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From celebrities to micro-influencers: Democratizing jewelry marketing case study: Instagram campaigns by local designers

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Abstract

This study examines how local Lebanese jewelry brands, such as Lynyer, Joanna Dahdah, and MBLSHD, are shifting their marketing strategies from celebrity endorsements to micro-influencer collaborations on Instagram. By leveraging micro-influencers, these brands are intentionally moving their brand perception from aspirational to accessible, which in turn affects consumer engagement and purchase commitment. The research explores the psychological and emotional impact of this shift, focusing on three key theories: emotional branding, parasocial interaction, and social proof. The findings show that micro-influencers, through their authenticity and relatability, foster genuine connections with their followers. This strategy builds emotional bonds (emotional branding), creates a sense of personal trust and familiarity (parasocial interaction), and validates consumer choices through peer influence (social proof). This comprehensive approach allows the brands to humanize their identity, drive loyalty among young adults, and successfully democratize the luxury jewelry market in Lebanon.

Keywords: Micro-influencers, emotional branding, parasocial interaction

Introduction

Marketing strategies can shift and change depending on the product, its value and its use. The industry is becoming more inclusive and popular in how it approaches and reaches audiences in the smartest way possible. In order to avoid using celebrity endorsement, some local small jewellery brands use a different strategy to approach their target audience in the most relatable way possible. In that case rather than celebrity figures being utilized, micro-influencers are exposed to the brand while approaching those viewers which makes the audience directly relate to those social media influencers since they directly engage with their followers. There is a clear shift in this strategy from aspiration where celebrities make jewellery look elite to accessibility on the micro-influencers' side making the jewellery feel wearable and attainable driving emotional connection and purchase commitment. By doing so, this psychological shift builds on consumer trends authenticity, realism and loyalty to the brand since the micro-influencers are down-to-earth and align with everyday lifestyles, humanising the brand and the attachment it shapes. Lebanese jewellery brands such as *Lynyer*, *Joanna Dahdah - Fine Jewellery* and *MBLSHD (embellished)* have approached the micro-influencer marketing tactic to demographically target young adults and the psychographics of belongers and belongers plus rather than the usual target audience for luxurious brands for archivers and achievers plus. This study explores how local jewellery designers in Lebanon leverage micro-influencers on Instagram to shift brand perception from aspiration to accessibility, affecting engagement and adaptation.

Research Question: How do emotional branding, parasocial interaction and social proof help explain the success of these micro-influencer collaborations?

Literature Review: In her Forbes article, "Micro-Influencer Power: Building Brand Trust and Driving Conversions", Bryanne DeGoede (2023) ^[2] conducted research on the impact of micro-influencers – with Instagram followers between approximately 10k and 100k – have on the consumer behaviour to buy a product.

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She argues that the use of micro-influencers can be very effective on creating brand loyalty through the interaction between the influencer and the viewer. This bond created between the two can further uplift the connection the viewers feel towards the micro-influencer since they relate to each other through the comments and online active interactions. This personal interaction builds a sense of trust and loyalty encouraging an increase of selling the product through brand recommendations, considering that those micro-influencers a reliable source. Such deep connection, according to DeGoede (2023) [2], emphasizes that it can lead to better conversions and return on investment (ROI) for brands. The collaboration that happens with micro-influencers are usually more budget friendly and are “typically more flexible when it comes to negotiating mutually beneficial deals with brands” (DeGoede, 2023) [2]. Their reduced prices enable marketers to work with many influencers in different places, particularly those with tight budgets. Additionally, micro-influencers build authentic relationships with their audience over time, who often view them as trusted advisors based on the continuous interactions and feedback within the context. Based on DeGoede’s research study, this trust has a “significant impact on their audience’s purchasing decisions”, with further studies indicating that 82% of consumers are “highly likely” to track recommendations a micro-influencer has approached. Moreover, the value of brand partnerships is increased by their ability to produce content that resonates due to their comprehensive acquaintance of their followers’ preferences. According to DeGoede, by looking at their audience demographics, marketers should carefully select their micro-influencer, content quality, and past brand partnerships. Furthermore, it is very important to the brand to engage with the influencers’ pages and not just “send them a gift box once and hope they post” but rather interact and show them long term support for better partnership. Brands may effectively and reasonably connect with their target audiences by emphasising targeted content and authentic participation. Overall, DeGoede’s observations highlight the strategic benefit of exploiting micro-influencers to expand brand loyalty and conversions. Today’s generation has preference to everyday lifestyle jewellery over occasional luxurious ones Robert Woo argues in his article “The Future of Jewelry in Retail: Authenticity Over Luxury”. This shift has formed a rising demand on the determination of jewellery in an authentic and approachable form to shape their personal stories and daily lifestyles. By targeting Gen Z and Millennials, some jewellery companies are rebranding in order to fit the new demand under this category of demographics. Robert Woo delved into his research and gave a clear example based on a jewellery campaign “Love Real” created by Zales, that has explicitly said “Customers today really value genuine, real connections — in their relationships, but also in their relationships they have with organizations” emphasising on Woo’s argument of the importance of personalisation serving approachable and authentic jewellery brands. As far as his study goes, Woo highlights the request Gen Z that have loomed for “sustainably sourced materials and transparent manufacturing processes”. Brands that are adapting sustainability by utilising “eco-friendly practices, such as using recycled materials, minimizing waste, and ensuring fair labor practices” in the making of their jewellery, are gaining costumers to their favour.

Furthermore, Woo claims that a sustainable shift in jewellery marketing will be beneficial for the brand’s future especially that it creates brand loyalty for young buyers or Gen Z by assuring their demands, which also leads “to win more market share in lasting ways”. This shift reflects a larger trend in the jewellery industry, where the emphasis is on developing personalised and authentic experiences aligning with the beliefs and lifestyles of modern consumers.

Marc Gobé (2001) [3], in his “Emotional Branding: The New Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People” book, talk about the connection emotional branding creates within the consumer and the brand which hold a huge power of brand loyalty and identity construction. It’s not about the product itself, but it’s about how it reaches out to people and how they feel and react to it depending on their emotional and cultural lives. Once a brand chooses to use emotions (bond, trust, affection and personal identification) over function (price, quality, value and image), it creates a long-lasting brand loyalty and builds trust towards the product and the brand itself. Gobé rewords branding as a “relationship” and not a transaction claiming that the shaping of a brand shall be emotional, valuable and shows an expression of personality for the audience to further emotionally connect to the company they’re purchasing from. He further stresses the importance of the use of sensory appeal – sight, smell, taste, sound and touch – noting that “people are sensory beings who respond best when all of their senses are stimulated”. In other words, sight can trigger memories in order to buy a specific item, and sound can influence an individual’s mood and can push buying behaviour in marketing environments. Deeper into his understanding of emotional branding, Gobé advocates for humanising a brand as much as possible aligning with emotions such as love, nostalgia, empathy joy, etc. Overall, brands must shift from traditional approaches into emotional branding cantering people instead of products.

“Para-social interaction is analogous to face-to-face interaction in terms of intimacy and trust but lacks reciprocity” (Horton & Wohl, 1956) [4]. Donald Horton and Richard Wohl (1956) [4] wrote a book under the title “Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance” where they dissected and argued the concept of one-sided relationships from the audience with influencers that feel personal. This kind of concept including the interaction that happens between the influencer and the audience, make the viewers feel like they “know” the media figure on a personal level even though the influencers do not in fact know the audience personally. Social media influencers, especially today, share personal content online and communicate directly with their followers on platforms like Instagram, promising a false sense of closeness or friendship. Further into their book Horton & Wohl emphasis that “the persona offers a continuing relationship. He ‘appears’ regularly, and in doing so assumes the role of a conversational partner who speaks directly to the viewer, cultivating a sense of intimacy” being intertwined between the two sides, leaving a reasonable impact on the audience’s choice in pursuing a product.

In Chapter 4 of “Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion” (1984), Robert B. Cialdini introduces the principle of social proof, where people perceive and copy others on social media determining what is correct by

observing the actions of others. Cialdini quotes “We view a behaviour as more correct in a given situation to the degree that we see others performing it”. When people are uncertain about decision they want to make, they often look to someone else for guidance in order to fulfil their needs and wants. Furthermore, he underlines the risk of manipulation the social proof has on people, where they rely on other individuals through social media for decision-making purposes. As far as his study about social proof goes, Cialdini asserts that advertisements will often have hundreds if not thousands of comments utilising social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and other socials. The continuous posts and tags are used to positively impact viewers with comments and likes. Besides, in order to showcase the benefits of the products, marketers attempt to use social proof with the certainty that everyone who has tried it has had a wonderful experience. However, people can warn viewers about the ambiguous traits of ads through the consumption of social media. For example, in Cialdini’s viewpoint, fraud reporting websites allow consumers to call out manipulative companies and thereby decline those companies’ influence.

Theoretical Framework

Using three intertwined theories: Emotional Branding, Parasocial Interaction Theory, and Social Proof, this study looks at how local jewellery brands intentionally use Instagram micro-influencers rather than celebrities from aspiration to accessibility to impact consumer behaviour and brand perception.

Emotional branding is a technique used to peruse a brand through emotional appeal building a relationship between the brand and the audience. In his statement, Gobé (2001) ^[3] emphasises the utilisation of the sensory appeal moving beyond the product features themselves. This marketing strategy shows up in tiny jewellery brands that will later be delved into, through aesthetic performance, storytelling, and a prominence on legitimate personality rather than elite desire. Micro-influencers constantly share personal experiences and narrate their stories as they give recommendations to others through viewership. Jewellery small brands, by extracting this marketing tactic, fit the characteristics of the descriptions given into this context.

Parasocial interaction theory was first introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956 ^[4], that defines the way viewers form emotional one-sided bonds with media personas. By publishing daily personal content, interacting back and forth with their followers directly, and satisfying a consistent online figure, micro-influencers on Instagram create the illusion of closeness among the two of them. Customers experience a sense of solidarity or trust by being open to these influencers’ suggestions. This phenomenon is essential to comprehending the power micro-influencers have on the audience despite them not being celebrities.

Social proof was first defined by Cialdini (1984) ^[1] as a psychological process where people perceive others as a reliable source when uncertain. Influencer endorsements and engagement system of measurement (likes, comments, shares...), for popularity and reliability, are taken over in digital marketing as public criteria. When endorsing jewellery products, micro-influencers serve as social authenticators, mainly if they seem related to the intentional demographic. The ways influencers approach a product through social media has an impact of the costumers’

decision making into buying a product, which increases conversion rates and democratises brand attractiveness.

The three theories combined offer a strong framework for comprehending the psychological transition in the jewellery industry from aspirational luxury (celebrity-driven branding) to accessibility (micro-influencer-driven marketing). Emotional branding strengthens consumer-brand relationships, parasocial ties increase influencer trust and social proof increases perceived value through obvious peer validation. Intertwined, these factors change how local jewellery companies cooperate with and win over their Instagram followers.

Methodology

Social media, especially Instagram, is used in our daily lives where we search for what we want to see and get satisfaction from the results we receive. By utilizing this platform, *Lynyer*, *Joanna Dahdah - Fine Jewellery* and *MBLSHD (embellished)* targeted their audience through micro-influencers rather than constantly applying the celebrity endorsement strategy. This shift will be qualitatively analysed through posts, views rate, likes, shares and comments. Thus, the relative theories to this case study would be emotional branding, parasocial interaction theory and social proof in context of the brands.

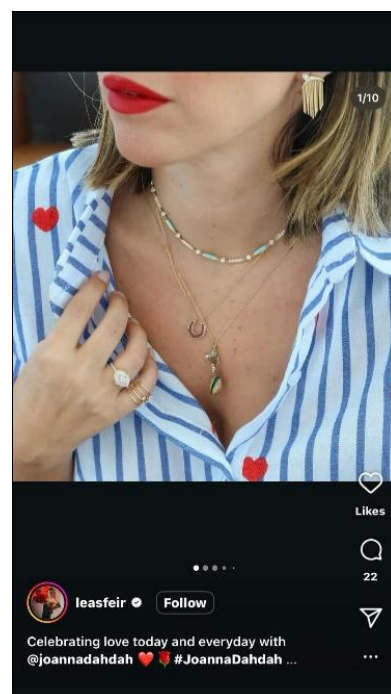
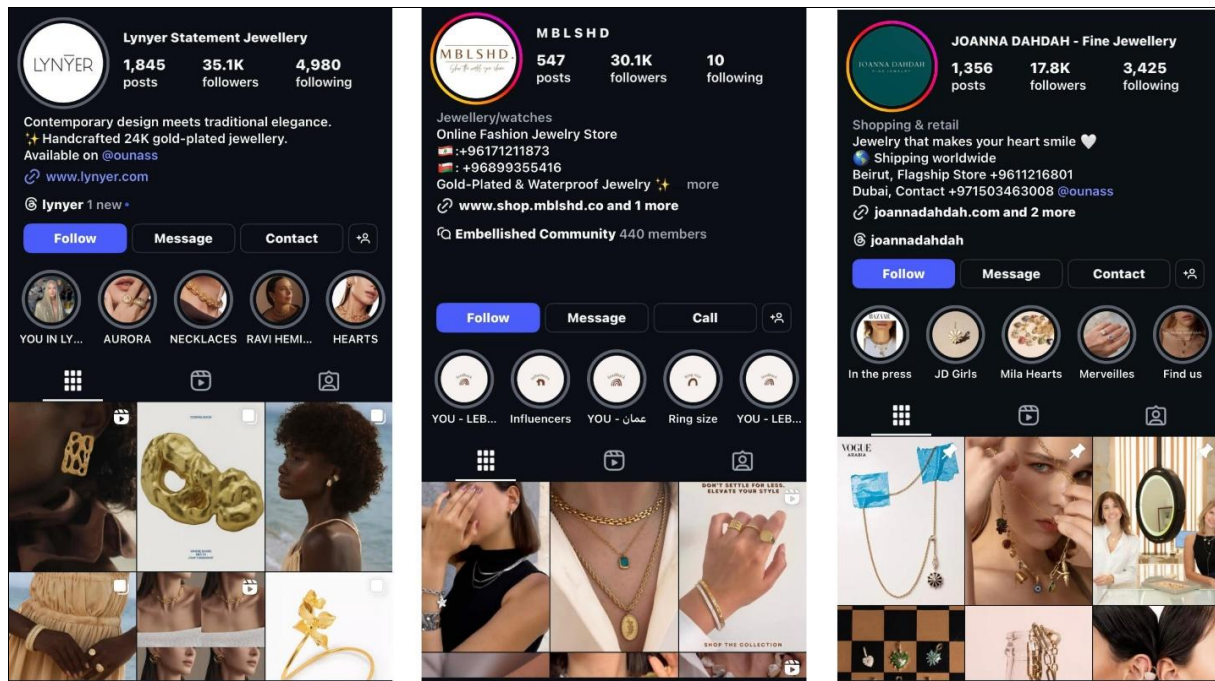
Analysis and Findings

The goal of this case study is to evaluate how micro-influencers are used in the three small jewelry local brands: *Lynyer*, *Joanna Dahdah* and *MBLSHD* to shift brand perception from aspiration to accessibility, respectively relating each brand to the theories defined in the theoretical framework following: emotional branding, parasocial interaction and social proof.

Small jewellery brands are most likely to use close-to-home marketing strategies such as collaborating with micro-influencers to showcase their brand as accessible and not luxurious, targeting a young audience with the goal of presenting their jewellery as aesthetic rather than elite. Likewise, *Lynyer* is a small jewellery brand that constantly collaborates with numerous micro-influencers by reposting them on their Instagram stories – creating a highlight for the consumers to frequently search for – who are active and engage with their followers. For example, based on DeGoede (2023) ^[2], the impact Instagram micro-influencers with followers between approximately 10k and 100k, plays a huge role on the consumer behaviour just like @nirvana.abdul posted a vlog on her reels where she shows the brand to her audience with a collaboration repost from the brand page itself. Nirvana approaches her audience with a cultural look adding *Lynyer* jewellery to her style with a direct engagement with her followers by posting a pole and also replies to her comments to keep the interaction going. As a jewellery brand, *Lynyer*’s kind of posts on their page displays women of young age, brides and mothers shaping their accessible identity in that sense with positive approaches and straight engagement with the audience. The positive energy adding the choice of micro-influencers to promote the jewellery marking at the audience’s emotional appeal, connects to the emotional branding theory by exploiting storytelling and emotionally link with the viewers. Moreover, other small companies like *Joanna Dahdah - Fine Jewellery* applied the micro-influencers method for their jewellery to attract their target audience –

young male and female adults, mothers and couples – in a different way than *Lynyer* did. They aim at many micro-influencers through sending them gifts with the target of sponsoring their brand through stories and posts such as @leasfeir did with a post tagging the *Joanna Dahdah*'s page with a caption "Celebrating love today and everyday with @joannadahdah ❤️🌹 #JoannaDahdah #MyValentine" pointing at her followers to trust the brand quality. Lea's choice of lifestyle and usage to the jewellery exhibits the brand's intertwined authentic cultural storytelling purpose with accessible luxury and strong commitment to community empowerment, making the jewellery not just an idea of "decoration" but rather throws meaningful expressions of identity and custom. Such posts and use of micro-influencers can strongly be applied on the parasocial interaction theory. On the other hand, Lebanese online fashion jewellery store MBLSHD short for "embellished",

the brand has fixed a niche in the Lebanese accessories scene by offering "Gold-Plated & Waterproof, Jewelry" designed for everyday wear. As a small local brand, they have created a highlight on their Instagram page under the name "influencers" collaborating with many micro-influencers to build a relationship between the brand and the consumers. Their most recent collaboration is with micro-influencer @tanyaaasif with around 7,000 followers and delivers content under the description of "Fashion, Beauty & Lifestyle". The recent collaboration with over 1,000 views, 27 likes and 14 comments with instant replies from Tanya Aasif and interaction between the influencer and the viewers within a span of 2 hours connects to the social proof theory where there is a strong, visible engagement amongst the two sides. This supports the right choice of micro-influencers to sell and promote a jewellery brand.



Further into this case study, emotional branding theory defined by Gobé (2001) ^[3], is a strongly used marketing strategy, in this case, for small brands such as *Lynyer*, *Joanna Dahdah* and *MBLSHD* worked around. Each of these arising brands utilised this strategy, ones more than others, in order to approach their audience differently and in the most emotional storytelling way possible through micro-influencers to build and shape the image and identity of the brand making it more about accessibility than aspiration. This psychological twist hits directly at the targeted audience in favour to the shaping of the brand and the creation of a connection between the Instagram followers and the jewellery brand. *Lynyer's* goal, for instance, is to reveal their brand identity through micro-influencers' lens, getting emotionally close and relatable to the target audience as possible, directly relating their influencer's choice to their Instagram aesthetic and aimed viewers – young females, mothers and brides – awakening nostalgia, elegance and happiness and other emotions. On the other hand, based on Horton and Wohl's (1950) theory, parasocial interaction is also a very applicable tactic for such brands explaining the way audiences form one-sided relationships with media figures or celebrities, connect emotionally despite no real mutual interaction. When applied to a

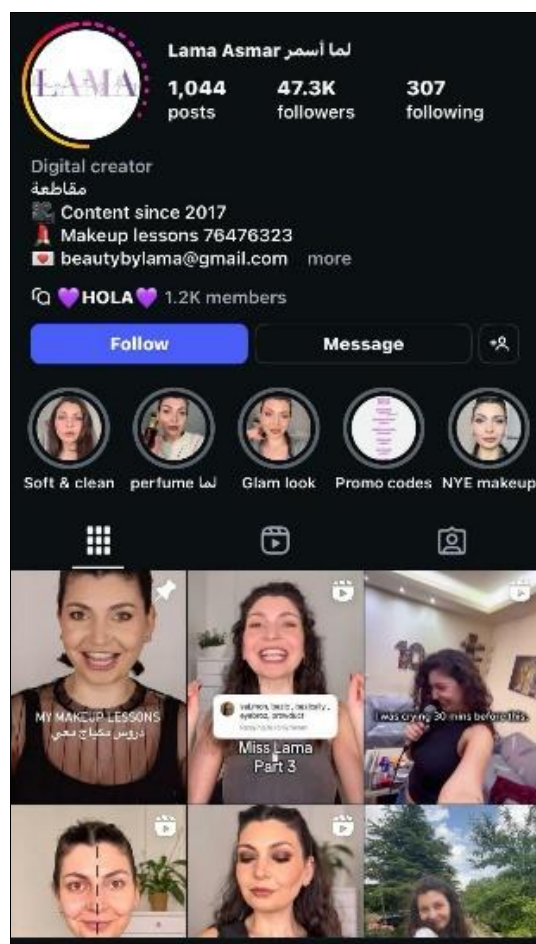
jewellery brand like *Joanna Dahdah's*, this theory becomes relevant through the brand's use of micro-influencers, and personal storytelling in marketing. *Joanna Dahdah's* fine jewellery brand posts on her social platform page straight interaction producing emotional closeness with her jewellery supporters by sharing her personal story. In addition to that, the selection of micro-influencers in that case is strictly accurate to her storytelling and emotional appealing product, portraying it in the most approachable and friendly way through the lens of those micro-influencers. Moving onto the subsequent theory, *MBLSHD* strongly implemented the social proof theory by leveraging the behaviour and approval of others to influence potential customers. Social proof refers to the psychological phenomenon where people in uncertain situations assume the actions of others reflect the correct behaviour, like deciding what jewellery to buy (Cialdini, 1984) ^[1]. The on-going support and interaction between customers and the brand page grow an instant trust towards the brand with the will of buying it based on the comments, shares and continuous communication. Overall, the use of such theories helps the brands healthily grow with good reflection to small jewellery brands as this analysis results in.



Based on the research conducted so far, there are favourable marketing techniques priorities such micro-influencer strategies employed by *Lynyer*, *Joanna Dahdah*, and

MBLSHD. However, general insights marked by the effectiveness of micro-influencer marketing strategy in the jewellery industry can be collected from broader industry

practices. In order to have a successful jewellery brand, they humanise their identity through micro-influencers for the sake of the connection built among the viewers and the influencer. Likewise, a trust for the brand gets collected the more relatable the viewers are to those influencers. This specific work intended in the three local jewellery brands, *Lynyer*, *Joanna Dahdah*, and *MBLSHD* assertively apply such technique, humanising the brand as much as possible while aiming for growth. Furthermore, *Lynyer's* emphasis on storytelling and emotional appeal, often focus on the emotional branding of marketing, especially posting and collaborating with micro-influencers encouraging brides for customised jewellery for their wedding. Whereas *Joanna Dahdah's* collaboration with micro-influencers can foster parasocial interaction, where consumers feel a sense of intimacy and bonding with the brand through its association with familiar personalities, portraying feminine jewellery presented by relatable, close-to-home figures; for example, they sent an influencer a gift with "the cutest pinkie ring ever" jewellery, what showcase the care depicted through the brand aiming to move people's want to buy the product. Lastly, *MBLSHD* leverages produced content and customer recommendations often relying on proof-based marketing, providing social proof of the brand's value and enhancing authenticity. And by doing so, the successful growth on their page by utilising micro-influencers particularly Lama Asmar on Instagram with 47.3K followers promoted MBLSD's jewellery with positive feedback and around 2,000 likes on her post tag, reaching not only her followers but also reflecting the best image for the brand. The purpose of humanising a brand reaches a bigger and healthier relationship within the marketing of a product.



Conclusion

In summary, the use of the right strategies in marketing strengthens or weakens a brand by the way it's being portrayed or promoted. It is immensely essential for the audience to perceive a product with the best image and rightest value available, in order to keep the company increasing. A psychological shift in this field from aspirational to accessible would impact the approach and mindset of the consumers buying a product, especially with the use of micro-influencers rather than celebrity endorsement tactic that is constantly used by big companies. Overall, this study shows a positive use for micro-influencers for a valuable image concerning a small jewellery brand, relevantly consuming the three marketing theories – emotional branding, parasocial interaction and social proof – analysed and studied in this case based on Lebanese local small jewellery brand namely, *Lynyer*, *Joanna Dahdah - Fine Jewellery* and *MBLSHD (embellished)*. By all means, celebrity endorsement is not always the first marketing strategy to search for, but the use of micro-influencers is considered beneficial as shown in this case study. But why would a big jewellery brand like *Zoughaib & Co* employ the micro-influencer – Nathalie Nasrallah – strategy rather than proceeding with their celebrity endorsement tactic?

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