



THE NEXUS BETWEEN CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN THE STAR RATED HOTELS IN KENYA

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to determine the nexus between customer relationship management strategy and customer loyalty of star rated hotels in Kenya. Precisely, the study assessed the influence of customer orientation strategy and service quality management strategy on customer loyalty. Resource based view theory anchored the research. The cross-sectional descriptive research design was adopted where a sample size of 140 respondents out of which 91.4 percent responded. Self-administered questionnaires were used in data collection. Descriptive statistics and binary Logistic Regression were used to analyze data and make conclusion. The P value for all the independent variable was less than 5 percent, thus, it was concluded that customer orientation strategy and service quality management strategy are statistically significant in prediction of customer loyalty in star rated hotels in Kenya. it was further recommended that; the top-level management need to promote a culture that is customer centered where their staff have more energy directed towards fulfilling the client

needs. The star rated hotel customer service department need to conduct regular follow ups on the offered services. The star rated hotels should offer a clean and organized platform so as to improve customer loyalty.

Keywords: Customer Orientation Strategy, Service Quality Management Strategy, Customer Loyalty, Star Rated Hotels

INTRODUCTION

Recently, numerous commercial activities worldwide have been brought to a halt or operations has reduced with the rise of Corona Virus (COVID 19) and this has changed how organizations do business. Hospitality industry has been highly affected due to the health measures taken like social distancing orders, events cancellations and travel restrictions (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2020). This has affected the hotel performance indicators negatively like decline in the hotel occupancy rates and revenues. Despite the pandemic control measure challenges to reverse this trend, hotels need to improve their customer loyalty. A loyal customer is regarded to be a free advert for any business and is regarded as an essential asset for the survival of any business worldwide. Hotels need to use customer centric approach like customer relationship management strategy so as to maintain their customer's loyalty and enhance its competitive edge in the long run (Davahli, Karwowski, Sonmez, & Apostolopoulos, 2020).

Relationship marketing has become a vital tool for the hotel sector in the current dynamic market where customer preferences and needs are shifting hastily. These hasty shifts increase the relationships importance and emphasizes on the need to be in relationships networks. Organizations have focused on establishing a long period profitable business relationship with their customers in order to enhance customer value. Customer relationship management strategies provide benefits to an organisation since loyal customers increases their expenditure at an increasing rate, make repurchases at full profit margin and generate operating competences (Nasir, 2017).

Customer relationship management strategy is a continuous procedure of recognizing and creating new customer value and distributing the merits of the customer value in a going concern organization (Mokhtaran & Komeilian, 2016). It is a customer centric strategy adopted by an organization to manage the its interaction with its clientele in the effort of creating a stronger positive relationship with them. It assists organizations make informed decisions in their attempts to improve customer loyalty and sales (Saleh & El Sabeli, 2018).

Customer relationship management strategies such as customer orientation programs and service quality management has been recognized as management philosophy while creating customer loyalty (Kocoglu & Kirmaci, 2012). Effective and efficient customer relationship management strategy lead to repeated purchase by the customer as well as more customer referrals. During this pandemic era hotels need to create strategies such as offering quality service, unique products or even customizing their products that can make their customers feel valued. Conversely, to earn more revenues with reduced number of workforce reorientation of technology in hotels has to be enhanced so as to retain the client's confidence and loyalty (Lawson-Body & Limayem, 2017).

To improve the customer value, hotels in the far-east countries have been offering quality service, unique products and involving customers in identifying their needs. They also maintain the records of their clients in their database. On the other hand, customers prefer to interact with less employees of the hotels who exhibit high skills (Zhang, Li, Jiao, & Zhou , 2016). Hotels that meet and satisfy customer needs by fulfilling their needs and wishes attracts customer loyalty. Thus, it is essential for them to regularly keep contact with them and follow their needs and wishes closely. Those that do not manage their customer relationship well they will adversely suffer for any strategy they adopt in an effort to win the customer loyalty as customers have a great power (Kocoglu & Kirmaci, 2012).

In Africa, increased hotel customers' loyalty in South Africa is credited to the effective customer relationship management strategies used. The strategies entail customer orientations and quality service provision which have been rated as an effective management tool (Madhov & Dhliwayo, 2017). Hotels need to build these strategies internally as they build closer bonds with their customers but the focus should be externally on customers. In Ghana, innovations have presented easier ways of keeping in touch with their customers in an effort to enhance their loyalty. Social media platforms have greatly cut the cost of reaching to customers. However, their service quality is still too low in comparison to the international standards. They also experience tough competition that have led them to focus on searching for new ways of encouraging and winning their clients to remain loyal. Customer relationship management strategies are usually utilized to create a large customer loyalty base for increasing sales revenue and performance of an organisation (Mohammed & Rashid, 2012).

In Kenya, the hotel sector has been listed as the first sector in vision 2030 that will enhance economic growth. The hotels need to be customer-centric so as to counter the competition they receive either locally by the increasing number of hotels or internationally while building customer loyalty (Mugito, 2016). They attract many customers but still work on establishing a long-term relationship with their customers either locally or internationally so as to

increase loyal and profitable customers. Customer centric organisation reap more long-term benefits such as increased customer loyalty and healthier financial returns (Kangu, Wanjau, Kosimbei , & Arasa , 2017). However, the hotel industry has experienced a high decline in customer loyalty of 30 percent which necessitate for a study to be conducted so as to offer a solution.

Problem Statement

Customer loyalty is essential for the survival of any business worldwide. Therefore, a stronger customer relationship management strategy is vital to the 21st century business that wishes to survive in the today's competitive environment (Wabwile, Uzel, & Wahida, 2019). The hotel sector in Kenya has witnessed an increase in the hotel occupancy by 6 percent in 2019, in spite of this the customers have reduced by 30 percent (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2020). Offering services to customers with no clear strategy of customer relationship management has contributed to this decline in customers which is expected to affect the hotel market share and profits negatively (Wabwile, Uzel, & Wahida, 2019). It is still a challenge even with the government effort to market and promote the hotels through the Kenya Tourism Board with an aim of attracting more customers locally and abroad (KNBS, 2020). This is so because, hotels gain their revenues from the customers they offer services to. The declining customer loyalty may threaten the going concern of the hotels thus leading to closure. In the long run this will largely affect the employment rate of 60 percent offered by the sector either directly or indirectly. Additionally, it will act as a hinderance to the improvement of the country's income as the sector is the largest foreign exchange earner (Parliamentary Budget Office, 2020).

However, the existing research globally are in disagreement in their results on the nexus among customer relationship management strategies and customer loyalty. For example, Al-Azzam (2016) and Kangu (2017) found a significant link among customer relationship management strategies and the performance of the hotel. Nevertheless, Wabwile, Uzel, and Wahida (2019) were in contrast. Thus, the need for the research on the nexus between customer relationship management strategy and customer loyalty in Kenyan star rated hotels.

General Objective

To determine the nexus between customer relationship management strategy and customer loyalty in the Kenyan star rated hotels

Specific Objectives

To determine the influence of customer orientation strategy on customer loyalty in the Kenyan star rated hotels

To establish the influence of service quality management strategy on customer loyalty in the Kenyan star rated hotels

Research Hypothesis

H01: Customer orientation strategy has no significant relationship with customer loyalty in the Kenyan star rated hotels.

H02: Service quality management strategy has no significant relationship with customer loyalty in the Kenyan star rated hotels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Resource Based View Theory

Barney (1991) is accredited with the theory of Resource based view. It proposes that to attain a competitive advantage a firm need to establish internal strengths among the accessible internal resources. The theory assumes two types of resources; tangible assets and intangible assets that are heterogeneous and immobile. Heterogeneous means that the organization resources must vary significantly from one organisation to another while immobile means that the resources cannot move freely among organizations (Wirtz & Daiser, 2018). The resources of the organisation should be valuable, rare, organized to capture value, be expensive to imitate or substitute and have ability to explain continued competitive advantage. The resources should assist an institution establish and implement strategies that can increase effectiveness and efficiency. Customer relationship management strategy, is a formation of the organization's culture and is considered as a resource that entails concentrating on winning the customer loyalty (Frambach, Fiss, & Ingenbleek, 2016).

Customer relationship management strategy is the adequate understanding of an organization's target customer to be in a position to produce superior value continuously (Wirtz & Daiser, 2018). By the organisation creating customer value customer loyalty is created leading to a competitive advantage and attaining organizational goals. The objective of maximizing firms' goals has been emphasized by the theory. The theory views organizations as possessing resources that are tangible or intangible (Frambach, Fiss, & Ingenbleek, 2016). These resources can include customer orientation strategies and service quality management strategies. Owning resources presents to the organisation a competitive advantage opportunity (Nasution & Rafiki, 2018).

Vargas, Gonçalo, Ribeirete and Souza (2017) argues that sustained competitive advantage is due to the strategic blending of internally developed resources in an organisation and synchronized with related competences. The competencies are the set of strategic procedures that allows the strategically positioned officers such as organizational officers to revisit their asset base so as to establish approaches that improve the customers' value. Competencies are complex and are encompassed in the routines of the organizations and cannot be imitated easily and must be non-substitutable. Customer relationship management strategies are core competencies that organizations ought to establish (Watson, Wilson, Smart, & Macdonald, 2018). Organizations with higher customer relationship management strategies have an upper hand in enhancing customer value with a view of maintaining their loyalty.

Empirical Review

Soltani, Zareie, Milani and Navimipour (2018) examined the customer relationship management impact on the performance of an organisation. Specifically, the study evaluated the use of information technology, customer orientation, organization capability and customer knowledge on the organisation performance. A Descriptive design of research was applied in the enquiry which had a target population of 69 Tehran companies. Analyzed data revealed a significant link between the customer relationship management parameters and organisation performance. An effective and efficient use of information technology, customer orientation, organization capability and customer knowledge leads enhance the organisation performance (Wirtz & Daiser, 2018). Focus is on improve the customer loyalty through enhancement of customer value, thus, assisting in increased sales. Nevertheless, the study lacked an anchoring theory. Knowledge based view theory would be appropriate for the study so as to improve its relevance. Moreover, no recommendation was made by the study.

A study review was carried out on customer employee's customer orientation and public utility sector customer satisfaction with a service quality as a mediator by Wenyuan, Wisdom, Courage and Jewel (2019). The study targeted all the all the commercial SMEs customers of Ghana electricity company in the greater Accra region where 384 SMEs were sampled which had no more than 99 employees. Since the population is unknown the estimated population was 10,000,000 where a confidence level of 95 percent was considered. Convenience and purposive sampling were used in selecting the respondents. Primary data was gathered by utilizing the questionnaires that were self-administered which was issued to the respondents who were managers. The questions were structured into five-point Likert scale. It was exposed that customer orientation had a substantial effect on commercial SMEs customers satisfaction in the electricity consumption. The study theoretical grounding and research design was lacking

together with the recommendations. The study ought to be improved by offering relevant theories to anchor the study.

Jarideh (2016) focused on examining client orientation effect on client satisfaction and loyalty in the hyper star stores. A descriptive survey was adopted. The study target customers in Tehran and Iran Hyperstar who had at least one spending experience in these stores. The population was unlimited hence, the study utilized the Morgan table and considered 384 respondents for the study in collecting data. A 92 percent response rate was witnessed and considered appropriate for conducting further analysis. Correlation analysis results showed that customer orientation positively affected the customer loyalty. Nevertheless, the study was not anchored on any theory and no recommendations were made.

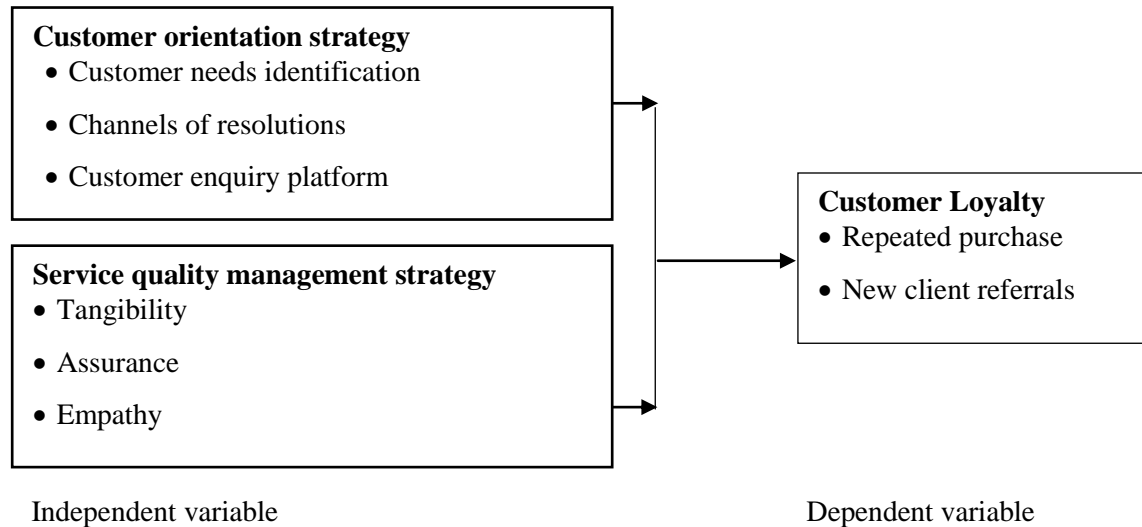
A critical review on the connection between service quality and customer loyalty was conducted by Anabila, Ameyibor, Allan, and Alomenu (2021) in Ghana's hotel industry. Pursuit for quality services in hotels may have gained momentum as service excellence desires continues to increase in the competitive global market. Customer have become unforgiving with high level of defecting and becoming disloyal if the service quality standards decline below their expectations. Using a quantitative survey design the researchers sampled 313 guests from the luxury hotels in Ghana where a questionnaire with five-point Likert scale was utilized in collecting primary data from the respondents. The correlated results revealed that service quality had a positive and significant effect on the loyalty of customers. The study did not show how the sample size was arrived at and the choice of luxury hotels is not justified. Despite, lacking recommendation this study ought not to represent the Ghana's hotel industry.

Priyo, Mohammed, and Adetunji (2019) examined the service quality effect on loyalty of a customer with client satisfaction as a moderator. Quantitative methodology was considered with 182 hotel customers participating in responding to the questionnaire out of the 200 distributed. The structural equation model results revealed that service quality has a positive connection with customer loyalty and customer satisfaction mediating the constructs was present. The study research methodology was not elaborate as the researcher did not indicate how the sample size was selected hence, the study was not scientific.

A review by Fida, Ahmed, & Al-Balushi (2020) on the service quality impact on customer loyalty in the Islamic banks of the Sultanate of Oman. Tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy were the constructs adopted in the study with a quantitative approach. A 120 customers sample size was selected from the Nizwa, Alizz, Maisarah and Al-Yusr Islamic banks in Oman. Questionnaire was utilized to gather data from the respondents which was examined using descriptive and regression statistics. The results indicated that empathy and responsiveness have a significant effect on customer loyalty while tangibility, reliability and

assurance did not show significant effect. The study ignored the sampling design so it is not clear how sample size was calculated and samples selected.

Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional research design. The study targeted the star rated hotels in Kenya in the 20 counties which are classified as; one-star hotels, two-star hotels, three-star hotels, four-star hotels and five-star hotels. The counties were selected as they play host to the 215 star rated hotels. The other 27 counties have no presence of a star rated hotel. In selecting the sample size, the study utilized the multi-stage sampling. First, the population was classified into strata. The stars classification was considered for stratification. Further, simple random sampling was utilized in selecting the sample respondents for the study from each stratum by use of random numbers table until the sample size was attained. In calculating the sample size, the Yamane (1967) formula for sample size computations was considered at a confidence level of 95 percent and $e = 0.05$.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where; n: sample size, N: population size and e: the level of precision.

The formula was utilized since the population is known. This resulted to 140 respondents of which 91.4 responded. Primary data was collected by use of a self-administered questionnaire. The self-designed structured questionnaire had five-point Likert scale questions measuring the various parameters in the study. The computed Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of above 0.6 attested the reliability of the questionnaire. Binary Logistic Regression analysis was carried out to test the influence of customer relationship management strategy on customer

loyalty. To test the strength of the association on the predictor variable and the dependent variable, Nagelkerke's R-Square was used. The overall goodness of fit of the model was tested using Hosmer and Lemeshow test. To test significance for individual independent variables 5% significance level for the P-values was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Organisation Profile

The researcher conducted the study in the star rated hotels in the 20 counties in Kenya. In an effort to understand the organisation in the scope the study sought out some information about them. The organization's information on their star rating and years they have been in operation was evaluated concurrently. The highest number of those who responded came from the four-star hotels who had a 32 percent representation. They were followed by three-star hotels (30.5%), two-star hotel (27.3%), five-star hotels (8.6%) and one-star hotel (1.6%) simultaneously. This is an indication that all the star rated hotels were represented in the study. The study would thus make general conclusion on the star rated hotels in Kenya.

On the other hand, the star rated hotels were found to have been in operation for a period between 6 years to over 21 years. It was noted that from the 128 star rated hotels that participated in the study those that had operated for between 16 years and 20 years were the majority (36.7%). They were followed by those that had operated for between 11 years and 15 years (31.3%), above 21 years (18%) and between 6 to 10 years (14.1%) simultaneously. This implied that the hotels which participated in the study had a good knowledge of their customer and understood their area of operation very well.

Customer Orientation Strategy and Customer Loyalty

Customer orientation strategy was examined through customer needs identification, channels of resolutions and customer enquiry platform. The respondents offered their opinions on customer orientation strategies available on the basis of the parameters. The researcher further utilized these variables during the hypothesis testing. The measure that had the highest score was on hotel conducts marketing research to gain familiarity with the customer needs and wants with a mean score of 4.83. This was followed by customers complaints and request being handled very fast, hotel having a clearly defined platform for customers to make enquiries, hotel taking into consideration any issue that is brought to the attention by the customers and market survey recommendations are implemented with an intention of winning customer loyalty with a mean score of 4.75, 4.64, 4.63 and 4.56 respectively. In addition, in case of inconveniences apologies are made to the customer had the least mean score of 4.55.

Service Quality Management Strategy and Customer Loyalty

Service quality management strategy was examined through tangibility, assurance and empathy. The respondents offered their opinions on service quality management strategy available on the basis of the parameters. The researcher further utilized these variables during the hypothesis testing. The measures that had the highest scores were that there is a platform for sharing important information to the customers, there is hired security guards, the hotel is located in a conducive environment, customer are offered immediate help when needed and customers are offered individual attention by the hotel staff which had a mean score of 4.92 each. This was followed by that the infrastructures where the hotel is located are good, their hotel attendants are usually dressed in uniforms, services do not delay as per the promised time to the customer, customers are offered guidance by the hotel staffs, and hotels having spacious and well-ventilated rooms with a mean score of 4.90, 4.88, 4.87, 4.85 and 4.80 respectively. Moreover, CCTV are installed in the premises had the least mean score of 4.49.

Binary Logistic Regression on the Nexus between Customer Relationship Management Strategy and Customer Loyalty

Binary logistic regression was carried out to test whether customer relationship management strategy has a nexus with customer loyalty in the star rated hotels in Kenya. The study examined the individual effects of the predictor variables. The study specific predictor variables were customer orientation strategy and service quality management strategy.

The Cox and Snell R square indicated that the variations in the dependent variable are explained by 21.3 percent of the independent variables. However, Nagelkerke R square shows the variations in the dependent variable are explained by 28.5 percent of the independent variables explained. Nagelkerke is recommended in explaining the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable. Therefore, Nagelkerke R square value of 0.285 is used in explaining the nexus between customer relationship management strategy and customer loyalty in the star rated hotels in Kenya. It indicates that 28.5 percent of the variations are explained by the variables of the study. The Hosmer and Lemeshow statistic had a significance of 0.119 which is greater than the 5 percent significance level. This is an indication that it is not statistically significant and therefore the model is quite a good fit for the fitted logistic regression. The binary logistic regression results on Wald statistic, Coefficient and P-values are as shown in table 1.

Table 1 Variable in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Customer orientation management strategy	-.659	.290	5.168	1	.023	.517
Service quality management strategy	2.576	.672	14.686	1	.000	1.143
Constant	-115.952	31.382	13.652	1	.000	.000

The binary logistic regression test developed a predicted equation as follows;

Logit of customer loyalty = -115.952 - 0.659 customer orientation strategy + 2.576 service quality management strategy.

The log of odds of customers in star rated hotel in Kenya being loyal is negatively related to customer orientation strategy but it is positively related to service quality management strategy. It can be further deduced that an increase in one unit of customer orientation strategy will lead to a decrease in customer loyalty. On the other hand, an increase in service quality management strategy will lead to an increase in customer loyalty. The odd ratio shows the overall effect on dependent variable of increasing the units of independent variables.

The first null hypothesis was to test that customer orientation strategy has no significant relationship with customer loyalty in the Kenyan star rated hotels. As indicated in table 4.1, the result indicate that customer orientation strategy has a Wald statistic value of 5.168 with 1 degree of freedom, a P value of 0.23 and an odd ratio of 0.517. The odd ratio of 0.517 indicates that an increase in one unit of customer orientation strategy will lead to a decrease in customer loyalty by 48.3. Conversely, the P value for the independent variable was less than 5 percent, thus, it is significant in explaining the relationship between customer orientation strategy and customer loyalty. This study finding is in agreement with the study carried out by Aburayya, Marzouqi, Alawadhi, Abdouli, and Taryam (2020) who concluded that customer orientation was positively correlated to customer loyalty. Mokhtaran and Komeilian (2016) also made a conclusion that client orientation has a significant positive effect on the performance of Dana insurance.

The second null hypothesis was to test that service quality management strategy has no significant relationship with customer loyalty in the Kenyan star rated hotels. As indicated in table 4.1, the result indicate that service quality management strategy has a Wald statistic value of 14.686 with 1 degree of freedom, a P value of 0.00 and an odd ratio of 1.143. The odd ratio of 1.143 indicates that an increase in one unit of service quality management strategy will lead to a 14.3 percent likelihood of star rated hotel customer in Kenya being loyal to the hotel. Conversely, the P value for the independent variable was less than 5 percent, thus, it is significant in explaining the relationship between service quality management strategy and customer loyalty. This supports the study carried out by Anabila, Ameyibor, Allan, and Alomenu

(2021) whose correlated results revealed that service quality management strategies had a positive and significant effect on the loyalty of customers. Fulasia and Otinga (2021) also found out that service quality management have a significant effect on client loyalty. On the contrary, a research conducted by Fida, Ahmed, & Al-Balushi (2020) found that service quality management strategies have no significant effect on customer loyalty.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that customer orientation strategy is statistically significant in prediction of customer loyalty in star rated hotels in Kenya. However, the negative value of the coefficient shows that an increase in one unit of customer orientation strategy would lead to a decrease in customer loyalty. Additionally, it was concluded that service quality management strategy is statistically significant in prediction of customer loyalty in star rated hotels in Kenya. However, the positive value of the coefficient shows that an increase in one unit of service quality management strategy would lead to an increase in customer loyalty. The study therefore, made recommendation that the star rated hotels should establish customer orientation strategies that are tailored uniquely to a certain niche of customers through focusing on their needs, concerns and each customer experience. In addition, the top-level management need to promote a culture that is customer centered where their staff have more energy directed towards fulfilling the client needs. The star rated hotels should offer a clean and organized platform so as to improve customer loyalty. The security of the hotels should also be beefed for the customers to feel safe and secure within the environment.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were constraints faced when conducting the research but it did not affect the results significantly. First, there were some hotels which were located in the interior rural areas which made it difficult for the researcher to access them. However, the researcher was able to reschedule the diary hence overcoming the constraint. Second, the study also experienced a few issues related to transport during data collection among the hotels. Most of the rural areas where the hotels are situated did not have good road network hence lacking means of transport due to the poor mode of transport. The researcher overcame the challenge by hiring a motorcycle (boda boda) to facilitate the administration of questionnaires in the rough terrain located hotels. Third, the respondents did not have a proper understanding of some terms used in the questionnaire. The researcher had to clarify this which led to good responses.

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