

Testing the Mediation Effect of Employee Engagement on Internal Branding Practice-Job Satisfaction Relationship of Hospitality Industry Employees



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ABSTRACT: This research explains (1) the conditions of internal branding, employee engagement, and employees' job satisfaction; and (2) the existence of a positive and significant relationship between internal branding, employee engagement, and job satisfaction among hospitality industry employees especially in hotel industry in Malang Raya. The researchers took the four-star hotel with non-chain hotel to make sure independent internal branding practices. The hotels consisted of six hotels as the research objects. The researchers took the sample from the population of six hotels with proportionate random sampling technique and obtained 163 respondents. The data analysis technique applied descriptive statistics and partial least square analyses. From the descriptive analysis result, it shows that hotel applied good internal branding practices, employees have high employee engagement and job satisfaction. The coefficient path between internal branding and employee engagement had the highest value. Thus, the researchers expected the hospitality service institution, especially hotel to implement internal branding for their employees.

KEYWORDS: Internal branding, employee engagement, job satisfaction, hospitality industry

Establishing strong branding in the hospital service industry is important because of competitive industrial competition from the previous situation. An industry or a corporation must keep the meaning of the attached brand (Pinar, Trapp, Girard & E. Boyt, 2014). Powell (2014) explains the solution of keeping and improving the commitment of a brand requires relevant internal branding management between the superordinate and the subordinates or the internal actors of an organization, the employees. Internal branding, based on the primes that employees represent the brand quality, in which the branding is achievable by supporting the employees to understand and comprehend the brand meaning; and gaining the relevant skills and techniques to meet the brand promises (Lee, Kim & Kim, 2014). The descriptions of internal branding as a focused branding toward internal consumers include the recognition of the employees by the employees. The objectives of internal branding are to ensure the employees deliver the branding promises for the external consumers (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng, 2010). Dryl (2017) defines internal branding as the implementation of internal communication and training programs to educate employees about the branding promises.

Hospitality industries apply internal branding practices as the parts of service industries with high employee-consumer interaction. The roles of employees in the hospitality industry are vital. The roles determine the satisfaction of the corporate services. Employees become the differentiators and competitive means within the hospitality industrial competition. Employees with excellent performance are irreplaceable by the competitors at least for the short term (Punjaisri, Evanchitzky, & Wilson, 2009). In the short term, internal branding brings employee engagement to inspire and bind the employees; and to associate the employees and the organization (Grossman, 2008).

The definition of employee engagement, by Right Management (2006), is - every individual in an organization who comprehends and is committed to succeed in the business strategy, combines the commitment aspect, and shares the pride of the product and the organizational brand. The success of internal branding supports engagement due to employee motivation by encouraging the employees to understand the corporate visions and strategies from personal perspectives. Some studies found the influence of internal branding on employee engagement. Slatten & Mehmetoglu (2011) found the information provision about mission or organizational direction improved employee engagement while working. King (2010) found that employees with excellent brand understanding could relieve the confusion about jobs and facilitate employee engagement to promote brand-

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support behavior. Employee engagement refers to an organizational result due to excellent employee treatment as the internal customers.

Employee engagement refers to the attachment between the employees and the organization. This engagement is beyond physical and cognitive attachments, such as emotional attachment to the performed jobs. Any engaged employees with the spirit and capability of feeling the relationship with the corporations could encourage future innovation and organizational advancement. Saks (2006) explains that employee engagement directs various things to be positive, such as performance satisfaction.

Job satisfaction refers to joyful and positive situations as the results of the performance assessment and individual performance experience. The conceptualization of the notion of job satisfaction includes the emotional state from the employee evaluation of their jobs. The other definition of job satisfaction is the individual attitude toward the promoted job as a global measurement with various dimensions (Kelly and Hise, 1980). Any employee with excellent satisfaction could reach a high-performance level (Kelly and Hise, 1980). Du Preez and Bendixen (2015) and Hwang & Der-Jang (2005) observed that internal branding contributed to performance satisfaction. Tang, Siu, & Cheung (2014) explain that job satisfaction influences employee behaviors then the whole organizational performance. Employees who perceive the superordinate or the employer provides career development support, the employees will have the organizational commitment and spend more time serving the clients (King, 2010). Internal branding maximizes the agreement between the values, the employees, and the organizational values to improve employee satisfaction and decrease the turnover increment (Du Prezz & Bendixen, 2015). In this research, the researchers discuss the correlation between internal branding and job satisfaction moderated by employee engagement. The concept of internal branding is interesting to investigate because hospitality service provides a brand image. The determination of the image relies on the employee service quality (Lee, Kim & Kim, 2014). Many parties assume that the branding concept only applies in marketing. In fact, before the implementation of external marketing to the community, a corporation must do the internal marketing inside the corporation. Internal branding aims and focuses on the corporate internal matters to make the employees comprehend their working places and their joy to work in the places. Thus, they will find the corporations the greatest places to work. Lee et al (2014) researched 12 employees of a hotel in South Korea. They found that internal branding was important to develop employee engagement while working and organizing. The effects included improved job satisfaction. Itam & Singh (2017) also found that the achieved employee management required the corporate focus to apply internal branding practices and to pay attention to the positive correlation toward job satisfaction. However, Lee et al (2014) and Itam & Singh (2017) found a direct and insignificant correlation between internal branding and job satisfaction. The correlation between internal branding and job satisfaction receives the full mediation by employee engagement. Thus, the researchers were interested in proving the truth of the direct correlation between internal branding and job satisfaction and examining the mediating effect of employee engagement. In this research, the researchers investigated the employees of hotels in Malang Raya. Malang Raya is a great region consisting of Malang Regency, Malang Municipality, and Batu Municipality. These areas are tourist resort areas that support the hospitality industry's growth. The rationality of selecting the hotel employees as the research objects included the direct correlation between the hotel employees and the customers. Thus, the interpretation of the employees toward the corporation is realized in the behaviors and the performances of the employees. These matters significantly influence the customers' perceptions of the corporations. Thus, internal branding is an absolute action to promote in the hospitality industry to establish excellent client perceptions toward the corporations. The selected objects in this research include the hospitality resort category with independent ownership. The researchers selected the four-starred hotels and resorts because these hotels and resorts had high and complex service levels as a hospitality business. Four-starred hotels also apply a high-standard employee management based on the requirement. On the other hand, the researchers did not select any five-starred hotels because the number of hotels with this star was limited in Malang. Most five-star hotels in Malang had special networks. Thus, the researchers assumed there would be various hindrances to collect the data. The researchers chose hotels with independent ownership since many previous researches about hospitality services had the features of chained or franchised hotels. Thus, heretofore, independent hotels are less exposed. By considering various reasons related to the hotel selections, the researchers eventually chose 6 hotels as the research object. They were: Bunga Butik Resort Club, Kusuma Agrowisata Resort & Convention Hotel, Amarta Hills Hotel and Resort, The Onsen Hot Spring, Zam-Zam Hotel and Resort, and Lembah Metro Resort

Based on the background, the formulated research hypotheses are:

H1: Internal branding has significant impact on the employee engagement.

H2: Internal branding has significant impact toward job satisfaction.

H3: Employee engagement significantly impact job satisfaction.

H4: Internal branding indirectly influences job satisfaction as mediated by employee engagement.

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METHOD

This quantitative research described and explained the data. Thus, the nature of the research is descriptive and explanatory research. The population consisted of employees of six-four-starred hotels with independent ownership. The researchers took the samples with a proportional random sampling technique. The researchers found the sample size consisted of 163 respondents. The applied instrument was a five-point Likert scale, from extremely disagree to agree. The researchers obtained the data by distributing the questionnaire and analyzed the obtained data through descriptive statistics and by applying Partial Least Square (PLS).

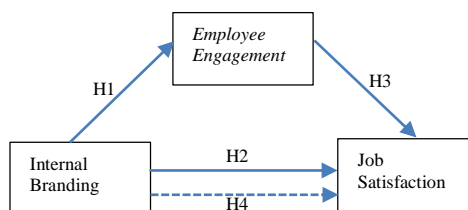


Figure 1. the Research Design
 Source: The Processed Data (2023)

Remarks:

- > : Direct influence
- - -> : Indirect influence

RESULTS

The researchers grouped the respondent descriptions based on sex type, age, educational level, and occupation status. The researchers concluded that most respondents were males (75%) aged between 20 and 29 years old (56%) with an educational level of Senior High School (65%) and contract-occupational status (74%).

The descriptive analysis of this research covers the variable descriptions of the respondents while answering each question item related to the variables of internal branding, employee engagement, and performance satisfaction. The descriptive results of the internal branding showed that whole items obtained a mean score of 4.10, indicating an excellent implementation of internal branding practices by the hotel. The descriptive analysis results of employee engagement showed that the whole items obtained a mean score of 3.95, indicating high employee engagement toward the given jobs at the corporation. Then, the descriptive analysis result of job satisfaction showed that the whole items obtained a means core of 3.96, indicating excellent satisfaction of the employees of the corporation.

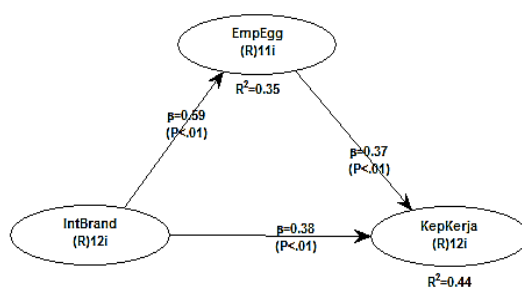


Figure 2. the Path Diagram
 Source: The Processed Data (2023)

The applied partial least square analysis was useful to determine the influence of internal branding on employee engagement, the influence of internal branding toward job satisfaction, the influence of employee engagement toward job satisfaction, and the influence of internal branding toward job satisfaction as moderated with employee engagement.

In this research, the researchers applied two assessment analyses with partial least squares by evaluating the outer model to validate and ensure the reliability of the establishing indicators of the latent variables. Then, the researchers evaluated the structural model or the inner model to determine the correlation among variables.

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In the outer model evaluation, the researchers validated the data with convergent and discriminant validity tests. Then, the researchers grouped the convergent test into the loading-factor-based convergent test and the average variance extracted test (AVE).

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Table 1. the Convergent Validity (Loading Factor)

Variable	Item	Loading Factor	Remarks
<i>Internal Branding (IB)</i>	X1	0,586	Valid
	X2	0,620	Valid
	X3	0,709	Valid
	X4	0,695	Valid
	X5	0,642	Valid
	X6	0,665	Valid
	X7	0,644	Valid
	X8	0,704	Valid
	X9	0,679	Valid
	X10	0,701	Valid
	X11	0,671	Valid
	X12	0,593	Valid
<i>Employee Engagement (EE)</i>	Z1	0,656	Valid
	Z2	0,588	Valid
	Z3	0,699	Valid
	Z4	0,682	Valid
	Z5	0,665	Valid
	Z6	0,671	Valid
	Z7	0,619	Valid
	Z8	0,608	Valid
	Z9	0,473	Valid
	Z10	0,533	Valid
	Z11	0,494	Valid
<i>Job satisfaction (JS)</i>	Y1	0,534	Valid
	Y2	0,492	Valid
	Y3	0,577	Valid
	Y4	0,740	Valid
	Y5	0,691	Valid
	Y6	0,739	Valid
	Y7	0,761	Valid
	Y8	0,784	Valid
	Y9	0,741	Valid
	Y10	0,594	Valid
	Y11	0,678	Valid
	Y12	0,535	Valid

Source: the processed data (2023)

Table 1 shows the whole items of internal branding (X1-X12), employee engagement (Z1-Z11), and job satisfaction (Y1-Y12) are valid to measure the latent variables since the loading values are higher than 0.7. Thus, the values are considerable to be between 0.4 and 0.6 (Solihin & Ratmono, 2013).

Table 2. The Convergent Validity (Average Variance Extracted (AVE))

Variable	AVE	Remarks
<i>Internal Branding</i>	0,436	Valid
<i>Employee Engagement</i>	0,375	Valid
<i>Job Satisfaction</i>	0,439	Valid

Source: the processed data (2023)

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Table 2 shows all variables, such as internal branding, employee engagement, and job satisfaction have AVE values lower than 0.5, the suggested value. Fornell & Larcker (1981) explain that the average variance extracted (AVE) could be the conservative estimation from the outer model. Based on the composite reliability, the researchers concluded that the convergent validity based on the construct is adequate although the value is higher than 50% of the variance due to the error. Thus, the researchers conclude the result meets the criteria because the reliability values of the internal branding, employee engagement, and job satisfaction are higher than 0.6. All indicators of the variables are valid.

Table 3 the Discriminant Validity

Variable	IB	EE	KK	Remarks
IB	(0,660)	0,585	0,550	Valid
EE	0,585	(0,613)	0,572	Valid
KK	0,550	0,572	(0,663)	Valid

Source: the processed data (2023)

The variables of internal branding, employee engagement, and job satisfaction lead to the greater AVE root-square than the other AVE root-square of other variables. Therefore, the variables of internal branding, employee engagement, and job satisfaction are valid. This result also indicated that the respondents had no difficulties while answering the questions.

Then, the researchers examined the instrument reliability with composite reliability value. The applied criteria of examination are: composite reliability values higher than 0.6 indicate excellent reliability (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4. The Composite Reliability

Variable	Composite Reliability	Remarks
Internal Branding	0,902	Reliable
Employee Engagement	0,867	Reliable
Job Satisfaction	0,902	Reliable

Source: the processed data (2023)

Table 4 shows that the composite reliability of all variables is higher than 0.6. Thus, based on the composite reliability calculation, all indicators of measuring the variables are valid.

Then, the researchers promoted an inner model evaluation and found some assessments. Here are the assessments.

Table 5. The Adjusted R-Square

The Endogenous Variable	Adjusted R-Squared
Employee Engagement	0,344
Job Satisfaction	0,431

Source: the processed data (2023)

Table 5 shows the value of the adjusted r-square of employee engagement is 0.344 (34.4%). The value indicates that internal branding could explain employee engagement for a percentage of 34.4%, moderate category. Then, the adjusted r-square value of the job satisfaction is 0.431 (44.2%). The result indicates that internal branding and employee engagement could explain the variance in job satisfaction with a percentage of 44.2%, a moderate category.

Table 6. The Effect Size

Variable	Effect Size
Internal Branding – Employee Engagement	0,348
Internal Branding – Job Satisfaction	0,224
Employee Engagement - Job Satisfaction	0,214

Source: the processed data (2023)

Table 6 shows the effect size of internal branding on employee engagement with a size of 0.348, lower than 0.35. The value indicates a moderate category. The effect size value of the internal branding toward job satisfaction is 0.224 lower than 0.35, indicating moderate category. The effect size of employee engagement toward job satisfaction is 0.214, lower than 0.35. The value indicates a moderate category.

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Table 7. Q2 Predictive Relevance

Variable	Q-squared
Employee Engagement	0,359
Job Satisfaction	0,447

Source: the processed data (2023)

Table 7 shows the Q2 predictive relevance of employee engagement is 0.359, indicating the predictive relevance of the model with the Q-square value of the endogenous variable, employee management, higher than 0. Then, the Q2 predictive relevance of the job satisfaction variable is 0.447. The value indicates that the model has predictive relevance because the Q-squared of the endogenous variable is higher than 0.

Then, the last step was promoting a hypothetical test and concluding the results.

H1: Internal branding positively and significantly influences employee engagement with a path coefficient of 0.590 and a p-value lower than 0.001. The result accepts H1. Internal branding significantly and positively influences employee engagement.

Thus, high internal branding increases employee engagement.

H2: Internal branding positively and significantly influences job satisfaction with a path coefficient value of 0.383 and a p-value lower than 0.001. The result accepts H2. Internal branding positively and significantly influences job satisfaction. Thus, high internal branding tends to improve job satisfaction.

H3: Employee engagement positively and significantly influences job satisfaction with a path coefficient of 0.371 and a p-value lower than 0.001. The result accepts H3. Employee engagement positively and significantly influences job satisfaction. Thus, high employee engagement tends to improve job satisfaction.

H4: Internal branding indirectly influences job satisfaction moderated with employee engagement. The obtained indirect coefficient of internal branding toward job satisfaction as mediated by employee engagement is 0.219 with a p-value lower than 0.001. The result accepts H4. Internal branding positively and significantly influences job satisfaction as moderated with employee engagement. The result indicates high employee engagement occurs due to high internal branding that improves job satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

Internal Branding

All hotels as the research objects had excellent internal branding. An excellent practice is observable from excellent response indications toward the implementation of hospitality training, communication during the group meeting and briefing, and the reward provision.

The employees promoted and respondents all related indicators with the internal branding practices. This situation led to improved performance potency. Employees become important components in the hospitality industry. The employees' capabilities to deliver the values of the hospitality product include the success of industrial performance.

Adequate internal branding of a corporation could transform the corporate values for the employees that may reach the customers. The internal branding process would be effective with training, group meetings, briefing, and reward provisions for the employees.

Employee Engagement

The measurement of employee engagement applied two indicators: job engagement and organizational engagement. This research found the fact that the engagement level of respondents had a high category. The result indicates that employee engagement in the jobs and the corporation is high, indicated by the enthusiasm of the employee performance.

Saks (2006) argues that workers will develop their corporate attachment and responses upon the organizational resources. In this context, the organizational resource includes the internal branding process, consisting of the given training, internal communication, and reward provision. This matter proves that a corporation with maximum internal branding practices could encourage employees to improve their engagement with the organization.

Job Satisfaction

This research found that employees had high job satisfaction. The indicators of job satisfaction include salary satisfaction, supervision satisfaction, and peer-working satisfaction. The satisfaction may occur due to various factors. In this research context, it happened due to internal branding practices and high employee engagement. Du Prez & Bendixen (2015) explain that internal branding could maximize the agreements between the values of employees and organizations to improve employee satisfaction

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Saks (2006) also states that employee engagement is directed to positive matters, such as job satisfaction.

The Influence of Internal Branding on Employee Engagement

Based on the partial least square analysis results, internal branding positively and significantly influences employee engagement. This research empirically proved that internal branding practices, by combining training, internal communication such as group meetings and briefings, and rewards could positively influence employee engagement.

Lee et al (2014) and Itam & Singh (2017) found that employee engagement had to focus on internal branding by applying an internal communication system, training, and reward provision. Thus, the employees had relevant skills and incentives to perform. Slatten & Mehmetoglu (2011) found that the provision of information about organizational mission and direction for employees would make the employees engaged in their jobs. King (2010) found that employees with excellent brand understanding could relieve the confusion about jobs and facilitate employee engagement to promote brand-support behavior. Employee engagement is an organizational product that treats the employees as internal customers.

The Influence of Internal Branding toward Job Satisfaction

Based on the path coefficient values, internal branding has a greater value (0.392) toward job satisfaction than employee engagement (0.369). Besides that, the size effect value between internal branding and job satisfaction is 0.233 higher than the correlation between employee engagement and job satisfaction, 0.216. This matter indicates that internal branding excellently influences job satisfaction improvement than employee engagement.

Du Prezz & Bendiven (2015) also found that internal branding greatly contributed the job satisfaction, brand commitment, and employee intention to stay. Internal branding could maximize employee values and organizational values along with improved employee satisfaction. Internal branding could decrease the turnover level. Eid et al. (2019) found the internal branding increment with the moderation of employee orientation. The increment had a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction. The results denied the findings of Lee et al. (2014) and Itam & Singh (2017). The researchers found the direct effect between internal branding and job satisfaction insignificantly. The correlation between internal branding and job satisfaction receives the full mediation by employee engagement.

The Influence of Employee Engagement Toward Job Satisfaction

Based on the partial least square analysis result, the researchers found employee engagement positively and significantly influenced job satisfaction. This study supported the previous result about engaged employees and the tendency to improve the job satisfaction level.

Kristianti et al. (2015) and Setiawan Widjaja (2018) also found that employee engagement positively and significantly influenced the job satisfaction of the employees at Swiss-Belinn and Shangri-La hotels in Surabaya. Excellent focus on employee performance and participation led to high engagement. Thus, corporations must find various strategies to bind employees with their jobs and to improve their job satisfaction. Excellently engaged employees would have positive perceptions of the corporation and organization. Alarcon & Edwards (2010) concluded that employee engagement significantly predicted job satisfaction. Employee engagement is important for corporations to establish an excellent working culture and expected consequences in terms of job satisfaction.

The Influence of Internal Branding toward Job Satisfaction with Employee Engagement as Mediator

The analysis results found the path coefficient results of each variable had a positive and significant influence. Internal branding had both a direct influence on job satisfaction and an indirect influence on job satisfaction with the moderation of employee engagement. The influence of internal branding toward job satisfaction with the mediation of employee engagement proves that employee engagement is the mediating variable. In this case, the mediating effect of employee engagement has a partial feature because internal branding could significantly influence job satisfaction without the moderation of employee engagement.

Lee et al. (2014) and Itam & Singh (2017) found that internal branding positively influenced job satisfaction with the mediation of employee engagement. However, the researchers noticed some differences. The results of Lee et al (2014) and Itam & Singh (2017) found the mediating effect of complete employee engagement. It happened because no direct correlation between internal branding and job satisfaction. Besides that, employee engagement, as a mediating variable, could moderate the correlation between organizational performance conditions and the related results, such as job satisfaction and job commitment (Maslach et al., 2001).

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CONCLUSION

Based on the results about the influence of internal branding on job satisfaction with the mediation of employee engagement, the measurements of all variables, the researchers concluded:

1. The employees had an excellent perception of the internal branding of the corporation. The reflection of the internal branding was observable in the hospitality training, group meeting and briefing communication, and reward provision. The employees had excellent engagement toward the job and the corporation. The evidence was the enthusiasm and high working spirit. The employees found the job satisfying especially related to the aspects of task, salary, supervision, and peer-worker.
2. The researchers found a direct, positive, and significant impact of internal branding, employee engagement, and job satisfaction. Thus, the results accepted H1, H2, and H3.
3. The researchers also found an indirect, positive, and significant correlation between internal branding and job satisfaction with the partial moderation of employee engagement. Thus, the result accepted H4.
4. The measurement of the outer model found the convergent validity on the item with a loading value lower than 0.7. Thus, the average variance extracted (AVE) of internal branding, employee engagement, and job satisfaction is lower than 0.5. However, the results did not become problems since the composite reliability value of the three variables was excellent, higher than the recommended value of 0.6.
5. The measurement of the inner model showed the r-square value of employee engagement and job satisfaction was in the moderate category. Then, the size effect value of the correlation among the variables: internal branding, employee engagement, and job satisfaction, was in the moderate category. The q-squared result showed that employee engagement and job satisfaction had predictive relevance.
6. The results of goodness of fit, GoF, found that the model was categorized at large category and indicated high or strong predictive power.
7. The highest coefficient value of the internal branding and employee engagement correlation was at 0.590. Internal branding could better improve job satisfaction than employee engagement based on the path coefficient value and effect size value. These values are higher than the inter-variable correlation.

SUGGESTION

Based on the results, the researchers share suggestions and considerations. Here are the suggestions:

1. For the hotel

The path coefficient and the size effect values of internal branding and employee engagement correlation were higher than the other variable correlations. Thus, the hotel must improve and develop internal branding practices. The evidence of the employee engagement improvement would direct to the positive attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, the corporation must realize the training practices, internal communication, and reward provisions to improve employee engagement. High employee engagement improves job satisfaction.

2. For future researchers

- a. The researchers suggest separating the job engagement and organizational engagement concepts from the original concept of employee engagement. The first two concepts are different constructs. This finding supports the theory of Saks that job engagement and organizational engagement are different concepts. Thus, future researchers should review the influential variables based on the two types of employee engagement and the influence on the outcome variables (job and organizational variables). This matter facilitates the understanding of inter-variable correlation.
- b. The researchers also suggest future researchers take different hotels and compare the results from various hotels.

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