis in the field of design, where content creation and enhancement applications, such as image and text generation, have been highlighted for their transformative potential (Anantrasirichai and Bull, 2022). In this context, the relationship between designers and their tools is undergoing a reconfiguration. Rather than functioning merely as passive instruments, generative AI systems are increasingly understood as creative collaborators, with partial agency in processes of visual and narrative conception (Anantrasirichai and Bull, 2022). This dynamic has been described as co-agency, in which creativity emerges from the interaction between human and non-human agents, requiring new forms of coordination and trust (McCormack et al., 2020).

However, the emergence of such co-agency does not occur without tensions. At the aesthetic level, studies suggest that AI-generated content tends to reproduce recurring patterns learned from large datasets, resulting in an “artificial aesthetic” marked by homogeneity and predictability, with perceptible traces of its machine origin (Manovich and Arielli, 2024). As AI models are trained on cultural datasets, they learn recurring patterns, often producing images that are stereotyped or idealised. This tendency manifests in a recognisable “default style” in the outputs of tools such as Midjourney, reinforcing a sense of visual homogeneity. In contrast to the human capacity to introduce singularities and fine-grained nuances, AI-generated images remain generic, producing the culturally widespread impression of an aesthetic that the authors term “artificial aesthetic” (Manovich and Arielli, 2024). On the other hand, at the ethical and legal level, concerns emerge regarding authorship, originality, and the potential unauthorised use of pre-existing works, given the opacity of the training processes underlying these systems (Škiljić, 2021; George, 2023).

These limitations generate effects that extend to the organisation of creative work, requiring a reassessment of tasks, timing, and roles. To further contextualise this within creative industries, Öztaş and Arda (2025) show that the introduction of AI is experienced simultaneously as an opportunity to expand expressive capabilities and as a competitive requirement in a market that values efficiency and time reduction. The authors point to the acceleration of workflows and productivity gains, but also to frictions such as the feeling of shortcutting and alienation when creative stages are abbreviated, as well as aesthetic homogenisation and uncertainties regarding authorship. One of the main transformations observed by the authors is the emergence of curation in creative work, in which the designer's role shifts from execution to conception and organisation of AI-generated artefacts. In this new model, professionals emphasise that human intentionality remains an irreplaceable differentiating factor (Öztaş and Arda, 2025).

3. Methodological Procedures

3.1 Description of the Research Context

The study was conducted within the context of Brazilian creative industries, with a focus on the design and advertising segments, which combine artistic and commercial activities in content production and account for a significant share of employment and added value in the sector (Firjan, 2022). Heterogeneous organisational structures, including large agencies, independent studios, and freelance professionals, characterise these segments.

The research focused on professionals engaged in the production of visual and audiovisual content, packaging design, and product development, areas in which the adoption of GenAI technologies has been expanding as support for creative processes. The sample consisted of ten designers operating across different contexts of the Brazilian market (Table 1), including agencies and independent practices, all with experience using generative AI tools in their workflows. Participants were selected based on criteria for effective use, albeit sometimes experimental, of generative AI tools in their creative processes.

This is an exploratory qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews (Table 2), appropriate for investigating emerging phenomena and understanding perceptions and practices in specific contexts. The interviews were conducted individually, in a remote format, recorded with consent, and subsequently transcribed.

Table 1: Profile of interviewees

Interviewee	Age	Experience	Role	City	Interview Format
E1	39	18 years	Design Project Manager	Porto Alegre	Online – 38 min
E2	24	3 years	Designer and AI Creator	Porto Alegre	Online – 23 min
E3	35	9 years	Brand Strategist	São Paulo	Online – 36 min
E4	29	10 years	Motion Designer	Porto Alegre	Online – 32 min
E5	38	20 years	Strategic Designer	Porto Alegre	Online – 50 min
E6	32	8 years	Graphic Designer	Porto Alegre	Online – 41 min
E7	31	10 years	Designer	Porto Alegre	Online – 40 min
E8	52	33 years	Designer	Porto Alegre	Online – 37 min
E9	38	22 years	Designer	Porto Alegre	Online – 1h 09 min
E10	62	40 years	Artist and University Professor	Porto Alegre	Online – 1h 15 min

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, inspired by Bardin (2016) and Gioia (2012), to identify recurring patterns in participants' perceptions and practices. The data were organised iteratively into analytical categories based on the relationship between interview excerpts and the research objectives, enabling the development of interpretations of the incorporation of GenAI into creative work. This approach enables the examination of technology adoption as a situated practice, going beyond usage intentions and highlighting how GenAI is integrated into creative processes.

Table 2: Guiding Questions Aligned with the Research Objectives

Theme	Guiding Questions	Objective of the Analysis
Profile	What is your name and age? What is your current role? How many years of experience do you have in the field?	To understand the profile and level of professional experience.
Adoption and Use of Generative AI	Do you use generative artificial intelligence in your work? Which generative AI tools do you currently use and how frequently? At which stages of the creative process has generative AI been most applied? How does AI integrate with other design tools you were already using? Do you use generative AI collaboratively (sharing knowledge about the tool with other professionals) or individually? What differences have you perceived in your work before and after using these generative AI tools?	To understand how the technology is being incorporated into work practices.
Benefits and Challenges of Generative AI Use	What are the main benefits you identify in the use of generative AI? What challenges or difficulties have arisen during implementation? How do you assess the impact of generative AI on the final quality of projects?	To understand the benefits and challenges of using the technology.
Perceptions of Generative AI Use	What are your concerns or apprehensions regarding the use of this technology? Do you consider that generative AI complements or replaces human creative work? How do you see the role of generative AI in the future of design?	To understand professionals' perceptions of the technology.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the interviews revealed a heterogeneous use of generative AI tools among design professionals, with different technologies performing specific roles throughout the creative workflow, in line with previous findings (Öztaş and Arda, 2025). Table 3 summarises this landscape, outlining the functions, benefits, and challenges associated with the main tools. In addition to the tools presented in Table 3, applications with occasional or experimental use were also mentioned, highlighting the field's still exploratory nature (e.g., Figma AI, After Effects, Magnific AI, KlingAI, Higgsfield, DeepSeek, Gemini, and Google Veo 3). Overall, a combination of technologies that complement one another in designers' practices can be observed, with variations depending on the type of activity and work context.

Table 3: Perceptions of the use of each generative AI tool

Generative AI Tool	Usage among Interviewees (%)	Functions Used in Creative Process Stages	Perceived Benefits	Perceived Challenges	Creative Role of the Tool
ChatGPT	90%	Support in presentations; Generation of images and concepts; Research and references; Brainstorming and ideation; Text refinement and structuring; Image editing.	Increased productivity; Support in idea visualisation.	Need for verification; Risk of incorrect or unreliable outputs.	Ideation and structuring assistant
AI Tools Integrated in Adobe Software	60%	Removing or adding elements; Colour or material adjustments; Image quality enhancement.	Image generation integrated into the Adobe ecosystem.	Difficulty in controlling fine adjustments.	Integrated refinement tool within the Adobe suite
Midjourney	30%	Generation of conceptual and expressive images; Rapid compositions and prototyping; Creation of backgrounds and visual variations to explore art direction.	Rapid generation of visual alternatives for image creation.	Hallucinations; Credit limitations.	Catalyst for art direction
ComfyUI	30%	Customisable node-based pipelines; Local execution; Model switching and integration of pre-/post-processing.	Greater privacy and customisation.	Learning curve; Requirement for specialised hardware.	Builder of specific local processing workflows

Based on this empirical foundation, the analysis enabled the identification of three interpretative axes that structure the incorporation of GenAI into creative work: (i) AI as a co-agent in creative processes; (ii) the limits and challenges associated with its adoption; and (iii) AI as a productivity tool.

4.1 Generative AI as Co-Agency

Throughout the interviews, professionals described GenAI as an auxiliary support in their projects, in roles analogous to those of assistants or interns. This idea became explicit in several statements, such as that of E4: "It's as if you were an art director, and AI were your intern," and of E7: "I see it very much as, in a way, my intern, who gathers options that I can use with my know-how." In both cases, although respondents indicated that the tool was part of their work, generative AI remained a technology under supervision and without autonomy.

These statements align with what the literature refers to as co-agency, shared creativity between human and non-human agents, with human direction (McCormack et al., 2020). Thus, the technology supports the professional's creative practice in a meaningful way by adapting to the style of that specific human partner (McCormack et al., 2020; Mollick, 2023). In this context, artificial intelligence shifts from being merely a tool or instrument that passively supports human creativity to a new type of active creative assistant, a movement that helps explain its incorporation and persistence within the workflow.

This view of AI as an "intern" reflects elements of perceived usefulness and ease of use, as proposed in TAM, which identifies these factors as central to the adoption of new technologies. Among the designers interviewed, AI is adopted and maintained in the workflow precisely because it is perceived as useful for exploring creative options, reducing operational tasks, and enhancing the quality of outputs (Davis, 1989).

As a practical consequence, professionals noted that work has been reoriented towards curation: AI generates materials under human command, while the designer focuses on ideation, direction, and selecting generated images. This transformation was described as a shift from the production of artefacts to the selection and integration of AI-generated texts and images, with the final product composed. The shift in focus towards conception under human direction implies that the professional assumes roles of creative direction or leadership, while the system executes stages under their command (Öztaş and Arda, 2025).

It is important to note that not all interviewees feel satisfied with this shift in the scope of work. Although ease of use has been widely recognised, a perception of loss of autonomy and authorship in the process emerges. As summarised in E4's statement: "Sometimes I take a long time making something, but everything I put there I decided [...] It's a strange relationship between generating solutions with AI and actually making something hands-on."

Thus, overall, the results indicate that designers position themselves in an intermediate space between the instrumental use of AI and effective collaboration. While they preserve their role as decision-makers and creative leaders, they also recognise, albeit with some apprehension, that AI already performs functions previously attributed solely to humans.

4.2 Limits and Challenges of Technology Adoption: Artificial Aesthetic and Authorial Uncertainty

Design professionals recognise generative artificial intelligence as a tool capable of expanding creative repertoires; however, they also point to significant limitations related to aesthetic quality and issues of authorship. Concerns related to the visual outcomes of generated images are evident, as illustrated by E2's statement: "As everything is very new, there are still many aberrations. I say 'aberrations' because the face looks strange, the hand looks strange—I generate a lot of images like this... It is difficult." Regarding aesthetic aspects, interviewees reported recurring anatomical flaws and visual inconsistencies, associated with what they refer to as system "hallucinations."

Beyond these technical inconsistencies, a perception of a generic and standardised aesthetic also emerged, recognised as having artificial characteristics, as noted by respondent E6: "Nowadays, everything looks the same to me, doesn't it? It is not just me having a designer's eye; I think the more we work with this, the more obvious it becomes that, in my view, when AI makes an image, it is lazy. For example, going on iFood. I do not know if this has happened to you. You go to order a pizza, (you see) an AI-generated pizza image, and then you think, hmm(?)." These statements directly resonate with Manovich and Arielli (2024), who describe AI's tendency to produce an "artificial aesthetic," characterised by recurring and stereotyped patterns, resulting in homogeneous and culturally impoverished images.

Another recurring point in the interviews concerns the cultural risk of homogenisation, as articulated by respondent E8: "On Shutterstock, there are many vanilla flowers generated by AI. Imagine in 50 years, maybe no one will know what the real flower looks like anymore. That changes cultural perception itself." These accounts reinforce the critique that AI, by operating on large datasets, tends to reduce cultural diversity, replacing singularities with repetitive models. In line with Manovich (2017), these findings support the idea that the automation of aesthetic choices and the application of algorithmically learned visual patterns may lead to the standardisation of cultural imagination, reducing variability and promoting a dominant aesthetic.

At the legal and ethical level, concerns emerged regarding copyright and authenticity. Some interviewees pointed to the exploitation of creative work without compensation to original authors. As discussed by respondent E6: "[...] AI takes ideas from everything that exists, puts it together, and the (original) author does not earn money from it, receives neither recognition nor remuneration." These perceptions converge with the literature identifying intellectual property issues in generative AI tools due to the lack of clarity regarding authorship and the use of training datasets (Appel, Neelbauer and Schweidel, 2023), highlighting risks of plagiarism and, consequently, copyright infringement (Škiljić, 2021; Božić, 2024), and advocating for the creation of regulatory mechanisms to ensure authenticity and attribution in synthetic content (George, 2023). The absence of clear mechanisms for transparency and traceability exacerbates this uncertainty, as summarised by E8: "You cannot really know how safe it is to use an AI-generated image."

Based on the adapted UTAUT framework proposed by Liu (2025), the findings of this section can be interpreted as risk perceptions that modulate intention to use. Criticism of the "artificial aesthetic" and the risk of cultural homogenisation reflect ethical concerns, while uncertainties regarding authorship, transparency, and traceability relate to privacy and intellectual property risks. Finally, the demand for clear rules underscores the regulatory environment's role in facilitating adoption.

Thus, the results indicate that, although generative AI is perceived as a valuable resource for design, it comes with aesthetic and legal limitations that hinder its everyday adoption. The convergence between professionals' accounts and the literature suggests that acceptance of the technology depends not only on technical advances but also on the development of mechanisms of legitimacy, whether aesthetic, capable of overcoming visual standardisation, or regulatory, capable of ensuring copyright and authenticity.

4.3 Generative AI as a Productivity Tool and Expansion of Creativity

One of the most frequent themes in the semi-structured interviews was the perception that generative AI optimises time in the creative process, positively impacting productivity. In addition, the tool has the potential to redistribute effort, as illustrated by designer E3's statement: "It makes me spend energy on thinking, rather

than executing things where my value does not lie." This statement reveals a shift in the development of work processes, with less time devoted to operational activities and more space for creative reflection (Dwivedi et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2025). This supports the findings of Božić (2024), who highlights AI's ability to automate repetitive tasks, such as data analysis, graphic design, and image editing, allowing professionals to focus on more strategic and creative aspects of their work.

In addition to reducing effort, interviewees emphasised gains in quality and speed, improving the performance of their projects. Participant E9 observed that the tools can generate better results more quickly, stating: "[...] sometimes even with hours it would not be as good." Similarly, E1 pointed to expanded access to resources: "We can deliver things that we could not before, because they required a high-end studio." These statements highlight how AI can democratise creative expression, enabling smaller agencies to perform tasks previously restricted to contexts with greater investment (Božić, 2024).

However, this perceived quality gain is not unanimous. The adoption of these tools has also been reinforced by institutional pressures, particularly in corporate environments seeking to standardise their use as a competitiveness strategy. As reported by respondent E4: "the company even evaluates us based on how much we are using artificial intelligence [...] we have been using it to meet increasingly demanding and faster-paced requirements, but not necessarily because of quality." This statement shows that, in certain contexts, the adoption of generative AI shifts from an individual choice to an organisational requirement, where usage is monitored and valued as a productivity indicator, even when output quality is not the primary driver. This scenario reveals tensions between professional autonomy and efficiency demands imposed by organisational structures.

These accounts align with UTAUT theory (Venkatesh et al., 2003), which posits that effort expectancy and performance expectancy are determinants of adoption, as technologies that reduce the effort required to perform a task tend to be more widely used (Jain, Garg, and Khera, 2022). Furthermore, perceived benefits related to performance expectancy act as a component that fosters initial willingness to use the technology and supports a positive evaluation of AI tools (Gursoy et al., 2019).

In the context of design, therefore, the ability of generative AI to optimise time and expand experimentation emerges as a decisive factor for its incorporation into professional routines, balancing the aesthetic and authorial challenges discussed previously. This emphasis on efficiency and performance gains aligns with the constructs of perceived usefulness (TAM) and performance expectancy (UTAUT), identified as key factors in technology acceptance.

5. Conclusion

This study analysed how design professionals have adopted GenAI and how they perceive its impacts on creative work. The findings indicate that it is incorporated as a co-agent in creative processes, in roles analogous to assistants under human supervision, while simultaneously introducing tensions related to aesthetics, authorship, and the standardisation of production.

Despite these challenges, the technology is perceived as a strategic ally, capable of optimising processes, expanding experimentation, and democratising access to creative resources. These results reinforce the centrality of factors such as perceived usefulness and performance expectancy in adoption, while also highlighting the influence of organisational pressures that, in certain contexts, make its use less voluntary.

The incorporation of GenAI also implies a reconfiguration of the designer's role, shifting from execution to conception, curation, and creative direction, in which human intentionality remains central. These findings suggest that technology adoption is not limited to an individual decision but rather constitutes a situated sociotechnical process that reshapes practices and work relations.

As limitations, the study highlights the sample's size and profile, as well as its geographical concentration, and the emergent nature of the phenomenon analysed. Future research may further explore factors such as social influence and voluntariness of use in different organisational contexts.

Ethics Declaration

Ethical approval was not required for this study. The questionnaire used included an introductory section informing participants about the purpose of the research, assuring anonymity, and requesting their informed consent prior to participation.

AI Declaration

OpenAI's ChatGPT was used to support language refinement and word count adjustments; all content was reviewed and validated by the authors.

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