

Organizational-Based Self-Esteem and Self-Monitoring in Fostering Work Engagement: A Review and Proposed Research Framework for the Hotel Industry

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Abstract: The rapid development of hotels in Malaysia has pressured hotel players to be more aggressive in attaining greater market share and customer loyalty. Hotels need to strive harder to unshackle the talents of their employees in order to accomplish peak performance. Recent efforts have highlighted the importance of research engagement which focuses on human strengths and optimal functioning. Despite its potential functional outcomes, research on the prevalence and antecedents of research engagement remains scarce. Therefore, the objective of this study is to create a model linking personal resources (organizational-based self-esteem and self-monitoring) as predictors of research engagement among customer-contact employees within the Malaysian hotel industry. In addition, co-worker support has been proposed as a moderator in the earlier mentioned relationship. A review of the literature to support the suggested model is provided.

Key words: Work engagement, organizational-based self-esteem, self-monitoring, co-worker support, hotels

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide expansion of personal income and leisure time has resulted in an increase in tourism-related activities for many countries around the world including Malaysia. The tourism industry in Malaysia has been rapidly growing for >2 decades. This can be seen from the Ministry of Tourism's records which showed a marked increase in the number of tourist arrivals to Malaysia from 7.4 million in 1990 to 16.4 million in 2005 and 24.7 million in 2011 (MOF, 2011). By 2020, the number of tourists coming into Malaysia is projected to reach 36 million (MOF, 2011). There are many reasons why Malaysia has been publicized as an attractive tourist destination. Among others include the beauty of its land and marine life, its diverse population and cultural heritage, its exotic cuisine and its shopping facilities (MICC, 2011). In fact, Malaysia has been recognized as one of the 12 mega-diverse countries in the world endowed with an abundance of flora and fauna (MNRE, 2009).

The expansion of the tourism trade in Malaysia has contributed significantly to the country's economic growth in terms of foreign exchange earnings and job opportunities. For instance in year 2011, Malaysia earned RM 58.3 billion through tourists receipts (Tourism Malaysia, 2011b). This increase is considered remarkable when compared to tourists receipts of only RM17.3 billion in year 2000. In terms of job opportunities,

in 2010, the tourism industry has provided 1.8 million jobs equivalent to 15.9% of Malaysia's total employment (Tourism Malaysia, 2012). Given its role, the tourism industry has been identified as one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) under the 10th Malaysia Plan (2011-2015). During the 5 years period, the government intends to raise the country's position to be within the top 10 in terms of global tourism receipts and to enhance the sector's contribution by 2.1 times, contributing a total of RM115 billion in receipts and creating approximately 2 million jobs (Economic Planning Unit, 2010). To achieve this aim, one of the main strategies would be to improve the quality of tourism products and services.

One of the key stakeholders within the tourism industry relates to hotels (Baum and Mudambi, 1999; Hayes and Ninemeier, 2007; MICC, 2011). Statistics from 2007 till 2010 consistently showed that accommodation represents the largest component of tourists' expenditures (Tourism Malaysia, 2011b). On the average, tourists that come to Malaysia spent about 31% of their expenses on accommodation (MOT, 2011a). Their Average Length of Stay (ALOS) is 6.8 nights in Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2011b). Factors relating to the increasing number of tourists over the years, the large amount of tourist expenditures spent on accommodation and the relatively long average length of stay have encouraged the rapid development of the hotel

industry. This can be grasped from the number of hotels in Malaysia which has risen from 2269 units in year 2005-2707 units in year 2011 (Tourism Malaysia, 2011a).

However, the rise in the number of new hotels combined with the expansion of existing hotels has stepped up competition for market share among hotels in Malaysia. Besides, hotels do experience difficulties in catering to the different expectations of customers that hail from different cultural backgrounds. It has been recorded that tourists that visited Malaysia in terms of country came from Asian countries (such as Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Japan, China and India), as well as Non-Asian countries (such as Australia and United Kingdom) (MOT, 2011b). The study by Poon and Low (2005) indicated the existence of significant differences between Asian and Non-Asian tourists in terms of their evaluations of a hotel's quality. For instance, Asian tourists emphasized more on the room rate, followed by the quality of food and beverage offered, before finally focusing on the quality of service offered by the hotel's staff in serving their customers. On the other hand, Non-Asian tourists ranked hotel security as their top priority, followed by the quality of services provided by the hotel's employees with the quality of food and beverage offered being the last.

With mounting pressure to escalate market share and to accommodate the different expectations from customers of different nationalities, improving service delivery quality becomes a must for hotels in Malaysia. Prior studies (Baum and Mudambi, 1999; Hayes and Ninemeier, 2007) have shown that a customer's decision to stay or not to stay in the hotel during their next visit depends on their satisfaction with the quality of service they received. This finding concurs with Lee *et al.* (2006) who advocated that customers are bound to be satisfied which in turn, lead to their retention when their perceived level of service provided by the particular service organization exceeded their expectations. On the other hand, customers are likely to feel dissatisfied resulting in poor retention when their experience during the service encounter are perceived to be unfavorable and fell after their expectations (Markovic and Raspor, 2010; Yoo and Park, 2007). In their empirical study using a sample derived from the hotel, restaurant and airlines industry, Bitner *et al.* (1990) found that offering better service delivery to customers are bound to make them satisfied with the service provider. Satisfied customers tend to become loyal by making repeated visits and conveying positive word of mouth. Such actions from customers will ultimately result in greater market share and higher revenue for the service providers.

As noted by Bienstock *et al.* (2003), employees, especially those at the frontline who liaise directly with the customers (hereafter known as customer-contact employees), represent the lifeblood of a service organization. This line of thought is especially true for the hotel business which has been accredited as a labor-intensive industry (Baum and Mudambi, 1999; Hayes and Ninemeier, 2007). Slatten and Mehmetoglu (2011) further highlighted the prime role played by frontline employees in influencing guest experience in the hospitality industry. In the hotel business, every customer will experience numerous service encounters (or touch points) with customer-contact employees. For instance, upon arrival at the doorstep of the hotel, every customer would come across the hotel's customer-contact employees, such as the bellman, concierge and receptionists. According to Cook (2008), the quality of this particular service encounter is the key to a hotel's success. Cook (2008) debated that if the service encounter with the customer was good but the product does not meet the customer's needs, the customer will often give the service organization a second chance. On the contrary, even if the service organization was able to provide a good product, customer will still feel indifferent if they experienced poor service encounter. Therefore, the attitudes and behaviors of customer-contact employees are very crucial in shaping customers evaluation of service quality and subsequently the success of service organizations such as hotels (Bettencourt and Brown, 2003; Bettencourt *et al.*, 2001; Bitner *et al.*, 1990; Hartline and Ferrell, 1996; Lee *et al.*, 2006; Schneider and Bowen, 1985; Yang, 2010). The 1 form of research attitude that is likely to enrich service delivery by customer-contact workers is work engagement.

Engaged employees are those who possessed vigor are dedicated and are absorbed in their jobs (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). A review of previous literature indicates that work engagement is one of the mechanisms that can induce beneficial workplace behaviors such as work performance (Chughtai and Buckley, 2009; Bakker *et al.*, 2004; Halbesleben and Wheeler, 2008) organizational citizenship behavior (Chughtai and Buckley, 2009; Babcock-Roberson and Strickland, 2010; Halbesleben *et al.*, 2009) and extra-role service behavior (Moliner *et al.*, 2008; Salanova *et al.*, 2005). In a sample of 342 customer-contact employees in Spanish hotels, Salanova *et al.* (2005) found that there is a positive relationship between work engagement and service delivery quality. Interestingly, in a study among 42 employees from 3 branches of a Greek fast-food restaurant, Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2009b) discovered that the level of employees research engagement has a

positive and significant effect on the restaurant's financial performance. Given the universality of the hotel business and that restaurant business makes up part of the hotel services one would expect similar findings to be applicable to the Malaysian hotel industry. In other words, higher work engagement among hotel customer-contact employees would result in better service quality and higher financial returns for hotels.

Given the functional consequences of research engagement, researchers have begun to investigate the predictors of work engagement. Previous researchers have identified a variety of resources as predictors of work engagement (Hakanen *et al.*, 2006; Josje *et al.*, 2010; Langelaan *et al.*, 2006; Liorens *et al.*, 2007; Martinussen *et al.*, 2007; Mauno *et al.*, 2007; Salanova *et al.*, 2005; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Weigl *et al.*, 2010; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2008; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007, 2009a; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009b). Generally, these predictors can be categorized into 2 categories: Job resources and personal resources.

Job resources are assumed to play an intrinsic motivational role by encouraging employees growth, learning and development or an intrinsic motivational role because they are instrumental in achieving work goals (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Job resources that have been examined include those derived at the organizational level (e.g., supervisory coaching, performance feedback, organizational climate, access to information) (Hakanen *et al.*, 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007, 2009b); interpersonal level (e.g., social support, team climate) (Hakanen *et al.*, 2006; Martinussen *et al.*, 2007; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004) and task level (e.g. job control, autonomy) (Hakanen *et al.*, 2006; Martinussen *et al.*, 2007; Mauno *et al.*, 2007; Salanova *et al.*, 2005; Weigl *et al.*, 2010; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007).

Personal resources, on the other hand, relates to an individual's sense of ability to control and impact his/her environment successfully (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2003). These positive self-evaluations enhance feelings of goal self-concordance which helps motivate the individual to pursue his/her goals and as a result trigger greater desirable work outcomes (Judge *et al.*, 2004). Personal resources that have been inspected include one's personal beliefs (e.g., self-efficacy, optimism and organizational-based self-esteem (there after labeled as OBSE) (Liorens *et al.*, 2007; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2008; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007, 2009a, 2009b), traits (e.g., active coping and proactivity) (Dikkers *et al.*, 2010; Langelaan *et al.*, 2006; Weigl *et al.*, 2010) and demographic variables (e.g., age, education, gender and marital status) (Mauno *et al.*, 2007).

Although, both job and personal resources are mutually related (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007), as suggested by Chiang and Jang (2008), personal resources can play a more influential role than job resources in predicting employees motivation. Drawing on this evidence, researchers suggest that personal resources can be a significant and independent predictor of employees' work engagement. Besides, prior studies on work engagement has been mostly confined to developed countries in Europe, such as Finland (Hakanen *et al.*, 2006; Mauno *et al.*, 2007), the Netherlands (Dikkers *et al.*, 2010; Langelaan *et al.*, 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007, 2009a), Greece (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009b), Norway (Martinussen *et al.*, 2007), Spain (Liorens *et al.*, 2007; Salanova *et al.*, 2005) and Germany (Weigl *et al.*, 2010). The subjects involved those from specific industries, such as education, health-care, insurance, fast-food, airlines, manufacturing, as well as the government sector.

Studies on the effects of personal resources on work engagement of people in developing countries have been confined to the work of Karatepe and Olugbade (2009) and Abdul Hamid and Yahya (2011). Karatepe and Olugbade (2009), examined the role of personal belief (self-efficacy) and trait (competitiveness) in predicting work engagement among frontliners in Nigerian hotels. Their results showed that employees competitive trait enhanced the 3 dimensions of work engagement construct (i.e., vigor, dedication and absorption) while personal belief (in the form of self-efficacy) was only able to have a significant and positive effect on one specific dimension (i.e., absorption). Abdul Hamid and Yahya (2011) conducted an empirical study on the relationship between person-job fit, person-organization fit and work engagement among a sample of engineers working in semiconductor companies in Malaysia. They discovered that there is a positive and significant relationship between both forms of fit (person-job and person-organization) and employees work engagement. Based on the claims that empirical findings from developed Western countries cannot be fully generalized to developing countries (Karatepe and Olugbade, 2009), studies on work engagement within the hospitality industry is clearly lacking (Karatepe and Olugbade, 2009), research in work engagement in Malaysia is still in its infancy (Abdul Hamid and Yahya, 2011) and realizing the growing need for service-providers to retain guests' loyalty, the aim is to review the literature and ultimately propose a model linking two specific personal resources (OBSE and self-monitoring) and work engagement of customer-contact hotel employees in Malaysia. Given that

these frontliners need to research interdependently with one another in order to complete the service process (Ma and Qu, 2011), co-worker support has been identified as a potential moderator in the proposed relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work engagement: Many views have been forwarded concerning work engagement. Kahn (1990) defined personal engagement as the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's preferred self in the task behavior. According to Kahn (1990)'s view, there is a connection of self in one's work physically, cognitively and emotionally. Harter *et al.* (2002), further proposed that engaged employees tend to be involved, committed and satisfied with their work. In defining the construct, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) view work engagement as a favorable attitudinal construct, specifically referring it to a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. The first dimension, vigor refers to high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence in the face of difficulties. The second dimension, dedication refers to one's sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. The third dimension, absorption refers to 1 being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in research whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work. Although other definitions have been put forth, the one given by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) is the most frequently cited definition in the study of work engagement (Wefald and Downey, 2009). In a recent study, Aryee *et al.* (2012) advocated that Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)'s conceptualization of work engagement is actually consistent with the perspective taken by Kahn (1990) whereby engaged employees utilized their physical, cognitive and emotional capabilities simultaneously at research.

According to Schaufeli *et al.* (2006), research engagement is not a momentary and specific state but rather a persistent, pervasive and positive affective-cognitive state of mind. As such, engaged workers view work as fun, as advocated by Bakker *et al.* (2008). Despite the fact that work engagement may have some overlaps with other motivational constructs (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job involvement) as claimed by some scholars (May *et al.*, 2004; Robinson *et al.*, 2004) research findings demonstrated that work engagement is a distinct, multidimensional construct comprising of vigor, dedication and absorption (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006; Koyuncu *et al.*, 2006; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

Resources as predictors of work engagement: Resources can be defined as those objects, personal characteristics, conditions or energies that are valued in their own right, or that are valued because they serve as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources (Hobfoll, 1989). According to Hobfoll (1989), resources are considered important because first, individuals need these resources to enable them to deal with threatening situations and prevent them from negative outcomes, particularly strain and second, individuals strive to not only conserve these resources but to accumulate them as well, since more resource gains results in positive outcomes, like better coping and well-being. Since, work engagement is regarded as a positive attitudinal state, one would assume that individuals with greater resources (such as those relating to one's positive psychological attributes) will experience lesser strain and higher work engagement.

As mentioned earlier, 2 types of resources are equally important in fostering work engagement namely job resources (i.e., resources derived from job) and personal resources (i.e., resources derived from self) (Liorens *et al.*, 2007). However according to Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2007), a substantial amount of studies have primarily focused on job resources while overlooking the role of personal resources in predicting work engagement. Given that personal resources, especially those relating to personal beliefs and individual traits are malleable (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009b) and can be developed and nurtured through managerial interventions (Bandura, 2009), the aim is to review the literature and explore the potential role of personal resources as possible predictors of work engagement. This study also attempts to address the call by Xanthopoulou *et al.* (2007) for more research investigating the effects of personal resources on employees work engagement.

Personal resources as predictors of work engagement: Personal resources refer to resources derived from one own self that reflect one's positive self-evaluations that are linked to resiliency. The extent of personal resources reflects an individual's sense of ability to control and affect his/her environment successfully (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2003). According to Salanova *et al.* (2006), personal resources are functional in facilitating the achievement of goals, protect from threats and their associated physiological and psychological cost and stimulate individual growth, learning and development. Thus, personal resources not only serve to enhance stress resilience for the individual, it also serves to improve the person's adaptability to the environment, leading to greater positive outcomes. This line of thought concurs

with Judge *et al.* (2004) who advocated that an individual who own positive self-evaluations are bound to enjoy higher levels of well-being outcomes. Work engagement is one potential outcome. Previous studies have demonstrated that hotel employees experience elevated levels of stress are confronted with heightened customer expectations, work irregular hours and have to bear heavy workloads (Babin and Boles, 1996; Karatepe *et al.*, 2007). Given this demanding scenario and in line with the earlier discussion, the availability of personal resources would be expected to trigger higher levels of work engagement. Hence, the first proposition is as follows:

Proposition 1: There will be a positive relationship between personal resources and work engagement of hotel employees.

Customer-contact employees are regarded as a unique asset for hotels, since they are responsible in distinguishing the hotel's service delivery quality from its competitors (Nailon, 1989; Samenfink, 1994). In dealing with the frequent, complex and taxing service encounters, customer-contact employees need to possess certain personal resources that are bound to increase their self-regard which in turn, lead to greater sense of well-being. One such resource is OBSE. In fact, OBSE has been specified as one of the crucial personal resources that elicit not only positive work attitudes like job satisfaction, organizational commitment, research engagement and motivation (Hobfoll, 2002; Mauno *et al.*, 2007; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009a) but functional behaviours, such as organizational citizenship behaviour (Pierce and Gardner, 2004).

Further, every service interaction in hotel is distinctive whereby some customer requests may require unique responses from customer-contact employees (Hoque, 1999). Failure to give appropriate response to customers is one of the main determinant of customer dissatisfaction (Bitner *et al.*, 1990). As such, customer-contact employees who are able to give close attention to the behaviour of others would definitely be able to better understand customers and consequently provide better responses to them (Heskett, 1986). Therefore, self-monitoring has been viewed as a critical personal resource for customer-contact employees in hotels (Samenfink, 1994; Tansik, 1990) to offset the effect of demanding work conditions (Pierce and Gardner, 2004; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007).

In concurrence with the earlier discussion, researchers have reasons to believe that OBSE and self-monitoring are 2 important personal resources needed by customer-contact employees in hotels. The following discussion will focus on these 2 specific forms of personal resources.

Organizational-based self-esteem and work engagement:

Individuals with OBSE are those who believe that they can satisfy their needs by participating in roles within the organization (Pierce *et al.*, 1989). This implies that employees with OBSE tend to perceive themselves as valuable, meaningful and worthy to their organization. In a hotel setting when customer-contact employees perceive their role as significant to the hotel, they are likely to be more confident with themselves in carrying out their daily duty. As such, these workers are more likely to become motivated, more energetic and are psychologically and positively connected with their work activities, all of which reflect the attributes of work engagement. Thus, employees with higher levels of OBSE would be expected to lead to greater work engagement. In fact, a 2 year longitudinal study by Mauno *et al.* (2007) among 409 Finnish healthcare employees provided empirical evidence for the predicting role of OBSE on work engagement. Therefore, it can be posited that:

Proposition 1a: There will be a positive relationship between OBSE and work engagement of hotel employees.

Self-monitoring and work engagement: Individuals with a self-monitoring trait are those who are sensitive to the requirements of a particular situation and are able to adjust their own behavior to fit that situation (Snyder, 1987). This implies that self-monitors are more likely to generate their own behavior based on the situational and non-verbal signals as opposed to their own internal feelings (Blakely *et al.*, 2003). In the context of the hotel business, being sensitive to the feelings of others and the ability to adjust their own behavior based on the situation and non-verbal cues is important for customer-contact employees. As frontliners, customer-contact employees need to communicate and interact not only with external customers with differing expectations on a regular basis (Blakely *et al.*, 2003; Kilduff and Day, 1994) but also their internal customers. According to Ma and Qu (2011), front-line employees may need to liaise with other departments in their bid to deliver quality service. Therefore, high self-monitoring customer-contact hotel employees would be able to better understand situational demands and provide an appropriate response quickly. In this way, customers will become delighted. At the same time, conflict may be avoided, resulting in lower frustrations and higher satisfaction for the employee. In such situation, these satisfied workers are more likely to adopt a favorable attitude at research by becoming more energetic, more dedicated and more engrossed in their research, all of which characterized research engagement. Thus, researchers postulate that:

Proposition 1b: There will be a positive relationship between self-monitoring and work engagement of hotel employees.

The role of co-worker support as a moderator in the personal resources-work engagement relationships:

Susskind *et al.* (2007) defined co-worker support as the extent to which co-workers provide work-related assistance to assist each other in carrying out their service-related duties. Co-worker support include forms of work-related expertise, information, cooperation and feedback (Anand *et al.*, 2010). In the service process, when peers are willing to render their support, the process of service delivery becomes easier and its completion becomes quicker.

In the hotel industry, Tiedemann *et al.* (2009) advocated that co-worker support plays an important role in service delivery. This is because customer-contact employees need to liaise not only with the hotel guests but also with other individuals, such as their superiors and colleagues (Kim *et al.*, 2009). Besides to complete a service process, customer-contact employees often need to coordinate closely with their peers from other departments (Ma and Qu, 2011). Thus, greater co-worker support in the form of expertise, information, cooperation and feedback can facilitate customer-contact workers to perform effectively. Greater co-worker support suggests better performance outcomes by the employee which ultimately result in higher well-being.

As previously mentioned, the availability of personal resources are considered functional since it not only serve to improve the individual's stress resilience but also enriches the person's adaptability to the environment, leading to improved psychological outcomes like higher research engagement. In other words, employees who have superior personal resources are more likely to become enthusiastic, more committed in their research and become more focused and absorbed in performing their task. These characteristics mirrors research engagement. Thus, the positive influence of personal resources on research engagement would be expected to become greater with the existence of co-worker support. Since, co-worker support has a heightened effect on work engagement, it is likely that the relationship between personal resources (i.e., OBSE and self-monitoring) and research engagement will be moderated by the level of co-worker support. Hence, the second proposition read as follows:

Proposition 2: The positive relationship between personal resources (OBSE and self-monitoring) and work engagement would be stronger for customer-contact employees who receive higher co-worker support than those who receive lower co-worker support.

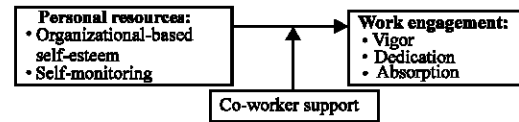


Fig. 1: Proposed research model

Proposition 2a: The positive relationship between OBSE and work engagement would be stronger for customer-contact employees who received higher co-worker support than those who receive lower co-worker support.

Proposition 2b: The positive relationship between self-monitoring and work engagement would be stronger for customer-contact employees who received higher co-worker support than those who receive lower co-worker support.

Proposed research model: Based on the review of the literature and our understanding of the hotel context, the proposed research framework is shown in Fig. 1. About 2 forms of personal resources (OBSE and self-monitoring) are posited to predict work engagement and this relationship is moderated by co-worker support.

CONCLUSION

In a highly competitive environment, service delivery quality becomes one of the most crucial elements for sustainable competitive advantage among service-providers (Markovic and Raspor, 2010). The hotel industry has been claimed to be experiencing increasing competition (Presbury *et al.*, 2005). Thus to provide high quality service delivery, hotels need to ensure that their customer-contact employees are highly engaged in their research. Research engagement is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption in research. Since hotels are labor-intensive, employees especially those at the frontline play a significant role in ensuring superior service delivery. Engaged employees are bound to portray a positive outlook toward their job and more willing to devote their time and effort in serving their customers, all of which will lead to higher perceived service quality and ultimately greater customer satisfaction. A review of past literature lends support for the positive relationships between personal resources and work engagement. Hence, a conceptual research model has been developed linking personal resources (OBSE and self-monitoring) as potential predictors of work engagement. In addition, since customer-contact employees research as a team in performing their service delivery duties, co-worker support has been posited to have a moderating effect on the relationships between the 2 predictor variables and the dependent variable.

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