

The Effect of Brand Experience on Brand Loyalty With the Mediating Role of Brand Trust

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to help traveling agencies gain insights on how can brand experience contribute to attaining brand loyalty. therefore, a sample of 149 customers was studied to test if there's an effect of brand experience on brand loyalty, and whether brand trust can mediate that relationship. The data was analyzed using the structural equation model, and the results show that brand experience does have a positive effect on both brand trust and brand loyalty, and that brand trust have a mediating effect. Thus, for traveling agencies to enhance their chance in gaining their customers' loyalty to the brand, they need to have equal focus on brand experience as well as brand trust that acts as link that strengthen the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty; Brand experience; brand trust; SEM

Jel Classification Codes: M31

1. INTRODUCTION

With the increasingly competitive markets especially in the service industry, firms are exploring more innovative branding strategies to develop their competitive advantages. In recent studies a lot more attention is drawn into the application of brand experience recognizing it as an essential factor for improving their performances and provided services. the importance of the customer's experience was Addressed by (Kam Fung so & King, 2010) emphasizing that it's a result of the customer's actual and direct involvement with the brand rather than from other sources, making the experience more authentic. Furthermore, in the subject of branding, (374 Alloza, 2008, p. 373) defined brand experience as "the perception of the consumers, at every moment of contact that he/she has with the brand, whether it is the brand images projected in advertising, during the first personal contact, or the level of quality concerning the personal treatment they receive". Studies have also examined the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty which been used as a key indicator for a firm's success, especially in the service industry(Bapat & Thanigan, 2016; J. Kim & Yu, 2016; Yoo & Bai, 2013). brand trust is the third important factor which is proposed in the current research, as a mediator that is affected by brand experience in one hand, which was discussed by many researchers before(Başer et al., 2015; Chen-Yu et al., 2016; Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019); In the other hand brand trust leads to brand loyalty, and the relationship between trust and loyalty is deep-rooted in the literature since (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and it's being argued that a customer who trusts a brand is more willing to stay loyal to the brand, and buy new products or services even if they fall in another category as long as they have the same brand, and is also less sensitive to the price (Mabkhot et al., 2017, p. 73). Thus, the main problematic proposed in this research is: **Does brand experience have an effect on brand loyalty?** Therefore, the main hypothesis is: **Brand experience have a positive effect on brand loyalty.** Throughout this paper four hypotheses were suggested in an attempt to answer this question, and were tested by analyzing the results of the calculations made to evaluate the measurement and structural model suggested in the research.

The main goal of this study is to focus on the Algerian tourist's brand experience while traveling with Algerian agencies, and although most of the brand construct are studied in various fields and applied on the Algerian community, for some reason the brand experience construct was neglected, this is where this research comes to fill in that gap. This study also aims to examine the mediating effect of brand trust to finally get to brand loyalty.

The research was divided into three main sections: the first one included the theoretical background and the hypothesis development according to previous studies, while the second section was an empirical study made to test and analyze those suggested hypotheses, to finally discuss the results found and the implications of this study.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT:

2.1. Brand loyalty:

The Brand Loyalty construct signifies the degree of attachment a customer has for a brand (Liu et al., 2012, p. 924). A loyal customer stays with a brand for several reasons and is difficult and costly to attract to another brand (Meier, 2020, p. 13). Brand loyalty is considered a core value for any brand. According to (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Morrison & Crane, 2007). The issue of maintenance of consumer brand loyalty is considered a priority in marketing plans since brand loyalty is vital for a firm's competitiveness and profitability. This is why it has a significant position in the marketing; Other than being regarded as the essential feature of brand value, Brand loyalty always leads the customers to believe the perceived quality of the brand is better than others, resulting a cut down in costs (for adds and such), Less sensitive to price since the customers are convinced they're getting a good value for the suggested price, Bring in new potential faithful consumers since loyal customers may bring in others along, and it benefits in global marketplace Most as Mao stated that "client brand dependability stands out as an important competitive weapon" (Mao, 2010, pp. 213–214).

2.2. Brand experience:

Brand experience was first conceptualized by (Brakus et al., 2009, p. 53) as “as subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments”. It’s also said to occur from interactions between organization, product, service personnel and customers, which are turned into customer responses to the brand (Hussein, 2018, p. 121). The term brand experience defines all touchpoints between a customer and a brand or touchpoints that have a great impact on the brand (van de Sand et al., 2020, p. 79). which are the interactions between customer and brand, and for the proposed brand management to be successful, a high brand authenticity is needed to deliver brand experiences that fulfil the customer’s needs across all touchpoints. This means that the brand promise that was given and the actual brand behavior need to be in line. (Kotler, P., Pfoertsch, W., & Sponholz, 2020, p. 130). Since customers feel safe and intelligent if the brand they chose seems trustworthy (van de Sand et al., 2020, p. 79), this means combining the forces of experience designers and marketing people to deliver a consistent, strong experience in all touch points between the company and its external stakeholders to provide the promised experience (Roto et al., 2015).

2.3. Brand trust:

Brand trust was defined as “a willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function” (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). Brand trust was also considered as a promise made by a brand to their customers to fulfil their expectations, and companies can build brand trust if they can prove that the brand’s main purpose is to meet their expectations (Ahmed et al., 2014, p. 309). Sharing the same opinion was (Tong et al., 2018, p. 7) by stating that in the brand domain, trust is a feeling of security held by the consumer that the brand will meet his/her consumption expectations. Brand trust transforms a positive transactional orientation toward a brand into an enduring, close, and personal – even committed – relationship with a brand. Furthermore, brand trust largely depends on existing attitudes and beliefs built from prior experiences (Frasquet et al., 2017, p. 5). Even more recent researches

defined brand trust as the expectation that consumers have that a brand will consistently deliver its promise (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019, p. 615).

2.4. The effect of Brand experience on brand trust:

Many studies have proposed a positive relationship between brand experience and brand trust, such as (Putra et al., 2020) who found a positive influence between brand experience and brand trust, explaining how the better the brand experience is the higher the brand trust. (Kang et al., 2017) also proven that brand experience has a significant effect brand trust in name-brand hotels, whether directly from brand experience to brand trust, or by the mediating effect of brand attachment. brand experience appears to be important sine it plays a vital role in engaging consumer's emotion to the brand, therefore marketers are encouraged to shift their focus to brand experience to enhance brand trust, and attachment via experiential marketing strategies. (R. B. Kim & Chao, 2019). Thus, based on the discussion above, the hypothesis proposed is:

H1: Brand experience has a positive effect on brand trust.

2.5. The effect of brand experience on brand loyalty:

Studies have examined the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty and found out that not only does brand experience has a positive effect, it also contributes in enhancing the brand loyalty and help create long-lasting relationships with brands (Khan & Fatma, 2019; MOHAMMAD, 2017). That effect can be directly, indirectly or even both (El Naggar & Bendary, 2017; Hussein, 2018; Shieh & Lai, 2017). Studies also demonstrated that memorable experiences motivate consumers to buy again from the brand, thus enhancing their brand loyalty (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020). All in all effect of brand experience direct or indirect, brand experience is found to be a significant contributor to true brand loyalty (Mathew & Thomas, 2018, p. 27). Based on these, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Brand experience has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

2.6. The effect of brand trust on brand loyalty:

In a study made by (El Naggar & Bendary, 2017) it was stated Brand trust is considered to be an important factor that should be considered in building and maintaining the customer's relationship with a product or service, since it acts as a major antecedent of customer's commitment &

loyalty, and emphasize that brand loyalty can be enhanced through a reliable trustful relationship with the brand. Furthermore, it was found that brand trust had a significant effect on brand loyalty, mentioning that when a customer finds a brand that's trustworthy and can be relied on, they will keep buying their products repeatedly (Budi et al., 2021). Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis was suggested:

H3: Brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

2.7. The mediating effect of brand trust:

Brand trust has been popularly discussed in relationship marketing, especially as a bridge that links numerous constructs to brand loyalty, and since this study is focused on the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty, only the studies that had similar variables were focused on. It's been empirically established in past studies that brand experience has a positive effect on brand trust which is a major antecedent in shaping customers' brand loyalty, since requiring long-term development, might mostly drive customers' loyalty to the brand (Huang, 2017). The influence of Brand Experience against Brand Loyalty mediated by Brand Trust, means that the better brand experience the better chance for customers to trust the brand, which later leads to brand loyalty (Marliawati & Cahyaningdyah, 2020; Vincentia et al., 2021). Thus, it can be hypothesized that:

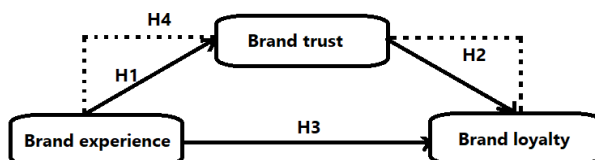
H4: Brand trust has a mediating effect between brand experience and loyalty.

3. METHODOLOGY:

3.1. The model:

After going through the theoretical background of this study, the model used as a conceptual framework upon which the research hypotheses are developed was proposed:

Figure 1. Research model



Source: by the researchers based on previous studies

3.2. Data collection and measurement scale:

This study focused on the tourism industry in Algeria, and more specifically a traveling agency, we chose Chebbah travel, a very active travel agency that offers trips to multiple destinations across Algeria each month, with the average period of two to four days depending on the destination. This study was kind of hard but doable under these circumstances of lockdown and curfew due to the pandemic, so we focused on inner tourism. 149 forms were gathered in the period between November 2020 and February 2021 via online surveys that were distributed on social media platforms and some emails. We made all the questions in the questionnaire obligatory so missing data won't be an issue.

All of the constructs and items used in the questionnaire were based on a review of the literatures and researches that were related to this study, and the three constructs in the model were measured using established scales.

Brand experience questions were adapted from the study made by (Brakus et al., 2009). Next for the brand trust items were made according to (Ahmad Mabkhot et al., 2017), and finally the brand loyalty items were made following (Rather et al., 2018) study.

And all the scales were measured using the five-point Likert-type scale with strongly agree at 1 to strongly disagree at 5.

3.3. Testing the reliability of the questionnaire:

First, the SPSS software was used to test the questionnaire's reliability using the alpha crobnach's reliability test, and the results are in table 1.

Table 1. Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	Number of items
0.912	0.913	13

Source: calculated using SPSS software

The results show that the questionnaire that's been used in this study is reliable.

3.4. Sample characteristics:

This is the part where the sample characteristics are analyzed according to their gender, age, education and salary. The results are demonstrated in table 2:

Table 2. Sample characteristics

Characteristics	Sub-characteristics	Sample (n=149)	Percentage %
Gender	Male	55	36.91
	Female	94	63.08
Age	25 or less	48	32.21
	26 - 35	52	34.89
	36 - 45	35	23.48
	46 or more	14	9.39
Education	Middle school or less	21	14.09
	Highschool	48	32.21
	Bachelor	49	32.88
	Master or more	31	20.80
Salary	18000 or less	14	9.39
	18001 - 25000	34	22.81
	25001 - 35000	57	38.25
	35001 or more	44	29.53

Source: by researchers using SPSS software

According to table 2, results show that males were traveling more than females with this agency, which can be explained by the fact that some females only travel with a companion whether it's a brother, father or husband, due to religious, cultural or security reasons, while men can travel alone or with other male friends. As for the age range of this sample we notice that it's a close call between the people who are 25 or less, and those who are 36-35 years old, followed by the ones who are 36 - 45. As for people who are 46 years old or more are the least ones who travel through the agency, which can be explained by the fact that most people who are in this age range and likes to travel usually have their own cars, and finds it both more comfortable and affordable to travel alone and with an agency.

Moving on to the education section, we notice that most of the travelers have a high school or a bachelor's degree, followed by those who have master's degree or more, than by the ones with a middle school degree or less. This means that our respondents are educated people.

As for the salary, most of our respondents gets payed over 18000 Algerian dinars, which means they have secure jobs that makes them able to afford traveling with this agency.

3.5. Data analysis:

A partial Least Square (PLS) analysis technique was applied using the SmartPLS 3.3.3 software following (Hult et al., 2015). The study adopted the structural equation model implementing two-stage analytical procedure to assess both of the measurement and the structural model recommended by (Hair et al., 2014).

3.5.1. Evaluation of the measurement model:

This part is concerned by testing the reliability and the validity by running the algorithm in SmartPLS. The result shown in Table 3 showed the average variance extracted, cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability. Whereas the correlation of latent variables and the square root of average variance extracted is found in table 4. As for the results of the cross loading are shown in table 5.

As a rule of thumb in evaluating reliability statistics, for the Cronbach's alpha values for all the constructs, the acceptable value should be 0.60 or more (Malhotra, 2010), and the composite reliability (CR) all the values shouldn't be less than 0.7(Nunnally & Bernstein, 1999).

After comparing the guidelines previously mentioned with results presented in table 3, the conditions of all the variables of this study are realized, which means that all the results are acceptable, confirming the reliability of the model's measurements.

Table 3. Reliability statistics

Constructs	items	Loadings	AVE	CA	CR
Brand experience	BE1	0.895	0.821	0.962	0.933
	BE2	0.945			
	BE3	0.895			
	BE4	0.901			
	BE5	0.912			
Brand trust	BT1	0.771	0.611	0.885	0.829
	BT2	0.780			
	BT3	0.801			
	BT4	0.705			
	BT5	0.793			
Brand loyalty	BL1	0.715	0.645	0.887	0.819
	BL2	0.854			
	BL3	0.861			
	BL4	0.815			

Source: Calculated using SmartPLS software

Note: AVE: average variance extracted; CA: cronbach's alpha; CR: composite reliability .
 Next we notice that the the outer loadings of all the items exceeded the acceptable value of 0.6 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1999), and the average variance extracted values above 0.5 suggested by (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Combining those information with the results of table 4 that shows that the square root of the AVE were all greater than the correlations among latent constructs(Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In addition, the results of table 5 which represents the cross loading of the variables shows that the loading of each item in its construct is higher than with the other constructs. Thus, indicating the validity of the model's measurements.

Table 4. Latent variable correlations and square roots of AVE

	Brand experience	Brand loyalty	Brand trust
Brand experience	0.903		
Brand loyalty	0.419	0.809	
Brand trust	0.310	0.594	0.770

Table 5. Cross loadings

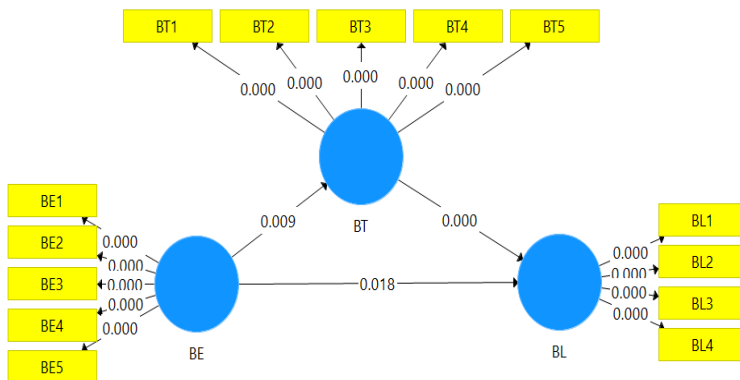
	Brand experience	Brand loyalty	Brand trust
Brand experience	0.980	0.329	0.222
	0.930	0.462	0.364
	0.900	0.325	0.384
	0.899	0.365	0.269
	0.898	0.384	0.234
Brand loyalty	0.240	0.715	0.567
	0.352	0.844	0.441
	0.417	0.859	0.372
	0.368	0.811	0.346
Brand trust	0.231	0.332	0.778
	0.297	0.413	0.848
	0.280	0.456	0.801
	0.104	0.472	0.705
	0.265	0.568	0.793

Source: Calculated using SmartPLS software

3.5.2. Evaluation of the structural model:

This first part is dedicated to testing the hypotheses previously proposed. This study applies the PLS standard bootstrapping procedure with a number of 5,000 bootstrap to assess the significance of the path coefficients(Hair et al., 2014). The results are in both figure 2 and table 6.

Figure 2. SmartPLS Bootstrap results



Source: results of smartPLS software

Table 6. Latent variable correlations and square roots of average variance extracted

H	Relations	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard deviation	T Statistics	P Value	F ²	Decision
H1	BE > BL	0.260	0.2667	0.108	2.417	0.018	0.154	Accepted
H2	BE > BT	0.310	0.314	0.121	2.557	0.009	0.157	Accepted
H3	BT > BL	0.513	0.523	0.077	6.704	0.000	0.406	Accepted
H4	BE > BT > BL	0.159	0.169	0.073	2.247	0.022		Accepted

Source: calculated using SmartPLS software

Note: BL: Brand loyalty; BT: Brand trust; BE: Brand experience.

Before discussing the hypotheses tests, we should analyze the F² values (effect size) portrayed in table 6, which are measured according to (Cohen, 1988) and results show that brand’s experience effect on both brand loyalty and brand trust is medium since it’s between 0.02 and 0.15, while brand trust had a large effect on brand loyalty since it’s higher that the suggested 0.35(Cohen, 1988).

The findings of table 6 also show the test results of the hypotheses proposed in this study, starting with H1 which suggests that brand experience has a positive effect on brand loyalty, and since the P-value is 0.016 this means the hypothesis is accepted. For H2 that says brand experience has a positive effect on brand trust, it’s also accepted since the P-value is 0.011. Also, the P-Value of H3 is found to be 0.000 indicating the acceptance of the hypothesis that states that brand trust has a positive effect on brand loyalty. Finally, there’s H4 that suggests a mediating effect of brand trust in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty, which is tested using a two steps measurement suggested by(Preacher & Hayes, 2008), the first one is testing the indirect effect of brand experience on brand loyalty through brand trust by bootsrap the indirect effect using SmartPLS, which is confirmed in table 6 since the P-value is 0.025. The second step is bootstrapped the confident interval that is calculated using Microsoft excel and the data from SmartPLS, and the findings are shown in the next table.

Table 7. Testing the mediating effect of brand trust

STRD Beta	STRD Beta	Path c			Confidence Interval		Decision
Path a	Path b	Indirect effect	SE	T-value	95 LL	95 UL	
0.310	0.513	0.159	0.073	0.369	0.015	0.302	Mediation

Source: calculated using Microsoft excel.

Note: LL: lower limits, UL: upper limits

Using (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) method, a 95% confident interval [0.015, 0.302] did not include zero, indicating the mediation of brand trust.

The evaluation of the structural model also includes calculating the R² values that reflect the predictive accuracy of the exogenous variable on endogenous variable/s, and the predictive relevance using the Stone-Geisser test or simply Q² (Geisser, 1975; Stone, 1974) which are shown in tables 8 and 9.

Table 8. The predictive accuracy (R²)

Latent variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted	results
Brand loyalty	0.745	0.737	high
Brand trust	0.353	0.346	medium

Source: calculated using SmartPLS software.

According to (Chin, 1998) the R² values of brand loyalty exceeds the 0.67 suggested since it was 0.745 so it's considered to be High. As for brand trust, it's medium since it close to the suggested value of 0.33.

Table 9. The predictive relevance (Q²)

Variable	SSO	SSE	Q ² (1-SSE /SSO)
Brand loyalty	308.000	236.470	0.232
Brand trust	385.000	368.199	0.044

Source: calculated using SmartPLS software.

For a model to have predictive relevance, the value of the Q² must be hight than zero(Henseler et al., 2009) which is what we see in table 9.

The last step is calculating the goodness of fit of the model GoF that considers the quality of both inner and outer models. This study follows the proposed method of (Tenenhaus et al., 2004; van Dolen et al., 2008) applying this equation and using The average AVE and the average R² of the study:

$$GoF = \sqrt{(R^2 \cdot AVE)}$$

$$AVE = (0.821 + 0.611 + 0.645)/3 = 0.692$$

$$R^2 = (0.745 + 0.353)/2 = 0.549$$

$$GoF = \sqrt{0.692 \cdot 0.549} = \sqrt{0.379} = 0.615$$

To analyze this result (Wetzels et al., 2009) suggested this scale :0.1 (small), 0.25 (medium) and 0.36 (large). The 0.615 value found is higher than 0.35. thus, we can confidently say that this study contains a good model of fit.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS:

The previous results have proven both the reliability and validity of our research model by evaluating the measurement model, and found all the results were in the acceptable range. Then we moved to evaluating the structural model starting with testing the hypotheses proposed, which they were all accepted, meaning that the better brand experience is, the stronger brand trust is (H1), and the more likely to gain brand loyalty (H2). Also, the more customers trust the brand the more chance is to get their loyalty to the brand (H3). Furthermore, brand trust can mediate the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty and strengthening it(H4). And all these results were compatible with the previous studies mentioned.

Moving on to the effect size of these relationship (F²) that was found to be medium in the brand experience and brand loyalty relationship, as well as brand experience and brand trust relationship. This shows that although there is an effect, it can be improved by providing better brand experiences to the customers, which leads to more effect on both brand trust and loyalty. It was also established that the research model had predictive accuracy and relevance by finding the values of both Q² and R² within acceptable range. We finally tested the goodness of fit of the model which was also found very good, therefore Reinforcing the acceptance of our research model.

Our findings have multiple implications. First, even though brand experience is considered a trending topic in the academic research, we are among the first to analyze the brand experience effect in the Algerian service market, which helps to shed a light on the importance of brand experience especially in the traveling services in Algeria that is considered a rising market. Moreover, our study is provided with empirical data that proves that brand experience does indeed have an effect on brand loyalty. Third, this paper also examined the effect of brand experience on brand trust and found that customers can have more trust if the brand experience is better. Finally, we focused on the mediating role of brand trust, which was affected by brand experience, while having an effect on brand loyalty.

In conclusion, for tourist agencies to improve their customer's brand loyalty, they should focus on improving the brand experience provided while taking into consideration the strong effect of brand trust on brand loyalty. To do so they must also know the fact that it's not only enough to measure whether the brand experience was good or not, or if a customer trusts a brand or if he's loyal, while all of this is important, it's also crucial to be able to measure how good was the experience and why, the level of brand trust and loyalty, and the drivers behind them to be able to adjust the services and marketing strategies accordingly. Thus, the following recommendations were suggested:

- The agencies should focus more on improving the communication with their customers to be able to know their exact wants and needs, even if it was by taking initiative in asking questions such as: how was the trip? What do you want us to do next? What are your suggestions for better future experiences? whether it's through the agency or social media platforms. This will also show the customers how invested the agency is in providing the best services.
- The traveling agencies should only make promises that they can keep. For example, when making the schedule, they shouldn't plan more activities than the time allows.
- Recovery services should always be provided to customers, since they're considered a second chance to gain the customers trust and loyalty.
- discounts shouldn't only be made on occasions, but also to regular customers to the brand, making them feel important.

- Well-trained and competent employees should be used by the traveling agencies in order to guarantee the best experiences.

4. THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

This paper only focused on one travel agency when it was better to study multiple agencies to see why is one of them better than the others, to get a fuller idea on how to improve the service provided to ensure a good brand experience. Also, speaking of brand experience, it was studied as one construct while it had to be studied in dimensions to know exactly what makes a good experience and what should the agencies focus on more. Thirdly, there are other constructs that can mediate the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty other than brand trust. That been said, the following propositions are made for further studies: The importance of brand experience dimensions in attaining brand loyalty in the tourism industry, the effect of brand experience brand equity, and finally, the impact of brand experience on brand loyalty with customer satisfaction and brand trust as mediators.

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