



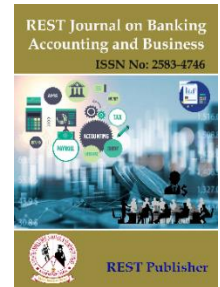
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Brand Love and Brand Evangelism: Examining the Mediating Role of Brand Trust for Sustainable Skincare Cosmetics

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Abstract: The overconsumption of resources has led to the consumers being concerned about the environment and they began to consume sustainable or green products. The present study acknowledges the importance of emotions to bring this change in the consumption habits and investigates the impact of brand love on brand evangelism in the context of sustainable skincare cosmetics. Further, it examines the mediating role of brand trust in this relationship. The data was collected from Indian consumers who have recently purchased sustainable skincare cosmetics. Research analysis was carried out through the use of SPSS 26 and AMOS 24 software. The results of the study reveal a significant mediating role of brand trust between brand love and brand evangelism. Additionally, brand love has a positive influence over both brand trust and brand evangelism. The findings confirm that brand trust partially mediates the relationship between brand love and brand evangelism. The findings indicate that individuals who have a profound love for a sustainable cosmetic brand tend to exhibit greater trust in it, which subsequently enhances their propensity to evangelize for the brand. This paper provides several contributions to branding literature and practical implications for the marketing managers of the sustainable skincare cosmetics industry.

Key words: Brand Love, Brand Trust, Brand Evangelism, Sustainable Skincare Cosmetics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumers are more attuned of the environmental damage caused due to their purchase and consumption patterns (Kumar et al., 2018). Thus, consumers are purchasing sustainable products to contribute to their environment and aim to combat the overuse of natural resources. Additionally, in order to maintain growth and cultivate devoted consumer relationships, businesses are increasingly producing sustainable products that aim to satisfy the requirements and demands of environmentally concerned consumers.

Creating sustainable goods is not enough to satisfy consumers in today's competitive market. It is important to understand that the emotional aspects will likely bring them to the final purchase decision. Among the key constructs that shape these relationships are brand trust, brand love, and brand evangelism, which together form a pathway from emotional attachment to active advocacy. Consumers' faith in a brand's dependability and honesty is known as brand trust (Becerra & Korgaonkar, 2011), and it frequently stems from emotional ties like brand love. Reaffirming these attachments encourages customers to actively support the business through brand evangelism, in which they turn into brand ambassadors who spread good word and defend the company from criticism.

The sustainable skincare cosmetics sector has witnessed widespread acceptance over the past several years due to consumers' growing knowledge of the dangerous chemicals used in cosmetic product composition and the negative health impacts linked to their use (Acharya et al., 2021). This industry offers a distinctive setting for examining the relationships between brands and consumers. There is a strong emphasis on ethical sourcing, sustainability, and environmental responsibility. The present study examines the Indian market, which has a population of over

a billion people and has significant growth potential (Gumparathi et al., 2021). Within this market, there has been consistent and robust performance in the beauty sector.

While previous studies have extensively explored the individual impacts of brand trust and brand love on consumer behavior (Maddie et al., 2021; AZ Zahra & Táchira, 2022), limited attention has been given to their interconnected roles in driving brand evangelism, particularly in the context of sustainable skincare cosmetic products. Thus, addressing this critical gap, we aim to assess the mediating role of brand trust in the relationship between brand love and brand evangelism in the context of the sustainable skincare cosmetics industry. This research is particularly relevant given the rapid expansion of the Indian market for sustainable products. By comprehending these associations, brands can better promote evangelism, driving organic growth through faith and positive word-of-mouth.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sustainable Skincare Cosmetics: Sustainable cosmetics are personal care or beauty products derived from natural elements such as minerals, plants, or animals, which aim to reduce pollution, promote environmental protection, and responsibly use non-renewable resources while ensuring animal welfare and species conservation (Limbu & Ahamed, 2023; Ali et al., 2023). The escalating negative consequences of chemical items used in cosmetics and skincare are causing people to become increasingly concerned and influenced by the return to organic. Consumers are observed to be more cautious about avoiding strong chemicals and are environmentally responsible about avoiding polluting nature (Thakur & Bhanushali, 2023). There has been an upward demand for sustainable skincare cosmetic products. Consumers prefer purchasing organic skincare products compared to other products that utilize artificial ingredients, harmful chemicals, and synthetic formulations (Ajani et al., 2024).

This heightened awareness has spurred customers and producers, resulting in a notable emphasis on sustainability within the cosmetics industry. Skincare brands aiming to satisfy the needs and wants of the consumers need to comprehend the same while producing their products. Therefore, they are placing more focus on adopting sustainable and environmentally-friendly practices in their manufacturing processes for sustainable cosmetic (Acharya et al., 2021). Consequently, the sustainable skincare market has transitioned from a niche category to one of substantial importance. Therefore, the market is witnessing a gradual rise in the popularity of natural, sustainable, and environmentally friendly cosmetics among the eco-conscious individuals (Kim & Sock, 2009).

Brand Love: The brand love concept is based on the assumption that consumers and brands can share a love relationship. Since the feeling of love is essential in creating connections between customers and brands, Brand Love as a construct is gaining traction in academia (Fournier, 1998). Carroll and Aviva (2006) defined brand love as how much a satisfied consumer is emotionally attached to a particular trade name. Brand love refers to the emotional connection a consumer establishes with specific products that signify a particular brand and the agony resulting from their separation (Thomson et al., 2005). The loved brand is irreplaceable beyond mere affection (Albert & Merina, 2013). According to Aru et al. (2018), brand love is the attachment of a satisfied consumer to a brand. This attachment can manifest in many ways for different individuals, but it usually comprises a small degree of identification with the brand. It is outlined as a high degree of engagement between the consumer and brand, characterized by reciprocity and revealing the numerous efforts the consumer makes to acquire their favorite brand (Coelho et al., 2019).

Brand Trust: Trust is a positive attitude towards someone based on the belief that they will fulfil their obligations, even with a certain level of risk or uncertainty (Becerra & Korgaonkar, 2011). Trust is a critical and important component in building and maintaining a strong brand relationship with the brand or services (Rahman et al., 2022). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) explained brand trust as the consumers' readiness to rely on a brand's capacity to fulfil its stated purpose. They will presume that the trusted brand would operate in their best interest. Trust has become a very influential concept in branding (Husain et al., 2022). Fuller et al. (2008) stated that brand trust depicts how consumers believe that a brand is delivering the brand promise accordingly. In basic terms, brand trust is the feeling of security held by the consumer with regard to their interaction with a brand as a result of their perceptions of its reliability and responsibility for their welfare and interests (Delgado-Baluster et al. 2003).

Brand Evangelism: Brand evangelism is a positive word-of-mouth communication in order to develop relationships among consumers and other behaviors related to the brand (Rahman et al., 2022). Brand evangelism goes beyond positive word-of-mouth, advocacy, or brand referrals. It comprises individuals actively promoting a brand to other individuals and defending it when they feel the brand is under attack (Adjara et al., 2023). A brand

evangelist communicates the character and features of the product they advocate and extrapolates their unique personal endorsements to their families, friends, colleagues and communities (Smolinsky, 2017). They frequently exchange valuable information about their preferred brand(s) with others in their social networks. They do not have generic market knowledge; instead, they have brand-specific information that exhibits high enthusiasm and commitment (Cesare & Ray, 2019).

3. HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Brand Love and Brand Trust: Trust often develops due to emotional bonds formed through love, which creates a foundation of security and understanding. In the context of brands, brand love can lead to brand trust, as consumers who have an emotional connection with a specific brand are more likely to trust its products, promises, and values. As per Bart et al. (2012), brand love is a strong emotional bond that promotes favorable opinions about the brand. They validated that emotional attachment boosts consumers' trust in a brand by increasing their confidence in its dependability and honesty. According to Carroll and Aviva (2006), consumers who love a brand are more likely to place their trust towards it as they perceive it as reliable, sincere, and authentic. Thus, we assert the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand Love has a significant effect on Brand Trust

Brand Trust and Brand Evangelism: Brand Evangelism is often explained as a high level of word-of-mouth communication. Previous research found that Brand Trust is related to several outcomes, such as word-of-mouth communication (Wang et al., 2018) and purchase intention (Chee et al., 2020). Additionally, previous studies have investigated the relationship between Brand Trust and Brand Evangelism, finding that trust positively stimulates evangelistic behaviors (Doss, 2010; Fiorina & Widest, 2016). A brand whose consumers form cognitive connections with it, such that they trust it to deliver on its promises, is more likely to own the brand and provide positive referrals (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Therefore, the present study postulates the following hypothesis:

H2: Brand Trust has a significant effect on Brand Evangelism

Brand Love and Brand Evangelism: Brand evangelists' technique for boosting their favored brand extends beyond patronizing it to actively denigrating rival brands that pose a threat through adverse word-of-mouth (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Recent research studies authenticate that brand love has a significant and positive influence on brand evangelism in studies conducted in various regions (Pornsrimate & Kham won, 2021; Konner et al., 2023). When consumers deeply love a brand, they are likelier to become enthusiastic and passionate advocates and engage in brand evangelism. They might express enthusiasm, offer feedback, promote the brand's goods or services, and actively recruit others to try their preferred/loved brand. They go beyond mere advocacy and engage in promotional activities to promote the products they love (Pornsrimate & Kham won, 2021). Thus, based on the literature, this study suggests the following hypothesis:

H3: Brand Love has a significant effect on Brand Evangelism

The Mediating Impact of Brand Trust in the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Evangelism:

Consumers establish trust and positive perceptions of a brand's intentions and consistency through emotional brand connections, such as brand love. They are more likely to believe that such a brand will meet their expectations (Ismail & Spinally, 2012). Moreover, trust acts as a precursor to evangelism because it assures consumers that the brand will consistently deliver value. Customer's trust in a brand will make them advocate for it passionately and publicly, as trust enhances their confidence in recommending the brand to others (Kumar & Kaushik, 2020). Therefore, the present study asserts that brand trust may act as a mediator in the relationship between brand love and brand evangelism and proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Brand Trust mediates the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Evangelism

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the review of the literature, the present study has focused on investigating the mediation impact of brand trust on the relationship between brand love and brand evangelism. This study focuses on understanding this relationship in the context of the sustainable skincare cosmetic industry. Figure 1 illustrates a three-path serial mediation model. It is important to examine the direct relationship between the variables before analyzing the indirect relationship. Therefore, the study focuses on the direct relationship between brand love and brand trust, brand love and brand evangelism and brand trust and brand evangelism. Using Hayes PROCESS macro, the mediation effect of brand trust on the said relationship is evaluated in the research model.

The study was conducted utilizing a non-probability sampling technique called purposive sampling. Participants involved in this sampling technique hold perspectives on the issues and ideas under discussion that are aligned with the study's objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). The present study included respondents based on their understanding, purchases and experience with sustainable skincare cosmetic products. This study has utilized Indian consumers who had purchased and consumed sustainable skincare cosmetic products in the last six months as its units of analysis. Analysis of the theoretical model was conducted using structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses. Based on recognized scales from the literature, a questionnaire was formed using a five-point Likert scale. The items for each construct were adapted from existing literature as provided in Table 1, where items for brand love were derived from Carroll and Aviva (2006), brand trust from Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) and brand evangelism from Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013). Minor modifications were made to the questionnaire without changing the original meaning as per the requirement of the study.

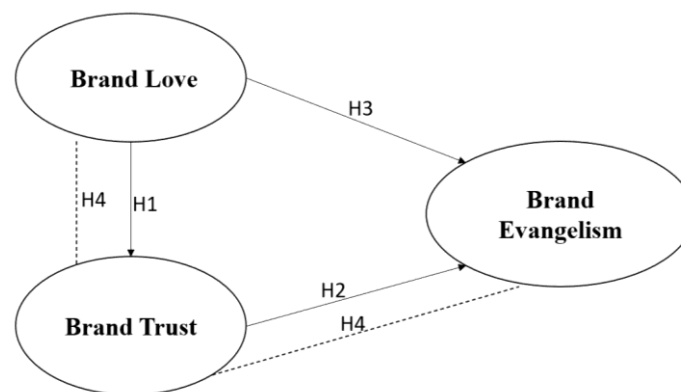
TABLE 1. Measurement Items for the Study

Brand Love	Carroll & Aviva (2006)
I'm in love with this sustainable skincare cosmetic brand.	
I have a special attachment to this sustainable skincare cosmetic brand.	
It is a sustainable skincare cosmetic brand I am passionate about.	
The fact that this sustainable skincare cosmetic brand sells sustainable products makes me happy	Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001)
Brand Trust	
This sustainable skincare cosmetic brand is trustworthy	
It is a sustainable skincare cosmetic brand I can rely upon	
It is a safe sustainable skincare cosmetic brand	Becerra & Badrinarayanan (2013)
This sustainable skincare cosmetic brand is honest	
Brand Evangelism	
I like to spread positive word of mouth about this sustainable skincare cosmetic brand.	
I'd strongly recommend this sustainable skincare cosmetic brand to my friends.	
It is likely that I'd spread negative word of mouth about other sustainable skincare cosmetic brands.	
I'd tell my friends not to buy any other sustainable skincare cosmetic brand, when they're looking for sustainable products.	

A total of 220 suitable responses were collected through the questionnaire, of which 33 per cent were males and 67 per cent were females. The majority of the respondents belong to the age group of 20-29 years (i.e., 53 per cent), and 41 per cent of the respondents were graduates. The demographics of respondents are shown in Table 2. In order to check that the data is free from biasness, Herman's single factor was applied to calculate common method bias. The variance explained is 45.648 per cent, which is lower than Harman's (1976) acceptable limit of 50 per cent, meaning that data are not biased.

TABLE 2. Demographic profile of the respondents

<i>Descriptors</i>	<i>(%)</i>
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	33
Female	67
<i>Age Group</i>	
20-29 years	53
30-39 years	16
40-49 years	18
50-59 years	13
<i>Educational Qualification</i>	
High school or less	3
Graduation	41
Post-Graduation	24
Doctorate	32
<i>Monthly Individual Income</i>	
Less than INR 50,000	34
INR 50,001 – 1,50,000	46
INR 1,50,001- 2,00,000	13
INR 2,00,000 & above	7

**FIGURE 1.** The Conceptual Model

5. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The collected data was analyzed using validated tools and procedures. EFA (exploratory factor analysis) was applied using SPSS 26 and is followed by CFA (confirmatory factor analysis) employed with AMOS version 24. Hayes' (2013) PROCESS method was employed for mediation analysis.

Model Assessment: KMO is calculated to determine whether data can be used for factor analysis. It values at 0.860, greater than the prescribed limit of 0.60 (Hair et al, 2015) representing that data is appropriate for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity values at 0.000, which is lower than 0.05, representing that the factors have zero correlation. Cronbach's α values of the constructs were measured to check the reliability of each construct. As shown in Table 3, Cronbach's alpha (α) values of the constructs such as brand love (0.867), brand trust (0.828) and brand evangelism (0.862) are higher than the cut-off limit of 0.70 (Baozi & Yi, 1988; Cornell &

Larker, 1981). Furthermore, factor loading for each construct derived from factor analysis was higher than the threshold limit of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2015).

Table 3: Factor Extraction results

Variables	Items	Mean	SD	Factor loading	Cronbach Alpha
Brand Love	BL1	3.6955	.70418	.807	0.867
	BL2	3.5318	.73645	.791	
	BL3	3.4364	.77078	.852	
	BL4	3.8227	.68275	.711	
Brand Trust	BT1	3.3773	.66787	.772	0.828
	BT2	3.2500	.75625	.791	
	BT3	3.2818	.69744	.800	
	BT4	3.4500	.75383	.713	
Brand Evangelism	BE1	3.8364	.68283	.801	0.862
	BE2	3.7818	.68088	.796	
	BE3	3.3409	.60978	.797	
	BE4	3.3500	.66226	.808	

Note: Cronbach's alpha (α) should higher than the cut-off limit of 0.70 (Cornell & Larker, 1981). Factor loading should be higher than the threshold limit of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2015).

Table 4: Discriminant Validity

Constructs	CR	AVE	MSV	BL	BT	BE
BL	0.869	0.625	0.382	0.791		
BT	0.830	0.550	0.382	0.618	0.741	
BE	0.850	0.595	0.301	0.549	0.504	0.771

Note: BL: Brand Love, BT: Brand Trust, BE: Brand Evangelism

Diagonal values should be higher than non-diagonal values for discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2015)

Table 4 demonstrates that the composite reliabilities (CR) and average variance explained (AVE) of brand love, brand trust and brand evangelism were greater than the acceptable limits of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively (Hair et al; 2012). Since composite reliability values are higher than AVE values, the convergent validity of the model is confirmed (Hair et al., 2012). Moreover, discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the average variance extracted for each construct with squared correlations between constructs. The research model ensures the discriminant validity of the constructs as the diagonal value (square root of average variance explained) of constructs: brand love (BL) = 0.791, brand trust (BC) = 0.741 and brand evangelism (BE) = 0.771 are higher than non-diagonal values (correlation between construct) (Cornell & Larker, 1981; Hair et al., 2015).

Table 5: Model fit indices

S. No.	Model Fit	Cut-off Criteria	Model Statistics
1	CMIN		94.131
2	Df		50
3	CMIN/Df	≤ 4	1.883
4	IFI	≥ 0.9	0.968
5	NFI	≥ 0.9	0.934
6	TLI	≥ 0.9	0.957
7	CFI	≥ 0.9	0.968
8	RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.063
9	SRMR	≤ 0.08	0.020
9	ECVI	smaller the better	0.686

Table 5 provides the model fit indices. Key model statistics show the good fit of the model such as CMIN (Σ^2) = 94.131, Degree of freedom (df) = 50, CMIN/df (Σ^2 /df) = 1.883, goodness-of-fit indices (IFI = 0.968, NFI = 0.934, TLI = 0.957, CFI = 0.968) and badness of fit measurement indices (RMESA = 0.063, SRMR = 0.020, ECVI = 0.686). According to Byrne (2013), the goodness-of-fit measurement indices confirm that the measurement model

is unidimensional, while badness-of-fit measurement indices show the discrepancy. The necessary requirements and acceptable limits are met by all the fit indices. Thus, it is indicative of the model fit.

6. PATH ANALYSIS

Before mediation analysis, we examined the direct relationship between brand love, brand trust and brand evangelism. By establishing this relationship, we laid the groundwork for further analysis such as mediation analysis. Two distinct criteria are used to determine significance: critical ratio compared to the Z-value at a 95% confidence level (C.R. > 1.96) and a 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$) for the regression coefficient.

As depicted in Table 6, all the direct relationships are significant. The influence of brand love on brand trust (Hypothesis; H1) is supported as the p-value is less than 0.05. Further, the impact of brand trust on brand evangelism (Hypothesis; H2) is supported as the p-value is significant. Lastly, the impact of brand love on brand evangelism (Hypothesis; H3) is supported as the p-value is significant and the CR value is greater than 1.96. This relationship between brand love and brand evangelism (Hypothesis 3: BL \rightarrow BE) emerged to be the most significant path ($\beta = 0.184$) followed by Hypothesis 1, the path between BL \rightarrow BT ($\beta = 0.173$) and Hypothesis 2, the path between BT \rightarrow BE ($\beta = 0.152$) in the research model.

TABLE 6. Summary of Path Analysis Results

Hypotheses	Relationship	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P Value	Result
H1	BL \rightarrow BT	0.173	.028	6.101	***	Supported
H2	BT \rightarrow BE	0.152	.028	5.474	***	Supported
H3	BL \rightarrow BE	0.184	.030	6.019	***	Supported

Note: BL: Brand Love, BT: Brand Trust, BE: Brand Evangelism
Critical Ratio (C.R. > 1.96) and significance level ($p < 0.05$)

7. MEDIATION ANALYSIS

The present research used an approach described by Hayes' (2013) to test the mediation hypotheses of the prescribed model. The mediating impact of brand trust on the relationship between brand love and brand evangelism was assessed through Model 4 of the PROCESS plug-in for SPSS created by Hayes' (2013). Table 7 depicts the indirect effect of brand love on brand evangelism through brand trust (SE = 0.0566, CI = 0.1107, 0.3324), which is significant. The direct effect of brand love on brand evangelism (SE = 0.0787, CI = 0.2846, 0.5948) is significant. In addition, the total effect of brand love on brand evangelism (SE = 0.0584, CI = 0.5403, 0.7705) is also statistically significant.

The study's findings show that brand love has a substantial impact on brand trust and brand evangelism, respectively. Furthermore, the results confirm the significant mediating role of brand trust between brand love and brand evangelism. This model also confirms the presence of partial mediation since the direct and indirect influence of brand love on brand evangelism is significant.

TABLE 7. Summary of Mediation Results

Relationship	Effect	S.E.	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Indirect Effect BL \rightarrow BT \rightarrow BE	0.2157	0.0566	0.1107	0.3324
Direct Effect BL \rightarrow BE	0.4397	0.0787	0.2846	0.5948
Total Effect BL \rightarrow BE	0.6554	0.0584	0.5403	0.7705

8. CONCLUSION

Growing evidence shows that consumers forge deep and meaningful relationships with certain brands (Scala's & Batman, 2005; Fournier, 1998). This research study provides empirical support for the influence of brand love on brand evangelism among consumers buying sustainable skincare cosmetic products. When consumers deeply love a brand, they might express enthusiasm, promote its goods or services, and actively recruit others to try their preferred/beloved brand (Pornsrimate & Kham won, 2021). The research findings also confirm that brand love positively impacts brand trust, which is consistent with the findings of (Bart et al., 2010). Moreover, the study has confirmed the significant impact of brand trust on brand evangelism. A brand whose consumers trust it to deliver on its promises is more likely to provide positive referrals (Doss, 2014; Fiorina & Widest, 2015).

Additionally, the findings of the study exhibit that brand trust partially mediates the relationship between brand love and brand evangelism among Indian consumers buying sustainable skincare cosmetic products, with both significant direct and indirect effects. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the critical role of brand trust in transforming brand love into active brand evangelism.

9. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Theoretical Implications: This research study contributes to the growing knowledge of consumer-brand relationships. It supports the view that brand love is likely to influence brand evangelism through the critical role of brand trust acting as a mediator. This mediating role establishes its relevance by providing a pathway from emotional attachment (love) to evangelistic behavior in the context of sustainable skincare cosmetic products.

Practical Implications: Moreover, marketers can foster both emotional passionate relationships and evangelistic behavior by showcasing ethical practices, sustainability efforts, and product reliability that will enable them to gain trust from the consumers. Furthermore, in order to boost evangelistic behavior, trust-based initiatives can be incorporated with loyalty programs thereby improving organic growth and reducing reliance on traditional advertising. As a result of these insights, policymakers can promote ethical branding practices that protect consumers from misleading advertising and build consumer trust.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research: Despite providing valuable insights, the present research study has few limitations. First, the findings of the study cannot be generalized as they are restricted to the sustainable skincare cosmetics industry. The proposed empirical model can be utilized in future research studies to examine the same for other sectors, such as sustainable apparel, organic food, green tourism and eco-friendly vehicles. Second, a more comprehensive understanding of consumer-brand connections might be gained by including constructs such as brand experience and customer satisfaction. Third, including moderators such as cultural differences, personal values and socio-economic factors could add depth, while cross-cultural studies could uncover global variations in trust and love dynamics. Last, since the cosmetics industry is changing dynamics, future research should focus exclusively on sustainable skincare cosmetics among men. As more men have shown keen interest in personal care and grooming products, the skincare cosmetics market has shifted from primarily targeting women. Studying sustainable skincare cosmetics exclusively among male consumers is essential to acknowledge this growing market segment.

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