Psychometric Evaluation of a Single-Item Measure of Delightedness with Service Experiences

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ABSTRACT
A significant challenge occurs when service organizations attempt to find a single metric to quantify ephemeral experiences. Typically, measures of experiential outcomes such as satisfaction, immersion, absorption, engagement, and the like are multiple item questionnaires that present a great risk for potential intrusion on the guest experience. This study examined the validity of inferences that can be made from a single-item measure of delightedness with service experiences. The sample consisted of people from the Western and Mid-western United States (n=62), as well as South Korea (102), and China (80). A single-item "Delighted-O-Meter" was created using a graphic of a temperature thermometer. Five descriptors of delightedness levels were positioned at different "mercury levels" on the thermometer: "fully delighted", "satisfied," "indifferent," "dissatisfied," and "disgusted." Multiple-item measures of positive and negative affect were also taken, and reactions of study participants to different service quality levels were assessed through an experiment. In this experiment, SERVQUAL-based service quality dimensions (i.e., tangibles, assurance, reliability, empathy, responsiveness) were systematically manipulated according to an orthogonal design. Participants completed the measures of positive and negative affect and delightedness following exposure to each of the eight scenarios that had different profile levels across the five service quality variables. The correlation between the Delighted-O-Meter score and positive affect was r=.789 ($p<.001$). The correlation between the Delighted-O-Meter score and negative affect was r= -.492 ($p<.001$). Multilevel modeling results revealed significant effects of all five service quality dimensions on delightedness, with the two strongest coefficients being associated with the empathy and assurance dimensions of service quality. These results support the validity of inferences made from scores produced by the Delighted-O-Meter.

Key words: psychometric evaluation, service experience, delightedness
JEL: M10, M30

I. Introduction

"Measure everything!" is the traditional mantra. In actuality, literal measurement of "everything," is, however, neither feasible nor even desirable. Continual measurement means that performance is plotted over time. The science and art of "metricology" points to the importance of precise and continual measurement of small numbers of well-defined outcomes that are most critical to sustained quality. Reichheld (2003) in Harvard Business Review pointed out that the "single most important indicator" a business can use is a single-item measure of intention to recommend a product or service to other people. Reichheld (2004) indicated that "well - a simple, practical, operational measure" can provide great benefits to those who work at the frontline and enable better decision-making in multiple scenarios.

Application of simple measurement in service industries, though, demands the availability of metrics that represent the desired outcomes of experience offerings. Typically, these outcomes transcend the traditional notion of "guest satisfaction." Producers of a theatrical performance may, for example, seek to tap into the sensations of guests; their success is measured by the degree to which guests are immersed in sights and sounds that become pleasant memories for years to come. Sports managers strive to craft competitive and entertaining events that excite and exhilarate their guests. The Disney Corporation asserts that it is in the business of "making memories," and that it "creates happiness for all people, everywhere." Heath and Heath, (2017) reflected on the impact of Senior Signing Day, which makes the particular experience memorable and meaningful to those who participate in the event. The nature of the service industry is such that, guest immersion, excitement, exhilaration, and happiness must be continuously quantified, plotted over time, and scrutinized for trends and data that lie beyond acceptable ranges.

A significant challenge occurs when organizations in the service industry attempt to find a single metric to quantify these exceptional, ephemeral experiences. Typically, measures of experiential outcomes such as satisfaction, immersion, absorption, engagement, and the like are multiple item questionnaires that present a great risk for potential intrusion on the guest experience. Few guests, for example, would eagerly oblige to participate in a multiple item questionnaire about their experiences immediately following an engaging athletic or performing arts event. Thus, an alternative approach that utilizes a minimally invasive measurement of a pivotal guest experience is needed. The purpose of this paper is thus to describe the development and psychometric (or "metricological") evaluation of a single item measure of guest experience (delightedness: the Delighted-O-Meter). Based on "pain thermometers" that are commonly used in medical science, the Delighted-O-Meter is a minimally invasive tool that generates data which can easily be plotted for evaluation of "real-time" and historical performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Delight

Company executives in the service industry clearly understand that customer satisfaction is not enough for their businesses to be successful. They need to look beyond customer satisfaction, which is a more static process that is related to known circumstance, to the concept of 'delight' (Chandler, 1989; Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997).

Delight results from unexpected/surprising features that add value to an offered service or experience (Finn, 2012; Oliver et al., 1997). The delight of customers is a crucial

component to surviving in the fierce market environment (Whittaker, 1991; Oliver et al., 1997). Delight can be considered an extreme form of satisfaction (Ali, Kim, & Ryu, 2016; Ellis, Freeman, Jamal, & Jiang, 2019; Kim, Vogt, &, Knutson, 2015; Oliver, 2010; Rust, & Oliver, 2000; Schneider & Bowen 1999; Torres & Kline 2006). Oliver et al. (1997) cite another definition of delight from Schlossberg (1993): "Customer delight...is a strong, positive, emotional reaction to a product or service. The key word is emotion" (p. 314). This indicates that the experience of delight is related to customers' emotional state (Ali et al., 2016; Kim, Vogt, & Knutson, 2015; Oliver et al., 1997). Customers are delighted when they are so satisfied with their experiences that they feel a sense of pleasure and joy (Ellis et al., 2019; Magnini, Crotts, & Zehrer 2011; Patterson 1997; Torres & Kline 2006). Although elements accounting for delight might be different between domestic and international travelers, an extreme form of surprise has been found to be a powerful agent in eliciting delight (Crotts & Magnini 2011; Ellis et al, 2019). Watson and Tellegen (1985) indicate that the concept of delight has similarities with positive affect. In their research, Oliver et al. (1997) found that three antecedents (surprisingly high positive disconfirmation, arousal, and positive affect) were jointly influencing delight (Rust & Oliver, 2000). Moreover, a high level of delight had a direct influence on the propensity of symphony customers to repurchase.

Customer experiences may transcend "satisfaction" when an unexpected value is added to a purchase experience. In such cases, customers are expected to experience "delightedness" with respect to their encounter with the seller. A hotel might, for example, unexpectedly upgrade a room for a loyal guest, or a tour company might unexpectedly add a special local food or drink to a menu.

2.2. Disgust

Other points along the continuum of customer satisfaction should also be considered. At the end of the continuum opposite delightedness are product attributes, services, or experiences that fail to meet a customer's minimal expectations. If the performance of the provider approximates customer expectations, but falls slightly short, customer dissatisfaction may result. If the failure to meet expectations is extreme, however, guest experiences will transcend a state of dissatisfaction, instead evoking the universal human emotion of "disgust". Briñol et al. (2018) indicated that, like anger, the emotion of disgust is appraisal of unpleasantness. Within appraisal theory, emotion of disgust occurs with sense of certainty (Tiedens & Linton, 2001).

The midpoint of the continuum represents services or experiences that marginally fulfill customers' expectations. At this level of seller performance, guests or customers may be satisfied, but the experience itself is insufficient to establish loyalty and commitment. Guests or customers are thus satisfied with but indifferent to the experience.

According to Oliver's Synthesis of Affect Circumplex Models (2010), delighted affect is in opposition to disgust. Disgust is considered by many social scientists to be one of five basic human emotions (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). Despite its central importance in understanding human emotional responses, guests' experience of disgust remains largely undiscussed in the service industry. Disgust is implied both by use of the "critical incident" technique to assess highly memorable negative experiences of guests, as well as investigations that involve extreme levels of customer dissatisfaction (Williams & Buswell, 2003). Rarely, however, is the concept fully defined, operationalized, and studied directly.

Theoretically, disgust represents the displeasure associated with noxious objects or ideas that elicit an aversive, negative reaction from the human body. In common usage, the term "disgust" is typically used to describe a repelled, irritated, or annoyed reaction to a stimulus or encounter (Nabi, 2002). Nabi (1999) suggests that disgust, along with fear, anger, sadness, and guilt, are five negative emotions that are common to human beings of all cultures. Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley (2000) point out that disgust is important for social and developmental psychology because, along with fear, it is a "primary means for socialization" (p. 638). Rozin and Fallon (1987) assert that disgust is "a characteristic facial expression, an appropriate action tendency (distancing of the self from an offensive object), a distinctive physiological response (nausea), and a characteristic feeling state (revulsion)" (p. 23). Lazarus (1991) defined the term as "…a learned meaning that a substance, idea, or action is 'offensive' (e.g., ants and grasshoppers as food, or a violation by another person of certain values)" (p. 56).

Rozin et al. (2000) classify disgust into five categories. The first category is distaste response through the mouth. Physical reactions, for example, protect the human organism from poisons and the unfavorable consequences of consuming food that has spoiled. The second category is 'Core Disgust'. Core disgust can be divided into three additional components: 1) a sense of oral incorporation, 2) a sense of offensiveness, and 3) contamination potency. Core Disgust engages with a psychological reaction related to the interpretation of or response to a situation (e.g., drinking water from sinks in restrooms) (Rozin & Fallon, 1987; Rozin et al., 2000). The three other categories into which disgust is classified are animal-nature disgust, interpersonal disgust, and moral disgust. Animal-nature disgust is related to protection of the body or soul and denial of mortality. Humans have certain characteristics of other animals. They try to suppress those features and avoid animalistic behaviors. When they fail in concealing those attributes, animal-nature disgust occurs. Interpersonal disgust is connected to protection of the body, soul, and social order. This form of disgust is related to social classes which strangers belong to. Interpersonal aversion comes from strangeness, disease, misfortune, and moral taint. Moral disgust is linked to the protection of social order. Moral disgust is directly triggered by moral offenses or socially undesirable behavior (e.g., murder) (Rozin et al., 2000). One's object of disgust varies by acceptability depending on the context or cultural history (Rozin & Fallon, 1987). Disgust, especially regarding food, is highly related to the process of preadaptation (Rozin et al., 2000). Therefore, disgust can be influenced by learned cultural practices (Lazarus, 1991).

2.3. Delightedness, Satisfaction, and Disgust as Emotional States

The construct of guest delightedness is defined as an emotional state that results from customer or guest interpretations of their experiences with quality elements of products and services. This definition raises important questions about the nature and duration of the emotion. Rust and Oliver (2000) identify two types of delight: institutionalized delight and reenacted delight. Institutionalized delight refers to a customer's state of reflection on the delighting components of consumption. Reenacted delight refers to an experience that the customer may not immediately recall until a new experience evokes the memory of a previous occurrence. Perhaps it is a song, smell, theme, or activity that makes the customer remember a previous state of delightedness and elevates

their current emotional state to a higher level of delightedness. This state of reenacted delight may revitalize one's previous memory and link it to their current experience.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The present study involved analysis of data from a previous study that examined the effects of service quality factors and culture on customer experiences (Lee, 2008), as well as a follow-up study (Lee, Ralston, Ellis, & Park, 2011). 244 travelers participated in the study. Of these, 62 were United States citizens, 102 travelers were from South Korea, and 80 were Chinese citizens. The average age of participants was 26.02 years (ranging from 18 to 54 years old for American participants, 19 to 53 years old for Korean participants, and 20 to 50 years old for Chinese participants). The sample consisted of 96 men, 146 women, and 2 participants whose gender was unidentified.

Table 1. Orthogonal Array of Customer Service Performance Represented in Video Clips

Video Clip	Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
1	High	High	Low	Low	Low
2	High	High	High	High	High
3	Low	Low	High	Low	Low
4	Low	High	Low	High	Low
5	High	Low	Low	Low	High
6	Low	High	High	Low	High
7	High	Low	High	High	Low
8	Low	Low	Low	High	High

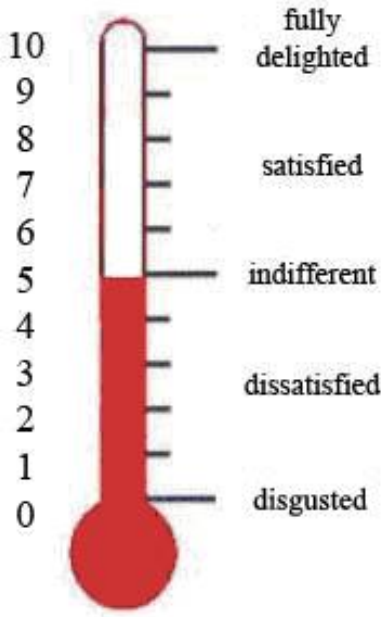
Each participant was invited into a conference room, where they viewed eight video clips of staged service encounters and reported their experiences (i.e., affect measures and delightedness) following the viewing of each clip. Video clips ranged from 5-8 minutes in duration and were recorded in English. To clarify participants' understanding of the content of each video, the researchers and interpreters provided vocabulary terms relevant to the check-in and check-out procedures displayed in each video clip. In addition, while viewing the first video clip, interpreters briefly explained the storyline to participants. Based on an orthogonal array (See Table 1), each video depicted a unique combination of levels of the five service quality dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, empathy, tangibles, and assurance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1994). In a given video clip, for example, the

service encounter portrayed might have reflected high reliability, low responsiveness, high empathy, low assurance, and high (positive) tangibles. All video clips included the same actors, the same service encounter, and the same setting. However, the script and set were modified so as to manipulate the service quality dimensions. The video clips were professionally produced, and the actors were three volunteers from the United States. After each video clip was shown, respondents were asked to imagine themselves in the role of the guest depicted in the scene and then complete the questionnaire containing the positive and negative affect items and the single item measure of delightedness. The English version of the questionnaire was translated into Korean and Chinese for participants not fluent in English. A minimum of three individuals bilingual in each language were asked to examine the accuracy, clarity and naturalness of the translated versions of the questionnaire prior to data collection.

3.2. Measurement

A single-item "Delighted-O-Meter" was created using a graphic of a temperature thermometer. Five descriptors of delightedness levels were positioned at different "mercury levels" on the thermometer: "fully delighted", "satisfied," "indifferent," "dissatisfied," and "disgusted." Scores on the single-item measure of the Delighted-O-Meter could range from 0 to 10 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Delighted-O-Meter



Multiple-item measures of positive and negative affect were also studied. Five positive affect items were included (e.g., "happy," "friendly," and "pleased") based on research by Watson and Clark (1994). The alpha reliability coefficient for this scale was .94.

Five items were also used to assess negative affect (e.g., "upset", "hostile", and "distressed") (Watson & Clark, 1994). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .88.

3.3. Procedures

The study that generated the data was a fractional factorial experiment that allowed the main effects of five service quality factors to be examined, along with the interaction of those factors with participants' cultural backgrounds. Following an orthogonal design, videos demonstrating eight service encounters were created. Each of these eight videos had a unique profile of presence or absence of five customer service encounter characteristics taken from the popular SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, et al. 1994): tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance. Scenario 1, for example, had good service in terms of tangibles and reliability and bad service in terms of assurance, responsiveness, and empathy. In contrast, Scenario 2 depicted good service with regard to tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Following the viewing of each service encounter video, participants completed measures of positive affect, negative affect, and delightedness.

3.4. Data Analysis Method

Bivariate regression was used to examine the relationship between delightedness and positive and negative affect following exposure to each scenario. Significant positive correlations were expected between delightedness and positive affect. Meanwhile, negative correlations were expected between delightedness and negative affect.

Validity is also reflected in correlations between delightedness and the presence vs. absence of each of the five service quality dimensions derived from Parasuraman et al. (1994). Delightedness was expected to be higher when tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, reliability, and empathy were present, as compared to when those features were absent. This hypothesis was tested using mixed modeling procedures, with multiple observations of guest delightedness nested within the 244 study participants.

4. Results

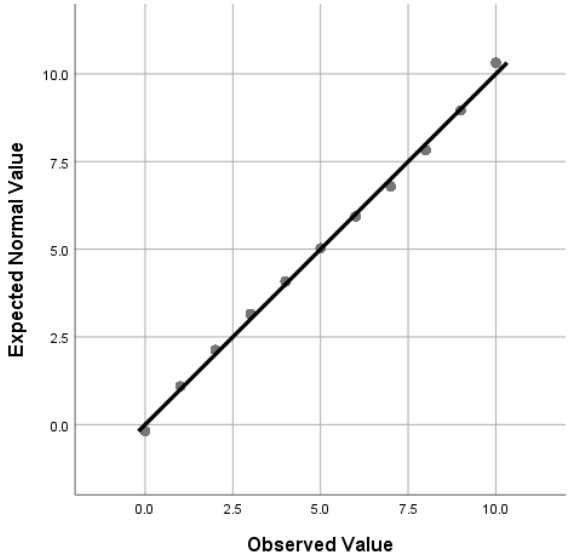
An example of delightedness measured with the Delighted-O-Meter tool is displayed in Figure 1. Examination of the stem and leaf diagram (Figure 2) and the Q-Q Plot (Figure 3) reveals that the scores did not show evidence of the "ceiling effect" that is often a significant problem in measures of this type. Rather, the scores approximated a normal distribution, with a mean of 5.16 (SD= 2.31). Skewness and kurtosis were both minimal (i.e., -.036 and -.59, respectively). Thus, the Delighted-O-Meter measure produced a distribution that was approximately normal and had sufficient variation to detect the presence or absence of factors that may influence delightedness.

Figure 2. Distribution of Delightedness Scores

Frequency Stem and Leaf

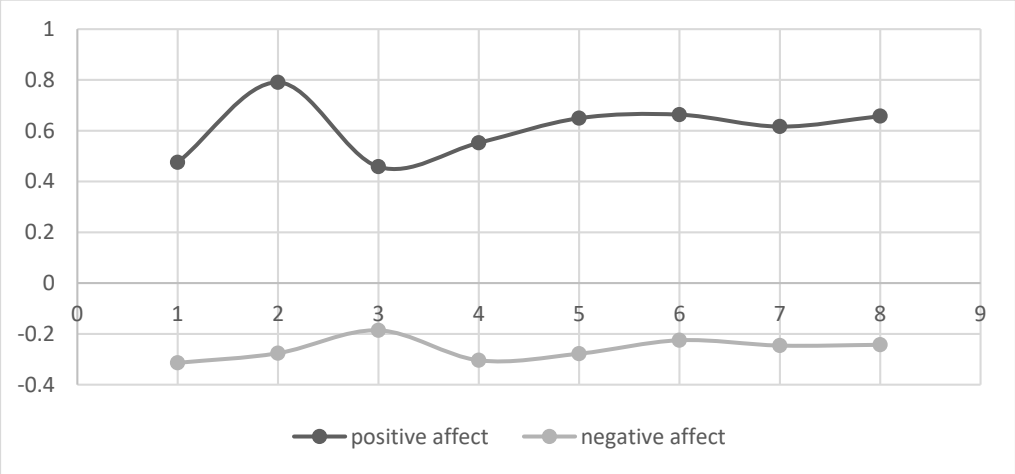
39.00 0 . 0000000000
71.00 1 . 00000000000000000
141.00 2 . 000000000000000000000000000000000
234.00 3 . 000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
250.00 4 .
0000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
351.00 5 .
00000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
0000000000000000
238.00 6 .
000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
254.00 7 .
0000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
188.00 8 . 000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
95.00 9 . 00000000000000000000
49.00 10 . 000000000000
Stem width: 1.00; Each leaf: 2 case(s)

Figure 3. Q-Q Plot of Delightedness



The overall correlation between Delighted-O-Meter scores and positive affect was r=.789 (p<.001). Finally, the overall correlation between Delighted-O-Meter scores and negative affect was r= -.492 (p<.001). Bivariate correlations were consistent with predictions (see Figure 4). The correlations between Delighted-O-Meter scores and positive affect were r=.475 (p<.001) for Scenario #1, r=.790 (p<.001) for Scenario #2, r=.458 (p<.001) for Scenario #3, r=.552 (p<.001) for Scenario #4, r=.649 (p<.001) for Scenario #5, r=.663 (p<.001) for Scenario #6, r=.616 (p<.001) for Scenario # 7, and r=.657 (p<.001) for Scenario #8. The correlations between Delighted-O-Meter scores and negative affect were r=-.314 (p<.001) for Scenario #1, r=-.276 (p<.001) for Scenario #2, r=-.186 (p<.001) for Scenario #3, r=-.304 (p<.001) for Scenario #4, r=-.278 (p<.001) for Scenario #5, r=-.225 (p<.001) for Scenario #6, r=-.246 (p<.001) for Scenario #7, and r=-.243 (p<.001) for Scenario #8.

Figure 4. Delightedness Correlations with Affect



Results of the mixed model analysis are presented in Table 2. As can be seen in the table, all five service quality variables had a significant effect on delightedness. Given the orthogonal design of the study, the coefficients provide direct evidence of the relative strength of the effect of each of the five service quality variables. The strongest effect, empathy (β=.623, p<.001), was three times as large as the service quality factor with the second largest effect size (assurance, β=.232, p<.001). The weakest effect in the model was the effect of tangibles (β=.094, p<.001).

Table 2. Mixed Model Regression of Delightedness with Service Quality Factors

Service Quality Factor	β	t	p
Tangibles	.094	3.851	<.001
Responsiveness	.111	4.534	<.001
Reliability	.181	7.368	<.001
Assurance	.232	9.450	<.001
Empathy	.623	25.344	<.001

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the validity of inferences that can be made from a single-item measure of delightedness (i.e., the Delighted-O-Meter) with regard to service experiences, based on pain thermometers. Findings indicated that the overall correlation between Delighted-O-Meter scores and positive affect was r=.789 (p<.001). The overall correlation between Delighted-O-Meter scores and negative affect was r= -.492 (p<.001). The results of the mixed model analysis revealed significant effects of all five service quality dimensions on delightedness, with the two strongest coefficients being associated with the empathy and assurance dimensions of service quality. These results support the validity of inferences from scores produced by the Delighted-O-Meter.

6.1. Synthesis with Previous Research

Watson and Tellegen (1985) indicates that delight is a similar concept to positive affect. Oliver et al. (1997) support Watson and Tellegen's (1985) assessment of the relationship between delight and positive affect in their research. This study found a similar result with previous research that correlation between delightedness scores and positive affect was relatively high.

6.2. Limitation and Direction of Future Research

One limitation of this study is generalizability. Participants enrolled in the study were individuals residing in the Western and Mid-western United States, the South East region of South Korea and Eastern China. Thus, the participants were not a direct representation of the entire population of tourists and hospitality guests. The second limitation of the study may be the use of two common terms ("delighted" and "disgusted") among the ten items used to measure positive and negative affect. "Fully delighted" and "disgusted" were also used on the separate Delighted-O-Meter measure. Future research should utilize different terms within the 10 positive and negative affect items so as to ensure that a high correlation between the two measurement tools is not triggered by similar wording.

The third limitation of this study was the English skills for participants from South Korea and China. Several of the respondents may have encountered with difficulty with contents of video due to their level of English, even though there were three interpreters at the time of data collection. Future research utilizing this process should consider including the subtitle or dubbing the voice in their mother languages in the movie.

The fourth limitation of this study was the influence of cues from the social environment. During the study, several respondents laughed at a few incidents in the movie. Laughter may influence the participants' affect measures. Controlling the factor can be a future research study.

Future research should replicate the study utilizing actual customers of a service, such as hotels, restaurants, or amusement parks, as participants and a wide variety of event and tourism providers. Replication of this study will generate greater insight into the role of delightedness in respondents' perception of satisfaction, intention to recommend, and intention to return. In addition, in order to collect diverse participants such as young children or people with disability, emoticon added Delighted-O-meter would be useful for future study.

7. Conclusion

We developed and tested a single item measure of customer delight that is minimally invasive on customers' experiences. The Delighted-O-Meter measure produced a distribution that was approximately normal, and had sufficient variation to detect the presence or absence of factors that may influence delightedness. Correlations with validity indicators were all significant and in the expected directions (positive with positive affect and negative with negative affect). The Delighted-O-Meter provides several benefits for application within the service industry. This tool can be routinely administered by front-line employees with minimal training. In addition, it generates data that can easily be plotted and interpreted for evaluation of "real-time" and historical performance. Therefore, the Delighted-O-Meter may prove to be very useful in the service and product industries.

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