Me and My Brand – A Study on Employee Perspective

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Abstract

An individual is known by his/her personality. Personality, an area studied for almost a century by theorists, psychologists, and researchers, is one of the important determinants of individual behaviour. But the question of 'how it affects the work action' is yet to be properly answered. The studies on understanding the role of personality in different aspects of work behavior are still an area of interest for many inquisitive researchers. This study on similar grounds tried to examine the role of personality factors on employee brand identification in internal brand management. A survey was conducted administering a structured questionnaire on a sample of 232 employees of select IT & ITES companies in Hyderabad. The results indicated that an individual's personality factors affect employee brand identification, and therefore, highlight the importance of having an appropriate person with appropriate personality at work for achieving great results. Therefore, it was implied that, it is important for both branding and HR personnel of the organizations to work in harmony with each other to identify and create a perfect blend of human resources by considering and evaluating the prospect's personality fit along with the technical skills and competencies. Such human resources would then reflect the organization's brand identity as their own identity, thus achieving maximum employee and customer experience.

Keywords : employee brand identification, big five personality factors, internal brand management

JEL Classification : M5, M30, M39

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Organisations brand their products and services for creating a targeted, differentiated, and predicted experience that can develop ultimate customer experience (Dash & Mohapatra, 2016; Joseph, 2012). Transforming this branding concept into internally directed programs to enable the employees to reflect the brand is referred to as internal brand management (Balmer, Powell, Punjaisri, & Wilson, 2011; Harquail, 2007). The fundamental aim of internal brand management is to achieve the ultimate advantage (King & Grace, 2010; Ravens, 2013) by developing brand identification amongst employees (Ravens, 2013).

The concept of employee brand identification emerged from the social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Brand identification of employees in an organization is a strategy that attempts to create a psychological contact (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Harquail, 2007) between the brand and the employees that empowers the employees to develop belongingness towards the brand and take pride in displaying it in their work behaviour (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

The second aspect of this study is personality factors. The literature on personality offers several different methods of measuring and understanding it (John & Srivastava, 1999). One such measure of personality is "Big

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Five" personality dimensions (Dubey & Pandey, 2017 ; Goldberg, 1990 ; John & Srivastava, 1999). The Big Five dimensions are categorized as extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness (Goldberg, 1990 ; John & Srivastava, 1999 ; McCrae & John, 1992).

Though the study on employee brand identification has been accentuated by many researchers (eg: Joseph, 2012 ; Ravens, 2013), over the years, there has been very little work done on individual employee behaviour perspective. Thus, this paper tries to elicit empirically the role of personality factors of employees on employee brand identification.

Literature Review

(1) Internal Brand Management : Internal brand management can be understood as an internally directed (Wittke - Kothe, 2001) employee management programme designed to cultivate a typical workforce behaviour. It emerges from commercial branding and marketing practices (Baron, Patterson, Oakes, Harris, Punjaisri, Evanschitzky, & Wilson, 2009). Its objective is to attain competitive advantage using the skills, knowledge, and shared understanding of the developed workforce that cannot be easily replicated by its competitors (Balmer et al., 2011; Khanyapuss & Alan, 2011). It believes in considering human resources as in-house customers and countenancing them in all brand- orientated HR and marketing initiatives that are crucial for effective internal brand management programs (Du Preez, Bendixen, & Abratt, 2017). Internal branding identifies that every organization has evolved big from the efforts of its employees and their identification towards the brand.

(2) Social Identity Theory : Social identity theory was first propounded by Tajfel (1978). It proposes that the individuals identify themselves and others with a group, depending on their- age, gender, organizational membership, or by any other affiliations that give them a sense of belongingness, pride, self-esteem, or self-enhancement. Such classification enables the individuals to identify and define themselves in a social environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

(3) Employee Brand Identification : Employee brand identification also emerged from social identity theory. It explains the psychological connection (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) between the brand and the employee that fosters a strong feeling of being connected and enables the employee to incorporate the organizational goals, challenges, and objectives as his/her own. It empowers the employees to develop belongingness towards the brand and to take pride in displaying it in their work behaviour (Harquail, 2007). The employees internalize the brand and reflect it in verbal and non-verbal actions providing an unobtrusive and unproblematic work behaviour (Bravo, Buil, de Chernatony, & Martínez, 2017 ; Mitra & Chatterjee, 2016).

(4) Personality Factors : American Psychological Association defined personality as a distinct variance in individual's patterns of intellectual and emotional behavior. It refers to a set of unique and relatively stable internal and external traits and behaviours that characterize individuals.

It is important to understand different personalities of individuals in an organizational context as it affects perceptions, attitudes, behaviour, human relations, and reprisal of employees at work. Employees with similar personalities work well together as teams and produce better job performance (Prewett, Brown, Goswami, & Christiansen, 2016 ; Yogalakshmi, Supriya, & Kirthana, 2016). Organizations, formally or informally, test the personalities of its interviewees during the selection process to find a perfect match for job requirements and organizational values. As understanding personality is a complicated task, researchers have been trying to find an accurate measure since almost a century (John & Srivastava, 1999).

One such successful measure is called "Big Five" personality traits. "Big Five" personality traits are a set of five abstracted personality dimensions that have been generalized across various cultures, factor analytic studies,

and languages, and were found to be stable over time (Costa & McCrae, 1988; Goldberg, 1990; John & Srivastava, 1999). These traits are categorized as extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness (John & Srivastava, 1999).

Extraversion refers to an individual's level of comfort with other relationships. Extroverts are more assertive, talkative, social, and open for relationships (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999; Wihler, Meurs, Wiesmann, Troll, & Blickle, 2017). Agreeableness reflects the ability of an individual to get along with others. Individuals who score high on agreeableness are caring, gentle, and likeable (Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998). Conscientiousness represents the ability to focus on a number of goals at a particular time by an individual. An individual who scores high on conscientiousness is achievement oriented, self-disciplined, responsible, organized, systematic, and careful (Judge et al., 1999). Neuroticism refers to individuals' inability to cope up with stress. While an emotionally stable person is calm, secure, and enthusiastic, a neuroticistic is nervous, hostile, and depressed (Costa & McCrae, 1988). Openness to experience reflects a person's range of interests. It explains depth, breadth, complexity, and originality of a person's experiential and mental life. An individual scoring high on this trait is creative and is ready to adapt to change (Barrick, 2005).

Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

Hogan and Holland (2003) pointed out the relationship between personality and social identity. This relationship was also empirically proven by Sagiv, Roccas, and Hazan (2012) and Jenkins, Reysen, and Katzarska - Miller (2012).

Very few or no such studies were found in literature on linking personality factors to employee brand identification. Thus, this study tries to examine the relationship between 'Big Five' personality factors and employee brand identification. The conceptual model was developed based on the gap identified, which is shown in the Figure 1.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model for the Study
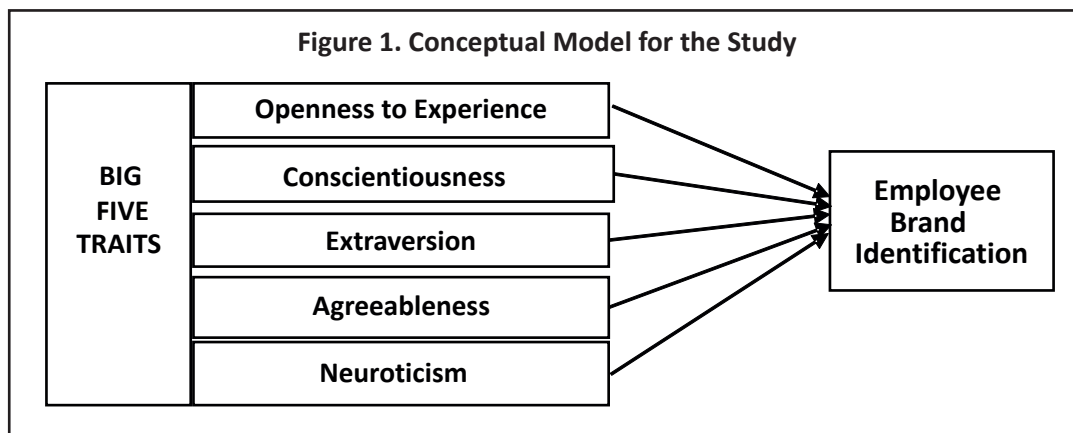
Research Objective

From the understanding of the existing literature, the identified research gap, and the developed model, the objective of the study is to identify the influence of individual 'Big Five' personality factors on employee brand identification.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses can be empirically tested to prove the above research objective:

- **H01:** Conscientiousness is not positively related to employee brand identification.
- **Ha1:** Conscientiousness is positively related to employee brand identification.
- **H02:** Neuroticism does not share a significant negative relationship with employee brand identification.
- **Ha2:** Neuroticism shares a significant negative relationship with employee brand identification.
- **H03:** Extroversion does not have a significant positive association with employee brand identification.
- **Ha3:** Extroversion has a significant positive association with employee brand identification.
- **H04:** Agreeableness is not positively associated with brand identification of the employees.
- **Ha4:** Agreeableness is positively associated with brand identification of the employees.
- **H05:** Openness to experience and employee brand identification are not positively related to each other.
- **Ha5:** Openness to experience and employee brand identification are positively related to each other.

Methodology

(1) Measures Used : The Big Five personality scale having 44 items was adopted from John and Srivastava (1999) and employee brand identification scale having five items was adapted from Balmer, Powell, Punjaisri, and Wilson (2011). Some changes in employee brand identification measure were made to suit the industry and need of this study. The 49 item questionnaire used a 5 - point Likert scale style of measurement. Demographic details such as gender, age group, educational qualifications, designated level in the organization, years of work experience with the organization were also included in the survey form. A detailed description of the purpose of the study and the type of information requested was provided in the cover letter. The cover letter also included a promise of confidentiality and instructions on how to complete the questionnaire.

(2) Population : IT & ITES sector was chosen for the study. This sector employs about 10 million Indian population. India is the largest sourcing destination of IT & ITES services in the world (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2017).

(3) Sampling Frame : Twelve organisations in IT & ITES sector that were listed as top companies in India by NASSCOM for a consecutive 4 years (i.e., from 2011 to 2014) were selected for the study. The study was conducted on those companies in Hyderabad, which contributed to approximately 10% of NASSCOM Registered companies in India (NASSCOM Ranking, 2015).

(4) Sampling Unit and Sampling Procedure : Permanent employees of the selected companies having experience of at least 2 years in the same company were considered as a sampling unit for the study. A sample was drawn using non-probabilistic snowball sampling technique.

(5) Method and Duration of Data Collection : A survey based method was adopted to collect the data from the sample which lasted for over 10 weeks (i.e., June 2016 to July 2016). Five hundred respondents participated in the study through both print and electronic media. Email reminders were sent to the respondents who did not

respond to the survey at the end of second and sixth weeks to ensure maximum response rate from the respondents ; 283 forms were collected at end of the 10 week period, out of which 232 survey forms were found to be complete and usable in all aspects. The response- rate of the survey was 49.6%, which was within the average range of standard response rate in academic and organisational research (Baruch, 1999; Baruch & Holtom, 2008).

Analysis and Results

The demographic details of the respondents is presented in the Table 1. Out of the total sample, 68.96% of the respondents were male and 31.03% were female. The possible explanation for this ratio can be understood from the NASSCOM report on Gender inclusivity, 2009 which claimed that women were employed in 33% of all technical jobs in the IT industry in India ; 51.72% of the respondents were found to be aged below 30 years, 41.81% were between 30 to 40 years, and 0.064% were found to be above 40 years of age ; 68.96% and 31.03% respondents were found to be graduates and post graduates, respectively ; 39.65% of the respondents worked in entry or first level, 44.82% were found working in middle level, and 11.2% were found to be working in top level designations in their respective organizations.

Two hundred and thirty two sampling data was divided as 101 and 131 respondents for conducting EFA and CFA, respectively. A pilot study was conducted on 101 respondents to outline the pool of items to a convenient number of variables for further study and to obtain the initial estimates of reliability. These items were first assessed for internal consistency. Based on the internal consistency test, no items were dropped and the instrument comprised of 49 questions and four demographics related questions.

The reliability of the instrument was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The values were found to be adequate to proceed further. The Table 2 shows the Cronbach's alpha value of each construct. Further, Kaiser Meyer- Olkin measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity were performed to measure sampling adequacy and the value of KMO was 0.795 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was found to be significant. High value of KMO indicates that a factor analysis is useful for the present data and significant value for Bartlett's test of sphericity indicates that there exist significant relationships among the variables.

Thus, as both KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity were significant, the next step of factor reduction was conducted using principal component method with constraint of number of factor as Eigen values > 1 and the component matrix thus formed was orthogonally rotated using varimax rotation (Kaiser, 1958). All the items were loaded onto six factors shown in the Appendix 1 as pattern matrix.

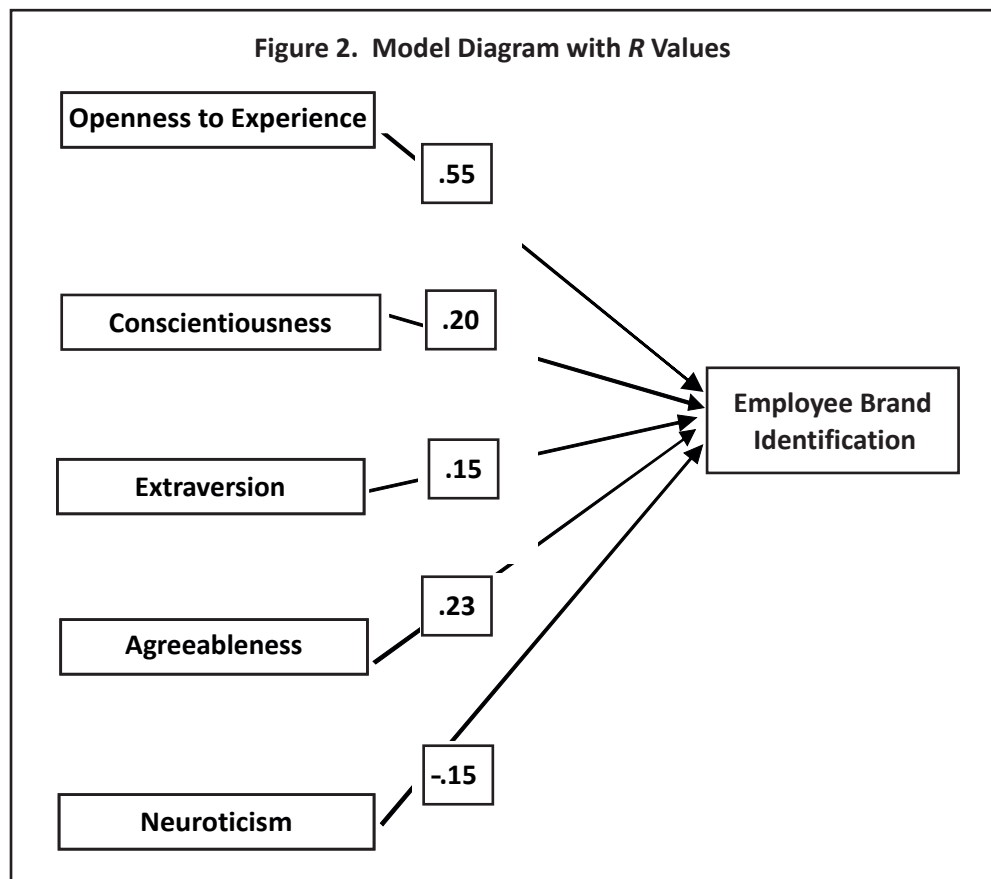### Table 1. Demographic Details of the Sample Respondents

Gender	Male	160	Qualification	Graduate	160
	Female	72		Post Graduate	72
Age	Below 30	120	Designated Level	First Level	92
	30-40	97		Middle Level	104
	Above 40	15		Top Level	26

Table 2.Values of Cronbach's Alpha as Reliability Scores for the Variables for Pilot Study

Constructs	Items Retained	Cronbach's Alpha
Big 5 Personality Factors	44	0.921
Brand Identity	5	0.915

Table 3. Model Fit Indices of the Study

Model	Chi-square Value	Df	Normed Chi-Square	TLI	CFI	RMESA
Study Values	1340.06	1016	1.319	.957	.959	.05
Recommended Values			Below 3	> .9	> .9	< .08

Figure 2. Model Diagram with R Values

Openness to Experience — .55 → Employee Brand Identification

Conscientiousness — .20 → Employee Brand Identification

Extraversion — .15 → Employee Brand Identification

Agreeableness — .23 → Employee Brand Identification

Neuroticism — -.15 → Employee Brand Identification

Table 4. Results of Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses No	Hypotheses	Accepted /Rejected
H01	Conscientiousness is not positively related to employee brand identification.	Rejected
H02	Neuroticism does not share a significant negative relationship with employee brand identification.	Rejected
H03	Extroversion does not have a significant positive association with employee brand identification.	Rejected
H04	Agreeableness is not positively associated with brand identification of the employees.	Rejected
H05	Openness to experience and employee brand identification are not positively related to each other.	Rejected

The other set of 131 sample data were used for conducting confirmatory factor analysis. CFA is used to learn if the items used in the measuring instrument are related to the construct. As a different data set was used for conducting CFA, two items (A2: Tends to find faults with others & BI5: when someone praises my organization brand, it feels like personal a compliment) were dropped at this stage as the loadings were found less than the prescribed values (< 0.40). A structured path diagram was drawn utilizing the model identified from exploratory factor analysis and

results of goodness of fit were calculated. The fit indices establish the acceptability of the model. The fit indices of the present study are shown in the Table 3, and the Figure 2 shows the model diagram with R values. From the values observed in the Figure 2, the results of the hypotheses can be concluded as shown in the Table 4. All the hypotheses (null) were rejected and hence the model is empirically accepted.

Discussion

The study attempts to explore the relationship between personality factors and employee brand identity in internal brand management. The testing of hypotheses and their analysis reveals the importance and scope of the model developed.

The relationship between the variables : personality factors and employee brand identity is established in this study. Though literature supports the importance of personality at work, this concept is often neglected due to the complexity involved in this measure. This study has highlighted and established a novel model of measuring employees' brand identification and its relationship with the personality factors and yet again has proven the importance of personality in job settings in a new dimension. The findings of this study suggest that:

Openness to experience and employee brand identification are strongly related ($r = 0.55$). This means that an individual who is more open to experiences possesses a greater degree of brand identification. An open (to experience) employee actively imagines oneself as a part of the brand, tries to know more about the brand, due to his/her intellectually curious nature, and is highly attentive to his/her innermost feelings that are closely related to the brand (Costa Jr & McCrae, 1992). Thus, the knowledge and psychological involvement of the open employee would positively enable him/her to be more loyal and committed to the brand and deliver the promises effectively.

Agreeableness is found to be related to employee brand identification ($r = 0.23$). It advises that a more agreeable employee identifies himself/herself more with a brand. An agreeable employee is altruistic and empathetic towards the organization and easily adapts himself/herself with the brand (Matsumoto & Juang, 2012). The modest and tender minded- agreeable employee deals with customers with greater levels of maturity and thus exhibits a greater level of brand identification.

More the *conscientiousness*, more would an employee identify himself/herself with the brand ($r = 0.21$). A conscientious employee would be more organized and efficient in displaying brand behaviours and would sincerely adapt to all the brand-related practices in the organization. The innate nature of self-discipline and thoughtfulness of this trait makes the employees more dependable and reliable in exhibiting brand identification.

Neuroticism and employee brand identification has a negative relationship, meaning that lower the levels of neuroticism, higher the brand identification. Employees who score less on neuroticism are calm, happy, and satisfied with the work (brand) and thus display the brand with higher levels of positivity and energy.

Extraversion is found to be positively related to employee brand identification, which suggests that, higher the levels of extraversion, the greater is the brand identification. An extrovert employee being talkative and social in nature connects oneself well with the customers, thus exhibiting brand identification.

It is observed that all 'Big Five' personality traits display a significant impact on brand identification with a cumulative r^2 of 0.44. So, the model provides sufficient evidence to both HR and branding professionals to understand the strategic importance of working together, in synergy, and select the right candidate for the right place.

Managerial Implications

The role of personality factors in developing brand identification cannot be neglected as an employee who is ill-tempered, hostile, and an extreme introvert would never feel comfortable with the brand and satisfy his/her

customers by displaying the brand behaviors. Hence, a thorough scrutiny of employee personality during employee selection would help managers in retaining and developing employees in the organization by designing appropriate internal branding programs.

Internal branding programs of the organization should be strategically designed to blend the human resources with the brand. This blend of such hand picked and selected individuals would form strong organizational (brand) identity and thus create an ever lasting competitive advantage over its competitors. The perfect fit of personality for brand identity enables in delivering brand messages efficiently and thus fulfilling brand promises.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

Employee perspective of internal brand management is found to have sparse literature and hence, more studies on this aspect can be conducted. This study considered one aspect of individual factors, other factors like attitudes, etc., can be further examined. Moreover, only employee brand identification is being examined in this study. Future studies can concentrate on other aspects of internal branding. It can be further stated that as this work has collected data at a particular point of time (cross-sectional data), longitudinal studies can also be conducted on this model using a larger sampling frame.

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Appendix 1. Pattern Matrix of the Study

S.NO	Items	Factor Loadings	Factors
1	Is helpful and unselfish with others.	0.955	**Agreeableness**
2	Is considerate and kind to almost everyone.	0.948	
3	Tends to find faults with others.	0.947	
4	Likes to cooperate with others.	0.947	
5	Is generally trusting.	0.944	
6	Can be cold and aloof.	0.939	
7	Has a forgiving nature.	0.938	
8	Starts quarrels with others.	0.937	
9	Is sometimes rude to others.	0.932	
10	Prefers work that is routine.	0.884	**Openness to Experience**
11	Likes to reflect, play with ideas.	0.879	
12	Is curious about many different things.	0.864	
13	Has few artistic interests.	0.846	
14	Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature.	0.84	
15	Has an active imagination.	0.832	
16	Is original, comes up with new ideas.	0.824	
17	Is inventive.	0.812	
18	Is ingenious, a deep thinker.	0.8	
19	Values artistic, aesthetic experiences.	0.711	
20	Gets nervous easily.	0.864	**Neuroticism**
21	Can be tensed.	0.862	
22	Is relaxed, handles stress well.	0.857	
23	Can be moody.	0.852	
24	Is depressed.	0.84	
25	Remains calm in tense situations.	0.835	
26	Is emotionally stable, not easily upset.	0.823	
27	Worries a lot.	0.755	
28	Does things efficiently.	0.832	**Conscientiousness**
29	Is easily distracted.	0.827	
30	Continues until the task is finished.	0.825	
31	Makes plans and follows through with them.	0.816	
32	Is a reliable worker.	0.802	
33	Does a thorough job.	0.792	
34	Tends to be disorganized.	0.738	
35	Tends to be lazy.	0.732	
36	Can be somewhat careless.	0.668	
37	Tends to be quiet.	0.859	**Extraversion**
38	Is reserved.	0.858	

S.NO	Items	Factor Loadings	Factors
39	Is full of energy.	0.847	
40	Generates a lot of enthusiasm.	0.838	
41	Is talkative.	0.794	
42	Has a confident personality.	0.778	
43	Is sometimes shy, inhibited .	0.774	
44	Is outgoing, sociable.	0.764	
45	I belong to my organization.	0.885	**Employee Brand Identity**
46	The success of my organization is my own success.	0.861	
47	My organization is like family to me.	0.857	
48	My sense of pride towards the organizational brand is reinforced by brand related messages.	0.828	
49	When someone praises my organization, it feels like a personal compliment to me.	0.809	

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