

GEN Y'S PERSPECTIVES ON APPAREL WEBSITE'S QUALITY AND REPURCHASE INTENTION

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ABSTRACT

The tendency for Gen Y to be online purchasers is quite high as they are considered to be digital natives. Hence, it is important to study repurchase intentions of this group, especially for apparel websites due to its low conversion rate. Understanding Gen Y's perspectives on apparel website's quality may provide valuable information for apparel website owners or sellers to improve on their website's quality. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand Gen Y's experience as online shoppers and their repurchase intentions for apparel. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants to be interviewed. The two main criteria used to choose the participants are that they must be Gen Y and have repurchased apparel online. The data collected through interviews were analysed using the constant comparative analysis method and three themes were generated. They are Gen Y's Purchase Experience with Apparel Websites, Influential Characteristics of Apparel Websites, and Gen Y's Repurchase Intentions for Apparel.

Keywords: *Gen Y, apparel website's quality, repurchase intention, qualitative research.*

INTRODUCTION

Electronic commerce is commonly known as e-commerce and is defined as “the buying and selling of goods and services, or the transmitting of funds or data, over an electronic network, primarily the internet” (Rouse, 2016, p. 1). E-commerce has been playing a huge role in retail revolution over the past two decades. It has been an interesting topic for research because it went from being a non-existent business model to a huge threat of brick and mortar retail stores (Olenski, 2015). The growth of e-commerce is enormous. From 2002 to 2011, the retail e-commerce sales in the United States increased from \$42 billion to \$162 billion respectively (Richter, 2012). Currently, there are more than 800,000 stores online and the second highest number of the online stores sells clothing and accessories, which is about 17.2% of the total (Stickler, 2016).

Although apparel websites are still doing relatively well, there are existing challenges due to the nature of the business. There are three common challenges faced by online apparel stores which are return rates, confusing size charts, and low conversion rates (Bold Metrics, 2016). The biggest challenge is the low conversion rate and this implies the need to study repurchase intentions. Conversion rate is defined as the percentage of successful purchase of visitors who browsed a particular site (Nielsen, 2013). Since the conversion rate in apparel websites is as low as three percent, it has become more crucial for

apparel website owners to try to retain more online customers. Thus, Generation Y (Gen Y) is their main target because 60% of them are loyal to a brand (Schawbel, 2015). Besides, Gen Y spend most of their time online for more than seven hours a day and spends approximately \$200 billion annually (eMarketer, 2016; Bilgihan, 2016).

The main purpose of this study is to understand Gen Y's experience and perspectives on apparel websites' quality and their repurchase intention. The following research questions have been established:

- i. What is the purchase experience of Gen Y using apparel website(s)?
- ii. What are the influential characteristics of apparel websites' quality that attracts Gen Y?
- iii. How does apparel websites' quality influence Gen Y's repurchase intention?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, several areas such as Generation Y, repurchase intention, website quality, and related studies about website quality are discussed.

Generation Y

Generation theory describes people's cohorts based on their membership of a generation revealing patterns across the generational group (Muskat, Muskat, Zehrer & Johns, 2013). Generational labels are often the outcome of popular culture. Generation Y (Gen Y), commonly referred to as the Millennials, were born between the year of 1980 and 1996 (Moriarty, Mitchell, Wells, Crawford, Brennan & Spence-Stone, 2014). They are one of the largest generational groups in the world, which makes up 25% of the world's population (Tang & Lam, 2017). It is important for marketers to understand Gen Y's buying behaviour because they are emerging as a big force with growing spending power and spends approximately \$200 billion every year (Bilgihan, 2016).

Gen Y is the first generation to spend their whole lives in the digital environment, thus they are called digital natives (Bolton, et al., 2013). In 2015, 73% of Gen Y shopped online for products or services (Statista, 2017). Amongst all the age groups, Gen Y spends the most time online, which is about 1,200 hours per internet user in a year. In terms of money spent online, each Gen Y internet user spends approximately US\$2,000 annually (Smith, 2014). Millennials have been known as impulsive buyers in the marketplace. 83% of the United States' Millennials had made an impulse purchase, especially when they shopped online (eMarketer, 2015). However, Malaysian Gen Y's online shopping behaviour has a slight difference as compared to those in the United States. Based on a survey done with 557 Malaysian Gen Y, all respondents have online purchase experience but they are less involved with online shopping activity due to Malaysian's "wait and see" attitude regarding online shopping (Lim, Azizah & Ramayah, 2015).

In terms of Gen Y's customer loyalty, Van Den Bergh (2016) mentioned that the key to win their loyalty is by incremental innovations. Additionally, this generation is more marketing savvy and will immediately see through fake marketing strategies. Thus, in order

to stimulate the repurchase intention of Gen Y, it is crucial to maintain uniqueness and honesty in brands.

Repurchase Intention

When an individual decides to repurchase a product or service of a company due to certain situations and conditions, the individual is known to have repurchase intention (Amini & Akbari, 2014). Repurchase intention usually takes place when consumers are satisfied with their previous shopping experience (Safa & Von Solms, 2016). One of the advantages of having repurchase intention is that it incurred less cost to retain existing customers than to seek for new customers. Moreover, with the existence of repurchase intention, customer loyalty will be formed as well.

However, unlike in “brick and mortar” retailing, the “clicks and order” retailing has one disadvantage when it comes to examining how consumers make purchase decision, which is the inability to touch and experience the product prior to the purchase (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2012). Fang, Qureshi, Sun, McCole, Ramsey and Lim (2014) conducted a research related to trust, satisfaction, and online repurchase intention. The findings indicated that there is a negative relationship between trust and customers repurchase intention yet there is a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and trust in an online vendor. In short, a satisfied customer would have trust in an online vendor, thus he or she would have repurchase intention. Another research indicates that there is a relationship between website quality and repurchase intention. The more frequent an individual visits a website or lingers longer in the site, the higher the probability of getting transaction done in the website (Nurhanan Syafiah, Abdul Halim & Marimuthu, 2016).

Website Quality

An online retailer is ‘faceless’ on the internet. For that reason, the website acts as a representation of the retailer and the website’s interface serving as the online storefront upon where first impressions are formed. According to Wu, Lee, Fu and Wang (2013), a web atmospheric cue is alike a brick-and-mortar atmospheric cue, so its interface components can stimulates one’s senses. Most Malaysian e-marketers tend to invest heavily on online advertisements to attract more online shoppers but they have overlooked some critical website elements that can fulfil customer satisfaction (Lim, Heng, Ng & Cheah, 2016). For instance, a website design must be able to create an image that is similar to the products or services which the store is selling. It is found that consumers are willing to linger around in a store if the elements of store environment are matched with the store image (Varga, Dlačić & Vujičić, 2014). For that reason, e-marketers must develop high quality websites to retain their customers and repurchase intention. Website quality is determined by how well a website is designed and how well it can satisfy the users (Sreedhar, 2016). Website quality can be measured from two perspectives; developers, and end-users. For the purpose of this study, end-users’ perspective is the main focus.

Pandey and Chawla (2016) have constructed five dimensions of website quality in their qualitative research which are e-enjoyment and convenience, e-distrust, e-negative beliefs, e-offers, e-logistics issues, and visual engagement. Whereas in another study, website ease of use, website entertainment, website content quality, and website privacy are

the dimensions of website quality (Afshardost, Farahmandian & Seyed Mohammad, 2013). In Shia, Chen, Ramdansyah and Wang's (2016) study, they measured website quality with three dimensions; usability, information, and service interaction. On the other hand, there was a research conducted with Malaysian Gen Y about customers' online website satisfaction with online apparel purchase. The authors studied usability, credibility, service quality, and transaction cost as the dimensions of website quality (Lim, Heng, Ng & Cheah, 2016). However, transaction cost was not the concern of Gen Y when it comes to online apparel shopping. A recent study was conducted based on four website quality dimensions which are system quality, information quality, service quality, and security quality (Nurhanan Syafiah, Abdul Halim & Marimuthu, 2016). The later quality indicators are described in the following paragraphs.

System Quality

System quality can be described as the website's performance perceived by users through information retrieval and delivery (Tsao, Hsieh & Lin, 2016). Another study defined system quality as the users' satisfaction level toward the performance of shopping websites in terms of technical and functional aspects (Kim, Galliers, Shin, Ryoo & Kim, 2012). According to Hsieh and Tsao (2013), the important indicators of website system quality are availability, usability, reliability, adaptability, and response time. Besides that, some other system qualities are website design, access convenience, and ease of use (Nurhanan Syafiah, Abdul Halim & Marimuthu, 2016). A successful website design consists of some essential features such as aesthetic appearance, navigation, and well-organised and managed content display (Nor Azureen, Shahril & Ali, 2014).

Information Quality

Information quality is related to e-commerce content issues and covers the comprehensiveness, accuracy, format, and currency aspects of information delivered by the e-marketers (Sharma & Wang, 2015). It is especially important in online business as it reflects the quality of the products and services provided by the e-retailer and consumers are heavily reliant on the information stated on the websites (Galati, Crescimanno, Tinervia & Siggia, 2016). Thus, online customer satisfaction and positive attitudes toward the particular website can be affected by the perceived information and its usefulness.

Service Quality

According to Sharma and Wang (2015), service quality is the measure of the service provided by an information service provider. Online service quality involves the website facilitation of efficient and effective shopping, purchasing and product delivery (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996). Customer service quality plays a fundamental role to make an online business competitive and successful. It can also influence customer attitude towards online shopping which might lead to impulsive buying behaviour (Ang, Liew, Wai & Yeoh, 2015). On the other hand, customised website service enhances customers' perceptions of a website's service quality and this can eventually lead to a revisit of the website (Jeon & Jeong, 2017).

Security Quality

In this technology advancement era, a website's security issue is getting more serious and concerning. It is said that information security and information privacy concerns would influence consumers' perceptions of the uncertainty of their relationship with online retailers (Sharma & Wang, 2015). Unfortunately, security quality cannot be evaluated easily unless the consumer experienced it themselves during or after the transaction is done (Nurhanan Syafiah, Abdul Halim & Marimuthu, 2016). The ability to deliver a safe infrastructure and to keep customers' information confidential should be the main concern of online shoppers and the main responsibility of online retailers (Ang, Liew, Wai & Yeoh, 2015).

Related Studies

Several studies were conducted related to website quality. Afshardost, Farahmandian and Seyed Mohammad (2013) stated that between website content quality, website trust and internet retailer, website entertainment quality, trust of internet service provider, website ease of use, gender and privacy, only website content quality is found to influence online purchase intention. Whereas another research argued that amongst security and privacy, website design, and shopping services, the most influencing factor for shopping enjoyment is security and privacy (Ang, Liew, Wai & Yeoh, 2015). Sheida, Mohammad Reza, Malekifar and Seyedeh Maryam (2015) claimed that e-trust is the main factor affecting online repurchase intention. However, e-trust involves both information or content quality, and security and privacy. Contrary to the previous study, Tsao, Hsieh and Lin (2016) have found that system and e-service quality are both positively significant to the perceived value of consumer and seller relationship, which would subsequently lead to online loyalty. It can be seen that there are different findings based on various researchers' study. All of the previous studies regarding website quality have used a quantitative approach. For this reason, this study was conducted using a qualitative approach to explore the experience of Gen Y as online apparel purchasers.

METHODOLOGY

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) have stated four characteristics of the nature of qualitative research. They are the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the process is inductive, and the product is richly descriptive. Firstly, qualitative studies focus on understanding people's experiences by interpreting their meaning and the way they construct their worlds. It is to make sense out of the process that people have gone through. Secondly, the researcher is being treated as the primary instrument to collect data and analyse them. Thirdly, qualitative research is an inductive process because the researcher would have to convert detail data into a general meaning. The last characteristic indicates that the result of a qualitative data collection is a rich description in the forms of words and pictures rather than numbers.

Research Design

The main focus in this study is about understanding the experience and perspectives of Gen Y on apparel websites' quality and their experience of repurchasing in the same website.

Hence, the phenomenology approach was used in this study as it best suits to study human experience which is emotional and affective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell and Poth (2017) stated that the phenomenology approach's objective is to identify and describe the common meaning based on individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon. Thus, this study focused on constructing a common meaning based on the participants' experience and perspectives on their repurchase experience with apparel website (s). The data in this study were collected through interviews.

Context of Study

This study was conducted in a private higher education institution located in the centre of the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Interviews were conducted with two participants separately. Both respondents are Malaysian Chinese female and 23 years old, which falls into the category of Gen Y. They are also the students of a private higher education institution.

Sample

The sampling method used in this study is purposeful sampling. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 96), purposeful sampling should be used when the researcher wants to "discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned". In this study, the participants were chosen because they were both Gen Y and had bought apparel from the same websites for at least twice. Thus, both participants fit into the purpose of this study which is to discover and understand the perspectives of Gen Y who have repurchase experience on the same apparel website.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to interviewing the participants, an invitation email was sent to both of the selected participants. The email contained the purpose of the interview, the reason for them being selected, the research topic, and the proposed interview schedule. The interviews were scheduled on different days for each participant so that the first transcript can be analysed to improve on the next interview. Once the participants have agreed to be interviewed, more details about the study were sent. Before the interview started, an informed consent was given to each participant to read and sign in order to assure that the participants were comfortable to be interviewed and recorded, and their personal information would not be revealed to the others. The transcripts were sent to both participants after the interview for accuracy checking.

Data Analysis Procedures

Transcripts were documented based on the voice recorded during the interview. The first participant's transcript was shorter compared to the second participant's. The first participant's transcript is six pages long and the second participant's transcript is nine pages long. As for the duration of interview, the first interview was held for 15 minutes whereas the second interview was held for 35 minutes. After the first interview was conducted, it was transcribed and analysed before the second interview was conducted. Both transcripts were

being compared forth and back in order to discover the relationship between the codes and to group them as themes and subthemes. This method is known as the constant comparative method which involves the inductive and comparative processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis resulted in three themes with three subthemes for each theme as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Themes and subtheme

Themes	Subthemes
Gen Y's Purchase Experience with Apparel Websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons to start online purchasing • Satisfaction of online purchasing • Dissatisfaction of online purchasing
Influential Characteristics of Apparel Websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System quality • Service quality • Information quality
Gen Y's Repurchase Intentions for Apparel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality information • Quality service • Quality system

The first theme identified is Gen Y's Purchase Experience with Apparel Websites. Both participants provided their reasons to start online purchasing, and shared their online shopping experience with the apparel website. Both satisfied and dissatisfied shopping experiences have been shared by the participants. The next theme is Influential Characteristics of Apparel Websites that attract Gen Y. The participants provided information regarding the attractiveness of the apparel website. That information provided have been categorised into three subthemes which are system quality, service quality, and information quality. The third theme is Gen Y's Repurchase Intentions for Apparel. It is found that quality information, quality service, and quality system must exist in apparel website in order to increase Gen Y's repurchase intention.

Theme 1: Gen Y's Purchase Experience with Apparel Websites

According to Krüger (2016), most findings of the research found that customer satisfaction influences repurchase intentions. Thus, it is important to ensure the customer's shopping experience is satisfying and memorable. If a customer had a dissatisfied experience with the apparel website, he or she has a lower possibility of repurchase from it.

Reasons to Start Online Purchasing

Both participants shared what triggered them to start online purchasing. There are three common reasons which are trend, busyness, and being influenced by others. According to Participant 1 (P1), "It was trending. It was during Chinese New Year and I didn't have time

to go to the physical store because there were a lot of assignments”. Participant 2 (P2) also mentioned that “During that time, many people started to buy things online”. Both participants indicated that it was a trend to shop online. The first participant also said that she was too busy to go to the physical retail store due to assignments. Both participants were also influenced by others such as friends and a cousin. P1 said that, “I shopped in Zalora, which my friend actually introduced to me”. Similarly, another participant said that, “I still remember that for my first online shopping is influenced by my cousin” (P2).

Satisfaction of Online Purchasing

The participants shared their satisfied online purchase experience in the apparel website they visited during the interview. The first participant purchased apparel from Zalora whereas the second participant purchased apparel from Taobao. The participant stated that “I shopped in Zalora...” (P1). Whereas when another participant was asked which website she usually goes to, she answered “Mostly is in Taobao” (P2).

In terms of the reasons which led to their satisfaction, there are eight of them; convenient, broader selection, keeping up with the trend, efficient shopping, exchange and refund system, good responsiveness, speed of delivery, and feedback incentives. According to P1, “In my opinion, what’s interesting about online shopping is that it is convenient”. She also mentioned that “I have a broader selection of apparels to see”. “For me, definitely it is because of the choices that I may not get from Malaysia” (P2). P2 also mentioned that “If I shop on this website, I can get the fashionable or trendy apparels earlier than others”.

Efficient shopping can be achieved by shopping online because the customer can see different brands’ apparel under one platform. According to P1, “Different brands under one platform is much easier for me to see which I want”. The shopping experience of P1 was satisfying because there is an exchange and refund system available in Zalora. “For me, it was satisfactory because Zalora has this system whereby if you do not like your clothes you can actually exchange it if it is the wrong size or they can actually refund it for you” (P1).

Good responsiveness from the seller is also one of the satisfactory reasons. “Normally the sellers I contacted are quite responsive” (P2). One of the participants was also impressed because of the speed of delivery. “I remember there was a time where I have only waited for two days to receive my clothes from China and this is really quite impressive as normally it takes around one to two weeks” (P2). Besides that, P2 is satisfied due to the feedback incentives received from the seller. “We will get reward like cash rebate if we provide comments or review the product” (P2).

Dissatisfaction of Online Purchasing

As for the dissatisfaction of online purchasing experience, only P2 had experienced it before due to a negative review removed by the seller and there were some flaws on the apparel. P2 mentioned that, “I once tried before and give an unsatisfied review of the product due to the sleeves are not balanced.” P2 also stated that, “I remember there was a time the seller deleted my comment which contained some negative issues.”

Theme 2: Influential Characteristics of Apparel Websites

Website's quality can be defined by several other characteristics such as system quality, information quality, service quality, and security quality (Nurhanan Syafiah, Abdul Halim & Marimuthu, 2016). However, only three characteristics of apparel websites are found to be attractive for Gen Y in this study. The three characteristics are system quality, service quality, and information quality. Security quality is not an attractive characteristic by Gen Y because it is perceived as a basic necessity rather than an attractiveness. According to P1, "I think security is like a basic necessity for all online platforms". Similarly, P2 also mentioned that, "For me, the security quality doesn't really make me decide to purchase the apparel."

System Quality

Based on the information provided by P1 and P2, there are six elements of the website perceived as attractive to them which can be grouped under system quality. The first element is advanced search feature. "We can search the items we wish to buy by uploading or scanning a picture or QR code which is really convenient for me in searching for the product, because sometimes I may not know the exact name for the clothes category" (P2). The second attractive element of the website's system is the comparison feature. According to P2, "I think the attractiveness for me in this website is that I can compare the prices among all the similar clothes from different sellers." P2 also felt that the auto-suggest feature is very useful when she said, "I think the suggestion provided is quite good for me because I can have more clothes without any hesitation to decide and I will feel it easier for me."

P1 also mentioned about the detailed categorisation available in the apparel website. P1 said that, "What I like is also they categorise products in detail, so it's much easier for me to actually find what I want." As for the detailed filter, both participants agreed on its attractiveness and usefulness. P1 stated that, "I like their filter because you can filter in a much detail way whereby you can filter not only the price, you can also filter a product, the colour of the product, sometimes even the materials." Whereas P2 mentioned that, "We can filter the price range and the category which makes it very easy for us to shop in the website." Both participants also agreed that the apparel website which they used are very user-friendly. "I would say it's user-friendly" (P1). "I think yes, the website is very easy to use because of the search feature" (P2).

Service Quality

As for the service quality, high responsiveness from the website owner or seller would attract Gen Y. P1 said that, "I have placed a wrong order before and I did contact them, and they replied me within 24 hours." P2 also said that, "I will choose those shops where the responsiveness is quite good one." Besides the fast response, P1 said that she likes that Zalora's customer service would provide a step-by-step guidance when she needs help. "What I like about their customer service is because I have to click something, I don't really know what to click, and in the end they will actually call and provided me step-by-step guidance."

Information Quality

There are five attractive elements which have been grouped as information quality. They are detail description, different-view photos, 360 degree video, product magnifier, and buyer's review. According to P1, "For Zalora, I do like the information provided because they do provide quite a detail description." P2 provided with some examples of the description, "For example like the measurement, the material, and then the size." In terms of the different-view photos, P1 also said that, "They also do have other photos, one is the front and the back view, and the side view." Whereas for the 360 degree video, P1 mentioned that "Let's say you click on the clothes, one of them will show the video where the model will actually walked around, so you will see like a 360." As for the product magnifier, P1 said that "If let's say the shirt material is a bit different, they do have a close zoom in to actually let you see what the material is like." Buyer's review is especially important for P2. "I will depend very heavily on the review of the product from other buyers." (P2)

Theme 3: Gen Y's Repurchase Intentions for Apparel

There is one previous study that claimed that e-trust is the main factor to affect online repurchase intention (Sheida, Mohammad Reza, Malekifar & Seyedeh Maryam, 2015). E-trust involves both information quality, and security. Whereas Tsao, Hsieh and Lin (2016) have found that system and e-service quality would lead to repurchase intention. In this study, it is found that quality information, quality service, and quality system are the qualities that would influence Gen Y to repurchase from the same apparel website.

Quality Information

Quality information is different from information quality. Quality information here indicates that the information provided in the apparel website is up to the standard. For P2, quality information is the crucial factor which would lead to her repurchase in the apparel website. The quality information perceived by P2 is the real photo. According to P2, "I depend very heavily on the part of the real photo taken by other buyer." P2 explained the reason of her not relying on the photo taken by the seller, "Sometimes the photo shot by the model might be over edited and photoshoped already and the product doesn't look the same at all compared with the product posted by the seller" (P2). P2 also mentioned that the accuracy of the information is more important than the service provided by the seller with this statement, "If let's say I already bought from the shop already, and then the information is very accurate, I do not need to contact the seller anymore."

Quality Service

The results show that high responsiveness and the exchange and refund system are being perceived as the criteria of quality service. P2 said that "For me, I think the responsiveness of replying the message to us should be fast." As for the exact definition of high responsiveness, P2 replied that it should be "within one day." Whereas for the exchange and refund system, it is being categorised as after-sales service. P1 mentioned that "Why I choose to repurchase at Zalora is because of the after-sales service is very good, so I think the service is very important."

Quality System

In order to increase Gen Y's repurchase intention in the apparel website, participants have provided some suggestions. P2 suggested that "I wish that the pop up advertisement of the website will be reduced as it is very annoying for me." Whereas P1 suggested that "I think that if they have this live chat, it would be better because it is faster compared if you email it."

Implications

Apparel website owners should emphasised more on the website's quality as it represents the real store to the customers. The apparel website should be well-secured and protect customers' privacy as Gen Y perceived it as the basic necessity nowadays. As for the system quality, a website should not be cluttered. The design and structure should be maintained in a simple and organised way. Apparel website should be able to provide detailed filter and categorisation in order to ease the shopping process of the customers. It is best to reduced advertisements as much as possible so that the customers would not get frustrated or annoyed as it would interrupt the mood of buying and the shopping process. Furthermore, it is very important for an apparel website to have an efficient exchange and refund system due to the nature of the business. Live chat should also be available in the website as Gen Ys are very particular about the responsiveness of the seller or website owner. Even if there is no live chat, Gen Y customers expect the website to reply their message within 24 hours. Otherwise, there is a possibility that they would switch to another apparel website due to the slow responsiveness.

CONCLUSION

The apparel website owners or sellers should understand the importance of maintaining and improving the website's quality as it represents their business. Apparel website owners should not underestimate the influence of the website's quality and the spending power of Gen Y. Although security quality would not lead to repurchase intention, it would definitely influence the purchase decision of Gen Y in the website. Lastly, apparel websites should have a decent system, sufficient information, and efficient service.

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