
THE EFFECT OF BRAND AUTHENTICITY ON BRAND LOVE, BRAND ATTITUDE, AND BRAND TRUST IN UNIQLO PRODUCT CONSUMERS



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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of brand genuineness on brand fondness, brand discernment, and brand reliability among Uniqlo patrons. The research examines how brand genuineness influences these factors and whether brand discernment and reliability mediate this relationship. Additionally, it considers potential moderating variables such as demographics and purchase frequency. Utilizing a descriptive quantitative approach, data were collected through an online questionnaire from 224 respondents and analyzed using PLS-SEM. This method was chosen to provide a robust statistical examination of consumer perceptions and interactions with the brand. The findings reveal that brand genuineness significantly influences brand discernment, reliability, and fondness. Moreover, brand reliability demonstrates a stronger mediation effect on brand fondness compared to brand discernment. These results highlight the critical role of authenticity in consumer-brand relationships. This study contributes to marketing literature by reinforcing the importance of brand genuineness in building consumer trust and loyalty. It also offers practical insights for brand strategists aiming to enhance authenticity and foster deeper emotional connections with consumers. The findings underscore that brand genuineness is essential in cultivating consumer allegiance and confidence in the Uniqlo brand.

Keywords: Brand Authenticity, Brand Love, Brand Attitude, Brand Trust

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, consumers have become increasingly discerning and critical when selecting brands. They seek not only high-quality products or services but also brands that reflect authenticity and align with their values. This shift underscores the growing importance of brand authenticity in fostering strong and lasting relationships with consumers. Brand authenticity influences key constructs such as brand love, brand trust, and brand attitude, which collectively shape consumer perceptions and behaviors. A brand serves as a distinctive identity encompassing names, symbols, or other elements that differentiate a company's offerings from competitors (Hegner & Jevons, 2016). Present-day consumers prioritize authenticity over conventional quality assessments, making it a decisive factor in purchasing behavior. Consequently, ensuring an authentic engagement with consumers has become imperative, as it significantly enhances their overall experience, both from a subjective perspective and in their interactions with others (Kim & Bonn, 2018).

Despite widespread recognition of the importance of authenticity, discrepancies exist in the literature regarding its impact on consumer-brand relationships. While Safeer et al. (2023) identified a positive influence of brand authenticity on brand affection, Mody and Hanks (2020) argued that brand authenticity does not have a notable effect on brand affection in the hospitality industry. This incongruity highlights a research gap that necessitates further exploration. Understanding the interplay between brand authenticity, brand love, brand trust, and brand attitude is essential to comprehensively evaluate how consumers develop emotional and cognitive connections with brands. This study aims to bridge the gap by incorporating brand attitude and brand trust as mediating factors, offering a more holistic perspective on the mechanisms through which authenticity influences consumer perceptions.

The significance of authenticity is further reinforced by recent findings. According to a Forbes report, contemporary consumers increasingly value brand authenticity when making purchasing decisions, as demonstrated by research conducted by Stackla, cited in social media Today. The study highlights that most consumers desire a genuine connection with the products they purchase, necessitating a paradigm shift in marketing strategies. However, executing authentic marketing remains a challenge. The research further reveals a discrepancy between marketer perception and consumer sentiment, with 92% of marketers believing their efforts convey authenticity, while only 51% of consumers consider fewer than

half of brands to produce truly authentic content. This gap between brand messaging and consumer perception underscores the need for deeper analysis of authenticity's role in shaping brand-consumer relationships.

The rapid expansion of the creative industry has played a crucial role in economic stability during global crises (Mangifera & Isa, 2019). Among various sectors, the fashion industry has witnessed substantial growth, with emerging brands striving to maintain authenticity as a key differentiator. In this increasingly competitive landscape, brand authenticity has become a pivotal factor influencing consumer decisions. Many fashion brands, such as Uniqlo UT, have successfully positioned themselves by leveraging authenticity in their branding strategies. Uniqlo UT, in particular, integrates unique graphic designs and collaborations with renowned artists and brands, reinforcing its brand authenticity and appeal to consumers who seek originality and meaningful brand engagement.

By addressing the inconsistencies in prior studies and incorporating brand attitude and brand trust as additional variables, this research seeks to contribute both theoretical and practical insights into the interrelationships between brand authenticity, brand love, and consumer loyalty. The findings will not only advance academic discourse on consumer-brand relationships but also offer actionable strategies for marketers seeking to enhance authenticity in brand positioning. Furthermore, this study will provide valuable perspectives on evolving consumer expectations in the digital marketplace, particularly within the fashion industry, where authenticity remains a crucial competitive advantage.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Attribution Theory

Attribution theory has been extensively utilized in research concerning consumer behavior, particularly in understanding the cognitive processes behind decision-making (Mizerski et al., 1979). This study adopts attribution theory, which explains the mental processes individuals use to ascribe causes to actions and occurrences in their surroundings (Mullen & Johnson, 2013). Specifically, attribution theory helps elucidate how consumers perceive brand authenticity by determining whether they attribute authenticity to external (brand-driven) or internal (consumer perception-based) factors.

For example, when a consumer encounters a brand that emphasizes its historical heritage and commitment to quality, they may attribute its authenticity to external factors such as a long-standing reputation or transparent business practices. Conversely, a consumer's personal experiences, biases, and expectations may shape their perception of a brand's authenticity as an internal attribution. Safeer et al. (2020) argue that when consumers perceive brand attributes as authentic through external attribution, they develop a sense of trust and attachment (internal attribution), thereby fostering brand loyalty. This process aligns with the idea that authenticity elements such as commitment to quality, genuineness, and heritage reinforce consumer perceptions of authenticity (external attribution), which subsequently cultivates positive emotional bonds with the brand (internal attribution).

Brand Authenticity

Authenticity pertains to an individual's perception of what is genuinely original, legitimate, or real (Beverland, 2005). Scholars have proposed two fundamental perspectives on authenticity: (1) an objective standpoint, wherein consumers evaluate brand genuineness based on available information (Beverland, 2005; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Zhang & Merunka, 2015), and (2) a subjective viewpoint, in which authenticity is shaped by consumer inclinations, expertise, personal biases, and interpretative frameworks (Napoli et al., 2014).

Brand authenticity plays a pivotal role in consumer decision-making, influencing emotional attachment before loyalty is established (Prameswari, Imronudin, & Mangifera, 2023). Prior studies have examined authenticity through different lenses. For instance, Manthiou et al. (2018) found that brand authenticity enhances brand affection by aligning with consumer lifestyles and memory recall. Similarly, Mody and Hanks (2020) observed that Airbnb fosters consumer attachment by strengthening existential authenticity, whereas hotels leverage authenticity to generate emotional resonance with patrons. While much research has focused on Western markets, understanding how these dimensions manifest in Asian markets remains an area for further exploration.

Brand Attitude

Brand attitude reflects consumers' overall evaluation of a brand, shaped by their responses to various brand characteristics, ultimately influencing their preferences (Keller, 1998). Consumers often assess a brand's authenticity as a benchmark for anticipated quality. Södergren (2021) found that perceived quality positively affects brand attitude and customer

satisfaction. Additionally, authenticity serves as a key factor in reducing ambiguity about domestic and international brands, allowing consumers to assess them with greater confidence. Busser and Shulga (2019) demonstrated that authenticity enhances brand trust and loyalty among U.S. consumers, while Carsana and Jolibert (2018) found that authenticity influences consumer attitudes toward eco-conscious products in the U.S. and private-label brands in France. Given the cultural variations in consumer-brand relationships, it is essential to examine whether authenticity plays a similarly crucial role in shaping brand attitudes in Asian markets.

H1: Brand authenticity positively influences brand attitude.

Brand Trust

Trust is defined as the confidence individuals hold regarding a brand's integrity and benevolence (Boateng et al., 2016). Cognitive social theory suggests that beliefs influence behavior, making trust a critical component of brand-consumer relationships. Prior research indicates that brand authenticity fosters trust, as it assures consumers of a brand's consistency and ethical standing (Schallehn et al., 2014). The link between brand authenticity and trust has been widely examined in Western contexts, but further studies are needed to determine whether similar relationships hold in non-Western markets.

H2: Brand authenticity positively influences brand trust.

Brand Love

Brand affection refers to the emotional attachment and satisfaction a consumer feels toward a brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Studies highlight the growing importance of authenticity in fostering brand love. Manthiou et al. (2018) found that authenticity significantly enhances brand love in U.S. markets. Likewise, Mody and Hanks (2020) demonstrated that brand genuineness in hospitality strengthens consumer attachment and loyalty. However, existing research largely focuses on Western consumers, leaving gaps in understanding how brand love develops in Asian markets. Safeer et al. (2020) underscore the significance of authenticity in amplifying brand love for both local and global brands, suggesting the need for further research on different demographic groups.

H3: Brand authenticity positively influences brand love.

H4: Brand attitude positively influences brand love.

H5: Brand trust positively influences brand love.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative descriptive research design to systematically summarize and analyze numerical data while identifying patterns and relationships among the examined variables. Descriptive research focuses on illustrating the characteristics of a phenomenon rather than establishing causality, making it suitable for exploring the dynamics between brand authenticity, brand trust, and brand love. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of these variables without necessarily testing specific hypotheses.

Data collection was conducted via an online questionnaire disseminated through Google Forms, ensuring accessibility to a broad audience. The questionnaire link was distributed across multiple social media platforms to maximize respondent participation. The instrument was designed based on established measurement scales from prior research to ensure validity and reliability. A pre-test was conducted to refine the questionnaire items, verifying clarity and coherence before full deployment. Additionally, reliability analysis (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) and validity checks (e.g., factor analysis) were performed to ensure the consistency and appropriateness of the survey items.

A non-probability sampling method was employed, meaning not all individuals in the target population had an equal probability of selection (Sugiyono, 2015). Specifically, purposive sampling was used to target respondents with relevant experiences or exposure to the research topic, such as individuals familiar with the studied brand. While non-probability sampling limits generalizability, it was chosen due to constraints in reaching a fully randomized population and the need to gather insights from a specific consumer group (e.g., Uniqlo shoppers). This method aligns with the research objectives by enabling a focused investigation of perceptions within a particular consumer segment.

The study utilized a Likert scale to measure responses, a commonly used tool for assessing attitudes and perceptions. According to Sugiyono (2018), the Likert scale facilitates the evaluation of individuals' viewpoints regarding social phenomena. The scale consisted of five response options: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

For data analysis, this research implemented Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a statistical technique widely recognized for assessing

relationships between both observed and latent constructs (Hair et al., 2021). PLS-SEM was chosen due to its robustness in handling complex models and small sample sizes, making it particularly useful for exploratory studies like this one. This method effectively evaluates the structural relationships among brand authenticity, brand trust, and brand love, aligning with the study's objective of understanding their interconnections.

The analysis was conducted using R, an open-source statistical software known for its powerful analytical capabilities. Practical guidelines were followed to ensure accurate interpretation of results. Step-by-step procedures, including model estimation and diagnostic testing, were implemented to enhance the reliability of the findings. Real-world case studies and heuristics were incorporated to facilitate the application of PLS-SEM, ensuring transparency and rigor in data interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Outer Model Analysis

Table 1.
Discriminant Validity

Construct	Brand Authenticity (X1)	Brand Attitude (Z1)	Brand Trust (Z2)	Brand Love (Y)
BAU1	0.671	0.404	0.507	0.411
BAU2	0.435	0.309	0.300	0.308
BAU3	0.501	0.293	0.382	0.387
BAU4	0.399	0.306	0.382	0.334
BAU5	0.401	0.363	0.286	0.359
BAU6	0.507	0.380	0.320	0.382
BAU7	0.420	0.275	0.306	0.340
BAT1	0.399	0.628	0.353	0.437
BAT2	0.281	0.461	0.295	0.288
BAT3	0.231	0.328	0.192	0.190
BAT4	0.374	0.415	0.313	0.314
BAT5	0.355	0.494	0.313	0.388
BAT6	0.383	0.586	0.318	0.400
BT1	0.420	0.272	0.656	0.399
BT2	0.267	0.199	0.333	0.315
BT3	0.299	0.230	0.420	0.334
BT4	0.363	0.340	0.474	0.360

BT5	0.336	0.329	0.411	0.344
BT6	0.533	0.446	0.677	0.428
BL1	0.405	0.404	0.319	0.566
BL2	0.305	0.367	0.240	0.400
BL3	0.443	0.334	0.399	0.589
BL4	0.337	0.263	0.424	0.459
BL5	0.425	0.465	0.404	0.544
BL6	0.391	0.348	0.443	0.532
BL7	0.507	0.461	0.468	0.673

Source: Data Processing Results (2024)

Table 1 presents the discriminant validity results using cross-loadings. Each item's highest loading corresponds to its respective construct, confirming some level of discriminant validity. However, the accepted threshold for good discriminant validity is typically ≥ 0.7 .

From the table, none of the items meet this threshold, which suggests that the indicators do not strongly distinguish their respective constructs from others. This raises concerns about the validity of the measurement model and suggests the need for potential refinement in the instrument or reconsideration of construct measurement.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Table 2.
Average Variance Extracted

Construct	AVE	Conditions
Brand Authenticity (X)	0.235	0.5
Brand Attitude (Z1)	0.246	0.5
Brand Trust (Z2)	0.262	0.5
Brand Love (Y)	0.296	0.5

Source: Data Processing Results (2024)

Since all AVE values fall well below the 0.5 threshold, this indicates that the constructs do not exhibit sufficient convergent validity. In other words, the indicators do not adequately explain their respective constructs. This suggests that either the measurement items need improvement, or alternative models should be considered to ensure construct validity.

Composite Reliability (CR)

Table 3.
Composite Reliability

Construct	Composite Reliability	Conditions
Brand Authenticity (X)	0.675	0.700
Brand Attitude (Z1)	0.652	0.700
Brand Trust (Z2)	0.666	0.700
Brand Love (Y)	0.742	0.700

Source: Data Processing Results (2024)

Brand Love is the only construct that surpasses the 0.7 threshold, indicating sufficient reliability. However, Brand Authenticity, Brand Attitude, and Brand Trust fall below the acceptable threshold, raising concerns about measurement consistency. These low-reliability values suggest potential issues in scale development, item clarity, or sample response consistency. Further refinement of measurement items or re-evaluating construct definitions may be necessary.

Cronbach Alpha (CA)

Table 4.
Cronbach Alpha

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Conditions
Brand Authenticity (X)	0.438	0.700
Brand Attitude (Z1)	0.372	0.700
Brand Trust (Z2)	0.397	0.700
Brand Love (Y)	0.594	0.700

Source: Data Processing Results (2024)

None of the constructs meet the recommended Cronbach Alpha threshold of 0.7, indicating poor internal consistency reliability. These findings suggest that the measurement scale may need revision, either by modifying items, removing poorly performing indicators, or reconsidering the operationalization of the constructs.

Inner Model Analysis

Coefficient of Determination R²

Table 5.
Output R²

Model	R-square
The Influence of Brand Authenticity on Brand Attitude	0.480
The Influence of Brand Authenticity on Brand Trust	0.556
The Influence of Brand Authenticity on Brand Love	0.661

Source: Data Processing Results (2024)

These R² values indicate that Brand Authenticity explains 48% of Brand Attitude variance, 55.6% of Brand Trust variance, and 66.1% of Brand Love variance through mediating variables. While the explanatory power is moderate, other factors also play a significant role, necessitating further investigation.

Effect Size (F²)

Table 6.
F² Test

Model	F-square
The Influence of Brand Authenticity on Brand Attitude	0.924
The Influence of Brand Authenticity on Brand Trust	1.252
The Influence of Brand Authenticity on Brand Love	0.108
The Influence of Brand Attitude on Brand Love	0.131
The Influence of Brand Trust on Brand Love	0.110

Source: Data Processing Results (2024)

Brand Authenticity has a strong effect on Brand Attitude and Brand Trust ($F^2 > 0.35$), while its influence on Brand Love, as well as the influence of Brand Attitude and Brand Trust on Brand Love, is moderate ($0.02 < F^2 < 0.15$). These findings suggest that Brand Authenticity plays a crucial role in shaping Brand Trust and Brand Attitude but has a more limited direct effect on Brand Love.

Goodness of Fit (GoF)

Table 7.
Goodness of Fit Test

Statistic	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.088	0.088

Source: Data Processing Results (2024)

The results of the goodness of fit test of the PLS (Partial Least Square) model in the table above show that the model is fit, as indicated by the SRMR value for the saturated model and estimated model which is less than 0.10.

Hypothesis Testing

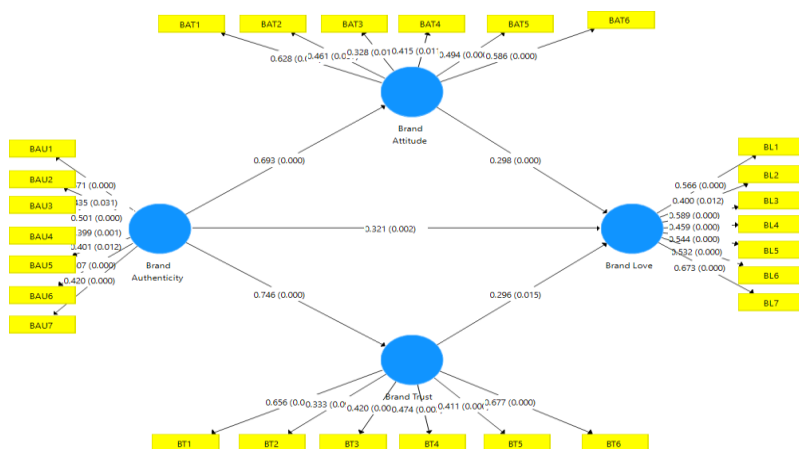


Table 8.

Direct Effect

Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Brand Authenticity -> Brand Attitude	0.693	0.66	0.112	6.164	0.000
Brand Authenticity -> Brand Love	0.748	0.72	0.108	6.901	0.000
Brand Authenticity -> Brand Trust	0.746	0.721	0.097	7.689	0.000
Brand Attitude -> Brand Love	0.298	0.302	0.06	4.967	0.000
Brand Trust -> Brand Love	0.296	0.279	0.121	2.44	0.015
Brand Authenticity -> Brand Attitude -> Brand Love	0.206	0.199	0.053	3.875	0.000
Brand Authenticity -> Brand Trust -> Brand Love	0.221	0.203	0.091	2.426	0.016

Source: Data Processing Results (2024)

The P-value is the key metric for evaluating hypotheses. First, Brand Authenticity significantly enhances Brand Attitude (P-value = 0.000), leading to H₁ acceptance. Second, Brand Authenticity positively influences Brand Trust (P-value = 0.000), confirming H₂. Third, Brand Authenticity strengthens Brand Love (P-value = 0.000), validating H₃. Fourth,

Brand Attitude significantly fosters Brand Love (P-value = 0.000), supporting H₄. Fifth, Brand Trust positively affects Brand Love (P-value = 0.015), affirming H₅. Sixth, Brand Attitude mediates the relationship between Brand Authenticity and Brand Love (P-Value = 0.000), verifying H₆. Lastly, Brand Trust also mediates this relationship (P-Value = 0.016), confirming H₇.

Brand Authenticity and Its Influence on Brand Love

Brand authenticity refers to the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as genuine, honest, and true to its values (Napoli et al., 2014). The analysis using PLS-SEM confirms a significant positive relationship between brand authenticity and brand love, indicated by a P-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This aligns with Bruhn et al. (2012), who argue that consumers develop stronger emotional connections with brands they perceive as authentic. UNIQLO exemplifies authenticity through continuous product innovation, compelling storytelling, and commitment to sustainability. According to Fournier (1998) in Khusni (2020), brands that provide meaningful emotional experiences cultivate long-term consumer loyalty. However, while UNIQLO successfully strengthens brand attachment through authenticity, it must also address potential risks, such as balancing authenticity with affordability and ethical concerns related to production.

Brand Authenticity and Its Influence on Brand Attitude

Brand attitude reflects consumer evaluations of a brand, encompassing both positive and negative perceptions (Santoso & Brahmana, 2019). The PLS-SEM results confirm that brand authenticity significantly enhances brand attitude, with a P-value of 0.000 (<0.05). Authentic brands tend to exhibit transparency and reliability, fostering favorable attitudes (Napoli et al., 2014). UNIQLO strengthens its brand attitude through its "LifeWear" philosophy, offering functional, minimalist clothing that integrates seamlessly into daily life (Purwanto & Syam AR, 2022). However, while UNIQLO's brand attitude is strong, potential pricing concerns or fast-fashion criticisms may impact its long-term perception. Future strategies should emphasize both affordability and sustainability to maintain consumer confidence.

Brand Authenticity and Its Influence on Brand Trust

Brand trust is the consumer's confidence that a brand will deliver on its promises (Choi et al., 2015). The analysis confirms a significant positive impact of brand authenticity

on brand trust, evidenced by a P-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). Consumers are more likely to trust brands they perceive as consistent and aligned with their values (Sari & Rahardani, 2024). UNIQLO has built trust through superior product quality, innovations like HeatTech and AIRism, and active engagement in social and environmental causes. However, it must ensure that its sustainability initiatives are transparent to avoid skepticism regarding greenwashing claims.

Direct Influence of Brand Attitude on Brand Love

The hypothesis testing confirms a significant positive influence of brand attitude on brand love, with a P-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). This finding aligns with Fournier's (1998) theory, which states that positive brand attitudes foster strong emotional connections. UNIQLO's high product quality and brand consistency contribute to favorable consumer attitudes, thereby enhancing brand love (Siahaan, 2023). However, future research could explore whether this effect varies across different demographic groups or cultural contexts.

Direct Influence of Brand Trust on Brand Love

Brand trust significantly influences brand love, as shown by a P-value of 0.015 (< 0.05). Trust fosters consumer confidence, creating an environment where emotional attachment can flourish (Miharni Tjokrosaputro, 2020). This supports Fournier's (1998) theory that brand trust facilitates deeper consumer-brand relationships. While UNIQLO's brand trust is strong, it must continuously uphold its values and maintain transparency, particularly regarding labor practices and ethical sourcing.

Indirect Influence of Brand Authenticity on Brand Love Through Brand Attitude

The mediation analysis reveals that brand authenticity significantly affects brand love through brand attitude (P-value = 0.000). This suggests that a positive attitude towards an authentic brand strengthens emotional attachment (Margana, Wibowo & Dirgantari, 2019). Future studies could examine how external factors, such as social media influence, impact this relationship.

Indirect Influence of Brand Authenticity on Brand Love Through Brand Trust

Brand authenticity also significantly influences brand love through brand trust (P-value = 0.016). This supports the notion that trust serves as a foundation for developing brand love (Sari & Rahardani, 2024). However, variations across different cultural and industry contexts remain underexplored, providing an avenue for future research.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes to branding literature by reinforcing the role of brand authenticity in shaping brand love, brand attitude, and brand trust. It aligns with Fournier's (1998) relationship theory while highlighting practical implications for brand managers.

Boosting Brand Trust

Consumer trust can be further strengthened by offering consistent consumer experiences, such as maintaining product quality, providing responsive customer service, and ensuring an easy return policy. Uniqlo could also lead social campaigns that align with relevant societal and environmental concerns, ultimately fostering stronger trust with consumers.

CONCLUSION

Brand authenticity plays a crucial role in fostering consumer trust, brand love, and positive brand attitudes, particularly in the case of Uniqlo. When a brand consistently upholds its values, demonstrates transparency, and delivers quality products, consumers develop deeper emotional connections and trust. Beyond Uniqlo, these findings suggest that companies across various industries can benefit from prioritizing authenticity in their branding strategies. Businesses should integrate authenticity into their core operations by maintaining transparency, reinforcing brand identity through storytelling, and ensuring ethical practices. Ultimately, companies that emphasize authenticity in their brand management strategies can enhance consumer relationships, strengthen brand equity, and achieve long-term success.

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