

***THE MEDIATION ROLE OF BRAND LOVE IN THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN CONSUMERS BASED ON BRAND EQUITY AND LOYALTY:
RESEARCH ON SERABI NOTOSUMAN CONSUMERS***

**PERAN MEDIASI BRAND LOVE DALAM HUBUNGAN KONSUMEN
BERDASARKAN EKUITAS DAN LOYALITAS MEREK: PENELITIAN
KONSUMEN SERABI NOTOSUMAN**

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to determine the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between CBBE and brand loyalty. This study analyzes CBBE, brand loyalty, and brand love related to Serabi Notosuman food, a traditional snack concept with a cake-like texture. The research population consisted of Serabi Notosuman customers operating in Surakarta City, and a purposive sampling method was used. The sample in this study consisted of 150 respondents who were consumers of Serabi Notosuman in Surakarta City. With increasing competition in the culinary industry, understanding the factors that influence customer loyalty becomes very important. This research uses a quantitative approach using a questionnaire given to Serabi Notosuman consumers in Surakarta City. The data collected was analyzed using path analysis to test the relationship between brand equity, brand love, and brand loyalty. The research results show that brand equity has a positive effect on brand love which in turn has a positive impact on consumer loyalty. These findings emphasize the importance of building emotional connections between consumers and brands to increase loyalty, as well as providing insight for business owners in formulating effective marketing strategies

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peran mediasi kecintaan merek terhadap hubungan CBBE dan loyalitas merek. Penelitian ini menganalisis CBBE, loyalitas merek, dan kecintaan merek terkait makanan Serabi Notosuman, sebuah konsep jajanan tradisional dengan tekstur seperti kue. Populasi penelitian terdiri dari pelanggan Serabi Notosuman yang beroperasi di Kota Surakarta, dan menggunakan metode purposive sampling. Sampel dalam penelitian ini berjumlah 150 responden yang merupakan konsumen Serabi Notosuman di Kota Surakarta. Dengan semakin ketatnya persaingan di industri kuliner, memahami faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi loyalitas pelanggan menjadi sangat penting. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan menggunakan kuesioner yang diberikan kepada konsumen Serabi Notosuman di Kota Surakarta. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan analisis jalur untuk menguji hubungan antara ekuitas merek, kecintaan merek, dan loyalitas merek. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ekuitas merek berpengaruh positif terhadap kecintaan merek yang selanjutnya berdampak positif terhadap loyalitas konsumen. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya membangun hubungan emosional antara konsumen dan merek untuk meningkatkan loyalitas, serta memberikan wawasan bagi pemilik usaha dalam merumuskan strategi pemasaran yang efektif

INTRODUCTION

Besides being famous for its culture and batik, Solo is also renowned for its wide variety of culinary delights, perfect for enjoying a meal. There are many culinary options with diverse flavors, ranging from savory dishes to tasty snacks, one of which is Serabi Notosuman. Serabi Notosuman is a very famous traditional food from Solo. Its well-established brand attracts numerous visitors and tourists who come to Solo, as

they don't want to miss tasting this specialty. A brand is not merely a symbol or a name; it is the identity of a product that can serve as a benchmark for the quality of the product itself. When consumers feel satisfied with a product, they tend to return.

Brand loyalty is a strong tendency or commitment from consumers to consistently choose and purchase products or services from a particular brand, even when other choices are available in the market. Factors

such as product quality, user experience, brand reputation, brand values, and emotional connection with the brand can all influence the level of consumer loyalty toward a brand. According to Mowen (2002), brand loyalty refers to the extent to which customers have a positive attitude toward a brand, favor a particular brand, and intend to purchase it in the future. Consumers compare the value offered by a specific brand, and once they are satisfied with the value provided, they decide to remain loyal to that brand.

Brand equity, as a theoretical concept, was researched in the 1980s (Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2018). (Aaker, 1991) defines brand equity as “all assets and liabilities associated with a brand’s distinctive features, such as its name and symbol, which enhance or diminish the value of the products and services provided by a business to consumers.” Brand equity is a collection of associations and behaviors held by brand customers, distribution channel members, and the company that enables the brand to achieve strength, durability, and advantages that distinguish it from competing brands (Khan et al., 2023). Various approaches have been used to evaluate brand equity. The first approach is the behavioral approach, which consists of consumer attitudes and behaviors in evaluating brand equity. The second approach is the financial approach, which involves calculating financial statements to determine the brand's total equity (Grębosz-Krawczyk, 2018).

(Abdullah et al., 2018) demonstrate that brand equity plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior, attitudes, and preferences. (Agustini & Suasana, 2020) argue that to outperform or become the best among competitors, strong brand equity is essential. The stronger a product’s brand equity, the greater its appeal and added value in the eyes of consumers and competing brands, driving consumers to make purchases and enabling the company to gain profits, as well as increasing consumer trust

and satisfaction with the product so they are likely to repurchase it. Therefore, the concept of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) has become significant for researchers in recent years. Jorfi & Gayem (2016) state that CBBE and its various dimensions are important for companies due to their impact on consumer satisfaction, perceived value, and consumer loyalty. (Aaker, 1991) suggests that CBBE can be achieved through perceived quality, brand associations, brand loyalty, and brand awareness. Conversely, Keller (1993) defines CBBE as “the differential response of consumers to a brand’s marketing based on their brand knowledge.” In another study, CBBE is defined as “the overall symbolic and functional benefits consumers derive from the use and consumption of a brand” (Vázquez et al., 2002). Yoo et al. (2000), on the other hand, define CBBE as “the added value or enhancement of benefits from a brand name.” CBBE is based on consumer perceptions and behavior, referred to as cognitive and attitudinal effects (Enes et al., 2024).

CBBE is treated as a multidimensional construct in marketing literature, though this same literature presents discussions on whether the principles behind brand awareness creation can be directly applied to brands such as hotels and food and beverage companies, where service elements are predominant. For example, (Aaker, 1991) defines perceived quality as one of the elements of brand equity but does not clearly indicate whether this quality refers to goods or services. Adaptations to a service-based branding model are necessary to meet the specific features of service provision (i.e., non-physical), as various dimensions of brand equity become evident when a brand is evaluated within the service industry (Nam et al., 2011a; Sour, 2017). In measuring CBBE in the service sector, (Nam et al., 2011a) state that successful brands are designed not only to meet consumers' physical needs but also to fulfill their symbolic needs.

Previous research by (Stefanny et al., 2022) and (Bambang, 2017) demonstrates that brand experience has a positive effect on brand love. Brand love, which has attracted limited academic interest until now, is emerging as a new marketing phenomenon capturing the attention of both academics and sectoral practitioners (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). According to (Kevin Roberts, 2004), CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, there has long been a correlation between brands and customers, and the level of brand loyalty within a customer base is linked to an inherent love for the brand. He states that brands like Harley Davidson, Apple, and Starbucks have all achieved success through brand love. Brand love is an emotion that positively impacts buyers, ensuring that customers remain "loyal customers" at any cost; speak positively about the brand; and even feel emotionally attached to it (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; KALYONCUOĞLU, 2017).

Brand love is closely tied to the notion of irrational consumption, where consumers create multiple realities based on their consumption experiences. Brand love is a positive affection experienced by customers toward a particular brand, which can develop and grow in line with their experiences with that brand. Brand love is observed through positive feelings, such as enthusiasm or fondness toward a brand, and is reflected by giving positive evaluations to that brand. Therefore, this study aims to determine whether brand experience and brand love play a role in forming brand loyalty. Research by Stefanny et al. (2022) and (Bambang, 2017) found that brand love can mediate the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty by strengthening the connection between these two variables. This study seeks to identify the intermediary role of brand love in its correlation between Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) and brand loyalty, addressing issues related to brand equity, brand loyalty, and the phenomenon of brand

love through an analysis of Serabi Notosuman. Previous studies have generally assessed the influence of brand equity on brand loyalty and the mediating role of buyer satisfaction (Ali & Muqadas, 2015; Helen Ongkowidjoyo, 2015; Nam et al., 2011b; Shahroodi et al., 2015; Souri, 2017; Susanty & Kenny, 2015). Some have also examined the effect of brand trust on brand loyalty and the mediating role of brand love (KALYONCUOĞLU, 2017); brand trust, brand awareness, and the mediating role of brand love in the influence of self-image congruence on brand commitment (Aydin et al., 2017) and the mediating effect of brand love in the correlation between brand experience and brand loyalty (Aşkin & İpek, 2016).

In the first part of the study, Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) and its dimensions are conceptually explained. Next, in this section, previously analyzed consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) and relevant literature examining the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty are reviewed. The research model is established based on the data obtained. In the third part, the research methods and analysis of data validity and reliability are conducted. In the fourth part, the hypothesis analysis of the study is examined. Finally, the results are compared with previous studies based on the data obtained. Additionally, the reflection of the study's findings from a sectoral and literature perspective is detailed.

Mediation testing is a highly effective method for demonstrating "how" relationships between variables arise (Enes et al., 2024). Therefore, in the service industry, the impact of CBBE is expected to be influenced by various mediating variables as well as brand love. In this context, determining the mediating effect of brand love is considered a very important issue. In this study, the role of brand love on CBBE and loyalty will be examined for the first time. The results of this research are projected to contribute to profitability in this

sector by creating sustainable competitive advantages, serve as a guide for companies aiming to increase customer loyalty by emphasizing specific concepts, and contribute to marketing literature.

Based on the issues described, the purpose of this study is to analyze the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between consumer-based CBBE and brand loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer-Based Brand Equity influences Brand Loyalty

A brand is a key asset for sales value, not just a name but a valuable entity for a product. When a brand has strong equity, it encourages consumer behavior toward making purchasing decisions, as consumers no longer have doubts about a brand well-known in the market. Brand equity represents the added value given to products and services. According to (Kotler, 2009), brand equity is the added value given to a product. Aaker (2015, p. 8) defines brand equity as a set of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand, its name, and its symbol, which either add or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to the company or its customers. Brand equity can be reflected in how consumers think, feel, and act toward a brand, as well as in the price, market share, and profitability that the brand brings to the company (Kotler et al., 2017).

Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) has become a critical focus for companies, as consumer financial evaluations are no longer relevant for assessing a brand's stability. Thus, the purpose of the CBBE concept is clearer and more relevant than mere balance sheet values (Kotler et al., 2017). Maintaining positive CBBE is essential for marketing experts (Jorfi & Gayem, 2016). Each component (physical

quality, staff behavior, ideal internal consistency, brand identity, lifestyle consistency) of brand equity represents an indication of customer perception and imagination of the brand, and this image they create supports consumers in their purchasing decisions (Shahroodi et al., 2015). In their research, (Alfaridzi Sucma & Apsari Sugiat, 2023) demonstrate that CBBE has a direct effect on brand loyalty.

H₁: CBBE directly affects brand loyalty.

Consumer-Based Brand Equity influences Brand Love

Brand love is a concept that drives consumers to feel passionate and satisfied with a specific product or service brand. Essentially, brand love represents a strong level of emotional attraction from satisfied customers who own products from a particular brand. Satisfied customers who love a brand are expected to be more committed to repurchasing and more enthusiastic about spreading “positive word of mouth” (Ridhwan et al., 2021). Brand love is the level of intense and passionate emotional attachment felt by consumers who are satisfied with a particular brand (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Consumers who feel emotionally attached to a brand, or more than just liking it, tend to exhibit higher levels of loyalty and positive word of mouth (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Ultimately, if consumers need the same product again, they are more likely to repurchase from the same brand (Bhattacharya et al., 2022; Merabet, 2020).

Brand love has been conceptualized as a long-term relationship with a particular brand (Fournier, 1998). Carroll & Ahuvia (2006) describe brand love as an emotional affection that consumers feel

toward a specific brand. The love consumers feel for a certain brand impacts their brand commitment, leading them to become more loyal to the brand and willing to pay a higher price to experience the brand they cherish (Albert et al., 2008).

Giraldo et al. (2018) identified a meaningful and positive relationship between brand equity and brand love. (Doç & Önen, 2018) established that brand equity has a significant impact on brand love.

H₂: CBBE has a significant influence on brand love.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a state of attachment where customers choose to consistently commit to a brand or make regular purchases of that brand, fostering satisfaction with it. Brand loyalty involves a purchase decision driven by internal motivation to make repeat or continuous purchases. According to Kim et al. (2020), brand loyalty is a level that unconsciously surpasses mere brand awareness, as brand loyalty possesses a stronger level of commitment that can enhance brand performance.

Consumer loyalty refers to the degree of attachment a consumer has to a particular brand (Rather & Camilleri, 2019). In Aaker's brand equity model, loyalty is associated with reduced marketing costs, acquisition of new customers (building awareness and trust), and commercial support to respond to competitive threats (Bravo Gil et al., 2007). Traditionally, loyalty is considered a dimension of Aaker's brand equity model (Aaker, 1991). Many previous studies support this view (Doç & Önen, 2018; Helen Ongkowidjoyo, 2015; R. Kim & Chao, 2018; Üyesi et al., 2019). However, most studies in the service industry view loyalty as a result of brand equity ((Nam et al., 2011a;

Souri, 2017; Susanty & Kenny, 2015; Thanushan & Kennedy, 2020).

Brand loyalty is a marketing term that describes the strength of consumers' preference for one brand over others. According to (Mowen, 2002), brand loyalty is a state in which consumers have a positive attitude toward a brand, are committed to it, and intend to continue purchasing it in the future. Brand loyalty is the dedication of consumers to keep using products from the same company (Swastha, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

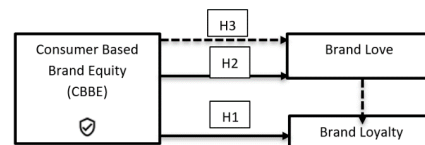


Figure 1. Theoretical Model

Data Sources

The data sources collected by the researcher for this study include primary and secondary data.

Primary Data

According to Sugiyono (2018, p. 456), primary data is data that directly provides information to the data collector. The primary data in this study was obtained through the completion of questionnaires. Sugiyono (2017, p. 142) defines a questionnaire as a data collection technique conducted by providing a set of questions or written statements to respondents for them to answer. The respondents in this study are consumers of Serabi Notosuman, where the purpose of the questionnaire is to understand the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between CBBE and brand loyalty.

Secondary Data

According to Sugiyono (2018, p. 456), secondary data is data that does not directly provide information to the data

collector. Secondary data was obtained from scientific journals, articles, and literature books.

Population and Sample

Population

According to Sugiyono (2017, p. 215), a population is a generalization area consisting of objects or subjects with certain qualities and characteristics determined by the researcher to be studied and from which conclusions are drawn. The population in this study consists of consumers of Serabi Notosuman.

Sample

Sugiyono (2017, p. 81) defines a sample as a part of the population that serves as a data source in the study, representing a subset of the characteristics of the population. The sample in this study will be selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on specific considerations in line with desired criteria to determine the sample size to be studied (Sugiyono, 2018, p. 138). The required sample size is 150 consumers of Serabi Notosuman.

Questionnaire

According to Sujarweni, (2020, p. 94), a questionnaire is a data collection instrument conducted by providing several written statements or questions to respondents for them to answer. The scale used in this questionnaire is the Likert scale, which consists of five levels of responses as follows:

Table 1. Assessment Using a Likert

Scale	
Response	Value
Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Somewhat	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

Operational Definitions

Brand Equity

Brand equity is the added value given to a product or service by the brand, which includes positive perceptions of quality, strong brand associations, high brand awareness, and brand loyalty.

Brand Love

Brand love is a strong emotional affection, psychological closeness, and attachment to a brand felt by consumers. It encompasses feelings of fondness, passion, and commitment toward the brand.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is the tendency of consumers to consistently repurchase products from the same brand, despite the availability of alternatives. Brand loyalty reflects consumers' preference and emotional attachment to the brand.

Validity Test

The validity test measures the consistency between the data reported by the researcher and the actual data obtained from the research subjects. This test is used to determine whether a questionnaire is valid or not. The validity test is conducted using Pearson's product-moment correlation formula (Sugiyono, 2014, p. 173) as follows:

1. If $(r \geq 0.30)$, the questionnaire items are valid.
2. If $(r \leq 0.30)$, the questionnaire items are invalid.

Reliability Test

To measure the reliability of the measuring instrument, the Cronbach's Alpha technique is used. Reliability is achieved if the alpha coefficient is greater than 0.6 (V. Wiratna Sujarweni, 2020).

Path Analysis

Another term for regression testing with an intervening variable is path analysis. The analysis technique used in this study is path analysis, conducted using SPSS 22. Path Analysis is an extension of regression analysis, and regression analysis can be considered a specific form of path analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Validity Test

The Validity Test is the accuracy of an instrument in measurement, conducted by comparing the (r_{hitung}) with the (r_{tabel}) value at a 5% significance level with a degree of freedom $(df) = n - 2$. Therefore, $(df) = 150 - 2 = 148$ and with an alpha of 0.05, the (r_{tabel}) value is 0.1603. If $(r_{hitung} > r_{tabel})$, the statement is considered valid, and if $(r_{hitung} < r_{tabel})$, the statement is considered invalid.

Table 2. Validity Test

Research Variable	Item Statement	r-count	r-table	Description
Brand Equity (X)	1. Serabi Notosuman is very familiar to the people of Surakarta	0.552	0.1603	ssValid
	2. The quality offered by Serabi Notosuman is very good compared to other brands	0.698	0.1603	Valid
	3. The ingredients used by Serabi Notosuman are of high quality	0.661	0.1603	Valid
	4. People often see promotions or advertisements for Serabi Notosuman	0.671	0.1603	Valid
	5. The Serabi Notosuman brand is very important when choosing serabi	0.831	0.1603	Valid
Brand Love (Y)	1. People really like Serabi Notosuman	0.558	0.1603	Valid
	2. People have an emotional attachment to Serabi Notosuman	0.787	0.1603	Valid
	3. We often think about Serabi Notosuman even when we are not eating it	0.799	0.1603	Valid
	4. People are very satisfied every time they consume Serabi Notosuman	0.627	0.1603	Valid
	5. People always choose Serabi Notosuman for their snack	0.756	0.1603	Valid
Loyalty (Z)	1. People often buy Serabi Notosuman	0.731	0.1603	Valid
	2. People continue to choose Serabi Notosuman even if there are cheaper brands	0.78	0.1603	Valid
	3. People are likely to keep buying Serabi Notosuman in the near future	0.721	0.1603	Valid
	4. We recommend Serabi Notosuman to friends, relatives, or family as a popular snack in Surakarta	0.787	0.1603	Valid
	5. Serabi Notosuman is a reliable food brand	0.72	0.1603	Valid

Reliability Test

Table 3. Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Status
Brand Equity (X)	0.712	Reliable
Brand Love (Y)	0.754	Reliable
Loyalty (Z)	0.797	Reliable

According to Ghazali (2018), a construct is considered reliable if it yields a Cronbach's Alpha value > 0.60 . The SPSS data processing results show that all variables have a sufficiently high Cronbach's Alpha, above 0.60, indicating that all measurement concepts for each variable in the questionnaire are reliable. Therefore, the items for each variable concept are suitable for use in further data collection..

Path Analysis Test (Path Analysis)**First model path coefficient:****Model 1 Path Coefficient:****Table 4. Model 1 Path Analysis Test**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.811	1.284		1.411	0.16
Brand Equity	0.907	0.057	0.797	16.027	0

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.797	0.634	0.632	1.3412

a. Referring to the output of the First Regression Model, it is evident that the significance value for the Brand Equity variable (X) is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This result leads to the conclusion that in the First Regression Model, the Brand Equity variable (X) has a significant effect on Loyalty (Z).

b. The R Square value is 0.634, indicating that the contribution of the influence of X on Z is 63.4%, while the remaining 36.6% is contributed by other variables not included in this study. Meanwhile, the value of (e_1) can be calculated using the formula $(e_1 = \sqrt{1 - 0.634}) = 0.604$.

Path coefficients of the second model:**Table 5. Model 2 Path Analysis Test**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.869	1.41		0.619	0.539
Brand Equity	0.613	0.102	0.517	6.006	0
Loyalty	0.31	0.09	0.298	3.457	0.001

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.776	0.601	0.596	1.46347

a. Based on the output of the Second Regression Model, the significance

values for both variables, Brand Equity (X) = 0.000 and Brand Love (Y) = 0.001, are less than 0.05. This result leads to the conclusion that in the Second Regression Model, variables X and Y have a significant effect on Z.

b. The R Square value is 0.601, indicating that the contribution of the influence of X and Y on Z is 60.1%, while the remaining 39.9% is contributed by other variables not included in this study. Meanwhile, the value of (e_2) can be calculated using the formula $(e_2 = \sqrt{1 - 0.601}) = 0.631$.

DISCUSSION**Analysis of the Influence of X through Y on Z**

The direct effect of X on Z is 0.517, while the indirect effect of X through Y on Z is calculated as $0.797 \times 0.298 = 0.237$. Therefore, the total effect of X on Z is 0.754. Based on the above calculations, it is known that the direct effect is smaller than the indirect effect, indicating that X has a significant indirect influence on Z through Y.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

The purpose of this study was to examine the mediating role of brand love in the relationship between Brand Equity and Loyalty. In this study, a Path Analysis approach was used, which was divided into two path coefficient models. The first model's path coefficient examined the influence of the Brand Equity variable (X) on the Loyalty variable (Z). It was found that in the First Regression Model, Brand Equity (X) has a significant effect on Loyalty (Z). This is consistent with the research by Fahrizal Alfaridzi Sucma and Maria Apsari Sugi (2023), which showed that

CBBE has a direct impact on brand loyalty.

The second model's path coefficient examined the influence of Brand Equity (X) and Brand Love (Y) on Loyalty (Z). The results indicate that in the Second Regression Model, both Brand Equity (X) and Brand Love (Y) have a significant effect on Loyalty (Z).

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This study was conducted as thoroughly as possible, but it is not without limitations. One such limitation is that the research focused solely on consumers of Serabi Notosuman within a specific area, so the results may not be generalizable to consumers in other regions or to those of other serabi brands.

It is recommended that Serabi Notosuman's business owners focus on strengthening brand equity by improving product quality, creating attractive packaging, and providing friendly service. The business owner should implement marketing strategies that emphasize emotional values. This includes sharing the story behind the product, such as the history or unique qualities of Serabi Notosuman, to strengthen emotional connections and increase brand love. Additionally, the business owner should consider developing a loyalty program offering incentives for loyal consumers, which would not only enhance loyalty but also create a stronger emotional bond with the brand. Regular consumer surveys are also advised to gather feedback.

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct studies on other traditional foods, as Surakarta is home to many traditional foods. Expanding the underlying theories of brand love and brand equity to gain a broader understanding within the food industry would also be beneficial. Moreover, future studies could develop more

specific measurement tools for brand love, enabling more accurate assessment within the context of local products.

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