

A CASE STUDY OF APPLYING THE EXPERIENCE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK FOR BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION IN THE ERA OF EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study of the Experience Strategy Framework (XSF) applied to a business transformation project within the experience economy. The XSF integrates key dimensions—people, experience, brand, and organization—to guide holistic, experience-oriented strategies that align business goals with customer needs. This study highlights how the XSF can address complex business challenges through a dynamic, relationship-based approach by detailing the rebranding of a leading home furnishings company in Taiwan. The case study demonstrates the framework's ability to overcome siloed business functions, enhance customer engagement, and provide a foundation for long-term competitiveness. Furthermore, the study underscores the evolving nature of the XSF as it adapts to new industry practices, making it a valuable tool for academic research and professional application.

Keywords: Experience Strategy Framework, Experience Management, Brand Experience, Customer Engagement, User-Centered Design, Organizational Strategy, Experience-Driven Business.

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's experience-driven economy, the influence of customer experience on business competitiveness has become increasingly evident [1][2]. As a result, industries are prioritizing the enhancement of customer experience to create added value [3]. Brand experience, which emerges from interactions between companies and consumers, relies on the effective translation of brand values into tangible actions [4]. However, research highlights a gap between organizations' customer experience strategies and their brand values, indicating a disconnect in their experience strategies [5].

This study posits that organizations must adopt a proactive approach to experience design in order to enhance competitiveness and brand value, by gaining a better understanding of users' preferences and perceptions of service experiences. We introduce the concept of the Experience Strategy Framework (XSF) [6]. The XSF emphasizes critical elements for organizations that rely on experience to drive business value. Using design-in-practice research, this paper presents an experience strategy-based approach to brand experience design, illustrating the advantages of adopting a macroscopic view of experience within a business context.

1.1 Background

This paper on experience strategy represents the culmination of ongoing activities, including academic research, consulting projects with clients, documented case studies, published books, journal and conference publications, conference presentations, workshops, professional education, and both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Additionally, the authors have held regular weekly meetings to exchange ideas derived from pedagogical and practical experiences. Two activities, in particular, have significantly contributed to the research and development of experience strategy: industry design projects with paid clients and educational courses in both professional and academic environments. With each activity, the definitions and frameworks of experience strategy have been iterated, evolved, and refined.

The research and development of experience strategy leveraged case studies from TANG Consulting, one of China's leading experience strategy, design, and management consultancies. These case studies included projects with Amway, Xiao Guan Tea, China Merchants Bank, WM Motor, and Starbucks. The case studies have been documented in the book *X Thinking: Building Better Brands in the Age of Experience*, as well as its Chinese edition. Subsequently, the proposed experience strategy was applied to TANG's new client projects, including an international skincare startup, a leading global sports footwear and apparel company, and a leading global luxury automotive manufacturer. Additionally, it was implemented at HOLA, a leading retailer of home furnishings and household merchandise in Taiwan. This paper uses the HOLA case study to illustrate some of the latest developments in experience strategy and the Experience Strategy Framework (XSF).

In addition to design projects, the authors applied the XSF concepts to professional education training programs for TANG employees and university courses in Taiwan and Shanghai. In 2019, a comprehensive X Thinking training program was delivered to over 120 design researchers, strategists, and designers. This program enhanced the consistency and quality of the consultancy's experience research, strategy, and design practices across the organization. In 2020, an advanced Experience Strategy training program was developed and delivered to TANG's top 30 consultants.

Elements of experience strategy have also been incorporated into university courses at various levels, including undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional education. Notable courses include the "User Experience Design and X Thinking" course for graduate students at Tongji University's College of Innovation and Design, a graduate-level course in "User Research" at Beijing Normal University's Master's in Applied Psychology in User Experience, the "User-oriented Innovation Design" course at Taiwan University of Science and Technology, and the "Service Design Innovation" course at The University of Hong Kong for the Institute for China Business.

The authors have published the evolving state of experience strategy in various forms, including trade publications, trade books, an academic journal paper, and an academic conference paper. Lai [7] initially defines experience strategy as an "omni-touchpoint approach (meaning all touchpoints working together) to create a holistic experience for customers" by "strategically defining and creating the situations where brands can influence users' thoughts, feelings, and meanings toward your brand." Huang & Lai [8] describe an eXperience Strategy as a mid-term to long-term strategic and tactical plan for the development of brand eXperiences to achieve business objectives. It helps brands envision the ideal eXperience people would like the brand to deliver, identify the touchpoints that deliver such an eXperience, and prioritize the business activities required to realize the vision, aligning the eXperience with the brand value proposition.

An eXperience Strategy aligns every touchpoint, from customer engagement to employee interactions. It is comprehensive, incorporating both expectations and perceptions. It involves the interconnected activities of personas and scenarios to identify their jobs-to-be-done, aligning with the brand value proposition and contributing to business growth. Lai & Tang [9] further elaborate on the elements, methods, and process of experience strategy: Experience strategy encompasses the interconnected nature of enterprise capabilities, the brand value proposition, holistic experiences across experience domains, and customer lifetime relationships, all of which support informed decision-making for long-term competitiveness in the experience economy. The process of eXperience Strategy should include the positioning, planning, and operation of the brand, as well as analyses of experience and users, to fully understand the spectrum of experience from both the company's and the users' perspectives. The methods of experience strategy include the analysis of industry competitiveness, brand value, user perception, stakeholder priorities, and XPI. The core elements of experience strategy are the corporation, the brand, experience domains, and people.

In a recent conference paper [6], the authors document the development of experience strategy through its different phases of transformation, from user experience to strategy, where each new phase of development created opportunities for designers and strategists to deliver more value to clients. The four phases of UX transformation move from UX (the design of digital experiences), to experience design

(the design of holistic experiences), to experience strategy (the design of the dynamic link between users and the brand), to experience management (the quantification of experience), and finally to experience-driven transformation (strategic consultation for organizational transformation to achieve desired customer-centric and experience-driven objectives).

1.2 Research problem

Despite the numerous publications mentioned above, we observed a lack of a clear definition of the Experience Strategy Framework (XSF), which has evolved through its application in different contexts. Therefore, this paper aims to clarify the definition of the XSF and establish a foundation for future academic research and industry practice. The objectives are twofold: first, to elaborate on the core elements of the XSF with the underlying rationale, and second, to present a case study that implemented the framework to further illustrate its possible applications in both academic and professional settings.

2 THE DEFINITIONS OF THE ELEMENTS OF EXPERIENCE STRATEGY

2.1 Experience Strategy

In the experience economy, customers' needs go beyond external branding to include internal value alignment. When selecting customized services, they prioritize brands that resonate with their beliefs, evaluating them through diverse touchpoints such as product usage, staff interactions, physical environments, digital platforms, and communication channels. Brands must actively design experiences across these dimensions to foster satisfaction and identity. As customer needs grow more complex, design management has shifted toward optimizing processes, strategies, and decision-making [10].

The customer journey forms the backbone of the experience economy, where brand interactions mature into lasting memories. These experiences, influenced by individual perceptions, can be analyzed on micro and macro levels [11]. Micro-level experiences focus on engagement with specific touchpoints, while macro-level experiences encompass the broader customer journey, building loyalty and enhancing brand value over time.

To address these dimensions, "experience management" has emerged as a key focus for industries [12][13][14][15][16][17]. By digitizing and concretizing experience design, organizations develop systems to evaluate effectiveness and inform strategic decisions. Tools like Qualtrics' Experience Management (XM) identify gaps, prioritize actions, and foster action-oriented cultures, helping integrate experience management into business strategies.

Customer journeys, however, are shaped by multiple departments within organizations, often resulting in inconsistencies. To deliver cohesive experiences, many companies now translate brand strategies into experience strategies through focused design initiatives. This process ensures alignment across departments and strengthens customer engagement.

Experience strategy, rooted in practical design and business case studies, has evolved into an innovation framework for organizations, advancing design performance and experience management. However, academic research has largely focused on customer experience without exploring how design transforms brand strategies into actionable experience strategies and design principles [18][19][20][21].

Modern design research should bridge these gaps, helping enterprises implement strategies through products, services, environments, and communications. The results would help identify opportunities for innovation, optimize service journeys, refine touchpoints, and deliver customer experience to deliver brand value. However, current frameworks need more scalability and integration for experience design management and theoretical models dynamically connecting people, experiences, brands, and businesses. This study proposes a research agenda for experience design management to meet these challenges.

2.2 The Revised Experience Strategy in this Study

The proposed experience strategy is a holistic and sustainable balance between the dynamic relationships among the business, its consumers, and the experiences that the business projects and consumers perceive. It helps companies make strategic decisions by understanding and interpreting both

business dynamics and customer behaviors. It involves the deliberate selection of touchpoints to bring a brand to life and provide a strategic advantage over competitors. This approach aims to enhance long-term competitiveness in the experience economy.

At the core of experience strategy is the Holistic Experience Model, which focuses on the connections between brands and consumers through experiences, as shown in Figure 1. This model emphasizes that people primarily perceive a brand's value through the experiences it offers.

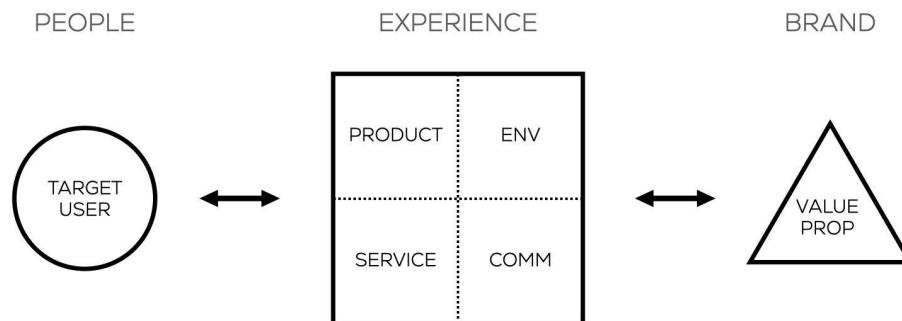


Figure 1. Holistic eXperience Model

Brands and consumers connect through experiences. Brands create value through touchpoints across four key Domains of eXperience, which also enable consumers to perceive this value.

The Domains of eXperience were originally inspired by brand practitioner Wally Olins's Four Vectors of Brand Tangibility and have evolved over the years [22]. The word "domain" was chosen because each domain requires a distinct set of knowledge, skills, mediums, and tools to design, implement, and operate. The original versions of the Domains of eXperience, as defined in both the Chinese and English editions of the *X Thinking* book, included four domains: offerings, communications, environments, and behaviors.

However, over time, the four domains have evolved for the following reasons: Initially, only products and services were considered offerings. However, after working in the real estate and intellectual property industries, it became clear that environments and communications are also forms of offerings. Additionally, user research revealed that consumers discuss services more frequently than they talk about behaviors.

Today, the Domains of eXperience have evolved to include products, services, environments, and communications, as shown in Figure 2.

Products are physical or digital artifacts that users acquire to own permanently. They are typically characterized by being produced by the company, owned by the user after purchase or acquisition, and evaluated through usage and its design to accomplish specific tasks or fulfill certain needs. Products can be physical (like a car) or digital (like software).

Services are activities or benefits that a brand provides, which are experienced temporarily. They are often characterized by being produced and owned by the company, accessed by the user but not owned, and evaluated through the quality of interaction (including customer service, user interface, and content quality). Services can be physical (like laundry and dry cleaning) or digital (like streaming services).

Environments are physical or digital spaces designed by a brand to facilitate user interactions, activities, and experiences. They are characterized by being produced by the company, accessed by the user for short or long durations, and evaluated through supported activities and design elements. Environments can be physical (like brick-and-mortar stores or hotels) or digital (like e-commerce sites or virtual worlds).

Communications refer to the exchange of information between a brand and its users, as well as among users themselves. They are characterized by being produced by both the company and users, accessed

by both the user and the brand, and evaluated through engagement and relevance. Communications can be physical (like signage), digital (like social media posts), or in-person (like events).

	PRODUCTS	SERVICES	ENVIRONMENTS	COMMUNICATIONS
DEFINITION	Tangible or digital artifacts that users acquire to own permanently.	Activities or benefits that a brand provides, which are experienced temporarily.	Physical or digital spaces designed by a brand to facilitate and enhance user interactions, activities, and experiences.	The exchange of information between a brand and its users, and among users themselves.
PRODUCTION	The company	The company	The company	The company and the users
ACCESS	The user after purchase or acquisition	The user but not owned	The user for short or long durations of time	The user and the brand
FORM	Physical (like a car) or digital (like software)	Digital (like streaming services) or physical (like laundry services)	Physical (like stores, hotels) or digital (like e-commerce sites, virtual worlds)	Physical (like signage), digital (like social media posts), or in-person (like events)
EXPERIENCE FACTORS	Utility derived from use, designed to accomplish specific tasks or fulfill needs	Interaction quality	Supported activities and design elements	Engagement and relevance

Figure 2. Domains of eXperience

2.2 Experience Strategy Framework

Over time, as client projects shifted in scope from design to strategy, the Holistic Experience Model has evolved and expanded into the Experience Strategy Framework. While the people and experience components of the Holistic Experience Model remained unchanged, focusing solely on the brand was insufficient for holistically representing the business dimensions of experience strategy. As a result, the organization was added to the original framework to address strategic issues that are dynamically linked to achieving a holistic and sustainable balance between the business, its consumers, and the experiences the business projects and consumers perceive.

The Experience Strategy Framework provides a structure for holistically considering the dynamic relationships between an organization's structure and capabilities, brand value proposition, holistic experiences, and customer relationships. The application of the Experience Strategy Framework in research and design practice enables organizations to adapt to rapidly changing markets and deliver exceptional experiences across multiple touchpoints, ultimately achieving business objectives.

The Experience Strategy Framework consists of four dimensions: people, experience, brand, and organization, as shown in Figure 3.

People addresses the question, "WHO are we serving?" To evaluate an organization in this dimension, examine the users, represented by their personas, jobs-to-be-done, needs, and user asset value.

Experience addresses the question, "WHERE, WHEN, and HOW do we serve them?" To evaluate an organization in this dimension, examine the solutions across the customer journey and the four Domains of eXperience.

Brand addresses the question, "WHAT do people think of us?" To evaluate an organization in this dimension, examine the brand value proposition, brand positioning, and brand personality.

Organization is the newest addition to the Experience Strategy Framework. It refers to the entity responsible for the brand and experience. While most industry projects work with for-profit and non-profit corporations, the term "organization" was chosen to include governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to which the Experience Strategy Framework has been applied. The organization dimension addresses the question, "HOW do we operate?" To evaluate an organization in this dimension, examine its structure, capabilities, and processes.

These dimensions are dynamically linked, where changes in one dimension impact the components of the other dimensions.

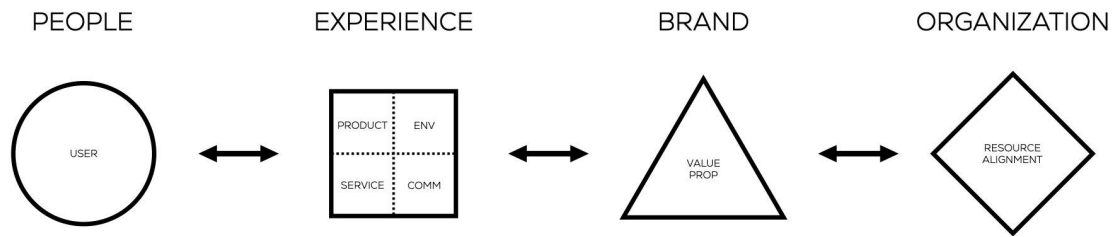


Figure 3. Experience Strategy Framework

3 IMPLEMENTING THE EXPERIENCE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

3.1 Case Study

This section presents a case study that demonstrates the application of the Experience Strategy Framework (XSF) in redesigning an organization's overall experience strategy to address a specific business challenge. The case study aims to provide a detailed understanding of the process and its outcomes, offering insights for future implementations of the framework. Conducted from an action research perspective, the study involved researchers actively participating as members of the design team, offering an insider's view of the project.

The case study focuses on a leading home furnishings company in Taiwan, known for its 25 retail locations and expertise in trim design products and home decoration consulting services. The project aimed to rebrand the company through an experience strategy, enhancing its brand value and fostering stronger connections with younger consumers.

Primary data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and materials from seminars. Over a nine-month period, the team held 13 meetings and conducted five co-creation workshops. Feedback and questions were documented throughout the collaboration, and 13 interviews with key personnel were conducted post-project. These data provided a basis for evaluating the impact of XSF on the company and its potential for broader application. The experience-oriented rebranding process was divided into three distinct phases.

3.2 Phase 1: Define the Personas and the organizational goal

The first phase focused on defining both ends of the XSF—personas and organizational goals—to establish the initial target for the experience strategy. Quality-of-life trends in Taiwan and in-depth interviews with potential users were analyzed to create personas. A workshop involving 30 employees from various departments was conducted to validate the selection of personas and to identify their needs and expectations. Open discussions and voting helped align customer groups with the company's business goals.

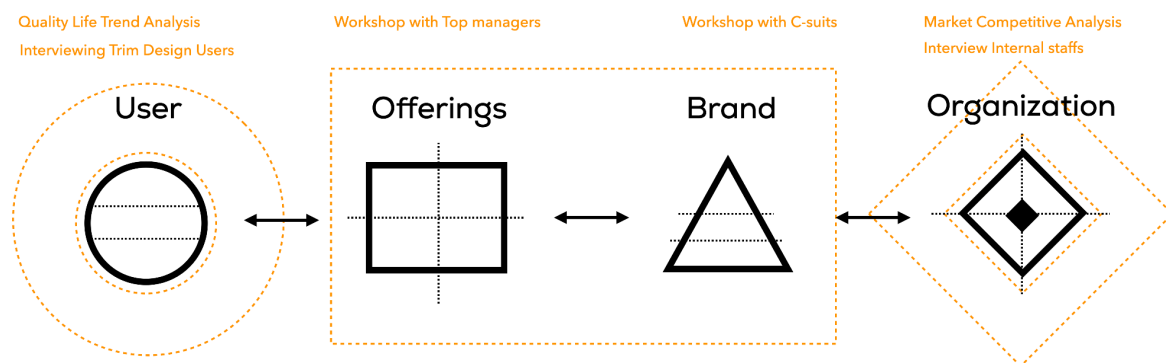


Figure 4. The process to apply experience strategy framework in the case study

Additionally, consumer and corporate competitiveness analyses and interviews with C-suite executives and top management informed the organizational goals, as shown in Figure 4. An experience strategy session with 40 top managers and a Brand Values Workshop with the C-suite further refined the company's direction. These sessions fostered consensus on target customer impressions, potential needs, brand personality, and key attributes, culminating in finalizing the company's experience strategy.

3.3 Phase 2: Connecting Expected Experience to Brand Value

The second phase involved conducting an experience walkthrough using the SPEC framework (Space, Product, Environment, and Communication) to evaluate the current state of the customer experience provided by the company. This process identified key touchpoints in the customer journey and clarified guiding experience principles. These principles were aligned with the brand's personality and attributes defined in the first phase. The team established a strong foundation for designing and implementing the overall experience strategy by integrating customer expectations with brand projections.

3.4 Phase 3: Experience Design and Program Execution

The final phase focused on brainstorming ideas aligned with the experience principles defined earlier. An experience design workshop was conducted with essential personnel from various departments, including both design and non-design backgrounds, who were directly responsible for shaping the customer experience. Participants contributed ideas related to store services, category-specific design, and marketing. These ideas were iteratively refined based on shared experiences and practical considerations. At the conclusion of the project, an execution plan was collectively developed to ensure each idea contributed to the overarching experience strategy.

3.5 The Benefits of Using XFS in the Case Study

The case study revealed three key benefits of using the Experience Strategy Framework (XSF):

Practical and Executable Results: The XSF process facilitated the creation of practical and actionable outcomes for each element within the framework. Interview findings showed that personas, experience principles, and brand values developed during the process were applied within the company even after the project concluded. For instance, employees across various departments began using personas in their daily discussions to assess service quality and design decisions. The study also highlighted that these results were more practical and cohesive than previous individual user studies or rebranding projects. Notably, the XSF outcomes unified employees from different departments, aligning them around shared target audiences and brand objectives.

Fostering an Iterative Spirit: The XSF process encouraged an iterative approach within the company. Participants were motivated to explore, test, and refine ideas to meet personas' jobs-to-be-done and align with brand values through workshops held at various process stages. Unlike rigid, process-driven frameworks, the relationship-oriented nature of XSF allowed for dynamic evaluations of ideas based on how they impacted the relationships between its core elements. This ongoing reflection on personas and brand values made the company more proactive in enhancing experiences.

Breaking Down Silos: The XSF process fostered dynamic connections among different departments, helping to avoid siloed operations. However, the primary focus was on rebranding, the XSF structure effectively defined and connected relationships between traditionally isolated business units. This integrative approach enabled departments to maintain alignment in their activities. Interviews revealed that the XSF was a valuable employee communication tool, reinforcing interdepartmental collaboration.

In conclusion, the case study demonstrated that the XSF preserves the relationships central to a solid experience strategy. It provides a foundation for future planning and allows the organization to adapt to external changes by modifying and iterating on new XSF scenarios. The findings highlight the strength of the XSF's dynamic relationships between its core elements, operating effectively at both macro and micro levels.

4 FUTURE STUDY OF THE XSF APPLICATIONS

The Experience Strategy Framework (XSF) offers a high-level structure for strategists, designers, and organizations to analyze and position the various elements and relationships between consumers and the organization during the early, ambiguous stages of the design process.

Once the experience strategy is defined, designers use the XSF as a framework to guide the design of each Domain of eXperience—products, services, environments, and communications—ensuring the brand delivers and users perceive an ideal experience. An ideal experience occurs when there is significant alignment between customer goals and business objectives. This process culminates in the detailed design and implementation of products, services, environments, and communications. The natural evolution of the XSF is Experience Management (XM), which extends its application. While experience strategy focuses on defining balanced relationships and experience design on execution, experience management focuses on measuring the outcomes of that execution.

Experience management is a discipline, approach, competency, and process that enables organizations to monitor, analyze, and act on experience data to enhance customer experiences. Experience data encompasses individuals' interactions with and perceptions of a brand's products, services, environments, and communications. This data can be collected from diverse sources, including user feedback, social media platforms, website analytics, customer support interactions, and sensor data in physical environments. Common methods for evaluating experiences include the Net Promoter Score (NPS) and Customer Satisfaction (CSAT).

The Experience Strategy Framework logically extends to validating the selected strategy and design execution using the same structure upon which they were built. We have already integrated the core elements of the XSF—people, experience, and brand—into TANG's XM solution and its Brand eXperience Index in practice. Future research should focus on further integrating XM and XSF to create robust growth mechanisms for experience-oriented businesses.

5 CONCLUSION

This paper proposed the Experience Strategy Framework (XSF) as a transformative tool for business adaptation in the experience economy with our previous papers and case studies. The case study demonstrated the framework's ability to integrate key dimensions—people, experience, brand, and organization—into cohesive, experience-driven strategies. The findings highlight the critical importance of aligning customer perceptions, brand values, and organizational processes to create meaningful, competitive brand and customer experiences.

From the case study, we conclude benefits of the XSF include:

1. **Holistic Approach to Experience Strategy:** The XSF establishes a comprehensive structure that connects customer needs, brand identity, and organizational capabilities. By emphasizing dynamic relationships among these elements, it enables businesses to achieve sustained competitiveness.
2. **Application Across Multiple Dimensions:** The framework encompasses four domains of experience—products, services, environments, and communications—facilitating the design and implementation of customer-centric strategies across diverse touchpoints.
3. **Strategic Business Transformation:** The study demonstrates how the XSF aids in breaking down organizational silos, aligning cross-departmental objectives, and adapting to evolving market demands. This approach enhances customer engagement and strengthens connections with key demographics, such as younger audiences.

The paper emphasizes the dual value of XSF for researchers and practitioners, providing a structured approach to bridge existing gaps in design and management frameworks. However, it recognizes that the evolution of experience strategy is ongoing. As design and experience management roles continue to expand in the industry, researchers and practitioners must iteratively refine and adapt the framework to meet emerging needs. While this version of the XSF is neither definitive nor exhaustive, it serves as a foundational starting point for leveraging experiences to drive business success. Future advancements

in case studies and practices will contribute to the framework's evolution, ensuring its relevance in the ever-changing landscape of the experience economy.

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