

## Don't Tell Me, Train Me: Employee Training, as the Most Significant Contributing Factor to Employee Performance in North of Malaysia's Tourism Industry

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### Abstract

Globally, the tourism industry contributed nine percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The tourism industry has many and various competitors, regardless of small or large industry players. To ensure this industry resilience and remain competitive, employees have become an essential resource in helping companies stay competitively ahead. This study delves into the methods that can help increase the employees' performance within the tourism industry. Four factors were addressed in this study, forming a causal model with a mediator. This study was administered using purposive sampling on 140 employees from 20 tourism-based companies in northern Malaysia by distributing questionnaires. Items were quantitatively analyzed using SPSS for demographic analysis and Smart-PLS 3.0 to assess the formative measurement models' PLS-SEM results. PLS-SEM analysis indicated that there is a significant relationship between the variables. Training and effective communication were the most effective contributing factors towards marketing competencies towards employee performance with a p-value > 0.05. The outcome of this research suggests that companies should construct innovative and novel ways to measure, train and manage of staff performance, which includes the way they communicate with their employees on the feedback process.

**Keywords:** Marketing Competencies, Communication, Training, Tourism, COVID-19

### 1. Introduction

Globally, the tourism industry contributed nine percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). 255 million people represent the tourism industry indicating eight percent (%) of the global workforce [1]. The tourism industry is the top three earning source of Malaysia's economy. In 2019, Malaysia tourism contributed RM 89.4 billion of tourism receipt and received 26.1 million arrivals internationally [2]. More than that, RM 92.6 billion is contributed by domestic tourism receipt in 2019. The tourism industry itself also contributed 15.9 percent (%) to Malaysia Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019 with RM 240.2 billion from gross value added [3]. 11th Malaysia Plan also enlisted tourism as part of the primary economy plan that is parallel with other industries development. Since Malaysia's tourism sector is rapidly expanding, it has attracted many businesses and entrepreneurs actively involved in this industry to maximize profits during the right time when there is a high demand in the market.

### 2. Research Problem

In the ever-changing business environment and globalization, the competitiveness between sectors and the consumer's demand significantly affects employee performance and capability to survive in this industry. The

employee performance is determined by the quality of standard provided by the hotel [4]. Excellent Human Resources Management (HRM) will contribute to the employee's performance [5]. Throughout ideal HRM on the tourism sector, the employee can achieve goals and competitive advantage performance [6] [7]. In tourism organization and sectors, employee performance is important even some companies still take this lightly [8]. Briefly, tourism industry needs to maintain their customer satisfaction and main factor that affect the customer satisfaction is employee performance [9]

Research has shown that employees' attitudes and behaviour affect customer satisfaction, the purpose of the visit, the number of visits, and customer loyalty [10]. Reference [10] mentioned employers would employ employees from different academic backgrounds without implementing any training to enhance their performance and ability in the workplace. Providing the employee appropriate training would be one of the best solutions to enhance employee performance and become productive at delivering their duties and responsibilities by improving their knowledge, skill, or behaviours [11].

Building marketing competencies is needed to delegate the tasks within the workplace environment and may help employees in enhancing skills, knowledge, and experience to improve employee performance [12]. In the tourism industry, despite having effective management of resources and resources, the main problem of insufficient income generated is because of lack of marketing competencies [13]. In 2012 until 2014, the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) emphasize the need of research in marketing competency and firm performance influence. This research would also analyse the mediating role of marketing competencies between other factors such as training, motivation and effective communication to employee performance.

Additionally, the other main concern in the tourism sector, especially in the hotel industry related to the higher turnover and service quality due to the motivation issue [4]. Many companies disengaged employees with low motivation [14]. Unmotivated employee and working environment could place the company at risky position in considering of employee disability to meet the company goals [15]. Referred to [16] found that there is a positive correlation between motivation and performance where the more motivated a person is, the better the performance.

The impact of this study is significant to ensure that employee performance in tourism industry is increasing because the tourism industry employee directly affects the image and the business of the organization [19]. Employees within the tourism industries will be the one who initiates the innovation changes of the organization's plan, initiating the future performance of the organization and directly deciding customer loyalty whether the customer will continue of the repetition of purchasing [19].

### **3. Purpose of Research**

The tourism industry is fast paced. Organization needs to be updated on the latest trend and technologies concerning the market to stay competitively ahead [19]. The purpose of this research is to analyse the relationship between the employee training, employee motivation and effective communication towards the marketing competencies and performance of an employee in the tourism industry. It also evaluated the factors of employee training, employee motivation, and communication will give the most effective towards the marketing competencies in the tourism industry. This research would also evaluate the impact of marketing competencies on employee performance.

### **4. Research Question**

- A. Is there a relationship between the employee training, employee motivation and communication towards the marketing competencies and performance of an employee in the tourism industry can be analysed?
- B. Among the factors of employee training, employee motivation and communication, which will give the most effective towards marketing competencies in the tourism industry?
- C. Are there marketing competencies will give the impact on the employee performance in the tourism industry?

### **5. Literature Review**

#### **Tourism Industry and Its Importance**

Based on reports from the Department of Statistics Malaysia [3], 23.6 percent (%) or around 3.6 Million of Malaysian employment-related or engaged in the tourism industry [3]. The tourism industry has slowly become an enormous economic contribution to the developing country [20]. In the twenty-first century, tourism has

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become the highest-earning industry due to the currency exchange of the countries. Therefore, most countries consider tourism as the primary source of income, like Thailand. Expanding tourism within a country could help increase the rate of employment and lower down the rate of poverty of the country [21]. In 2030, Malaysia is expected to be on the progressive growth in the tourism industry and receive USD 41.8 billion of foreign receipt [1].

### **Employee Performance**

Performance is the accomplishment on task received at the specific criteria of cost, speed, accuracy, and comprehensiveness [22]. Employee assessment is usually assessed through the quality and quantity of work when assigned specific tasks and responsibilities [23]. The manifestation of employee performance can be based on the production improvement, highly motivated workers, and easiness of recent technology adoption [23]. Employee performance is usually the dependent variable instead of the cause or determinant in empirical studies because it is a result of an organization behaviour or practice.

Studies have shown that there are two criteria for employee performance measurement which is measurement based on the final product and measurement based on the behaviour [24]. The result-based performance management evaluated based on objective measures and has little monitoring and directing from the management. Besides, the compensation of the employee is based on the number of sales that they have made. Whereas in behaviour-based performance measurement, is based on subjective measures, and it requires close monitoring and directing from the management [25].

Result-based performance management would be the best approach to assess employee performance for the fast-paced industry [26]. Result-based performance implemented the objective measures, compared to behaviour-based management which uses subjective measures and has a more protracted process in terms assessment [26]. The tourism sector is a fast-paced industry; therefore, long-term monitoring and controlling process is not a suitable method as it could interfere with the operation process [26].

### **Marketing Competencies**

Marketing competencies is the ability to obtain information focused on the customers and market of existed business for the product distribution [27]. Improve employee marketing competencies contribute to employees especially in understand requirements and needs of the customer [27]. Marketing competencies would also be able to provide hints and awareness on customer demand, better understand the communication and distribution channel, the policies of the pricing and how to upgrade corporate image through improving the efficiency of the business [28]. By applying the distinctive competencies in marketing, it can also help companies to obtain competitive advantages through using their internal resource [28]. High marketing competencies will improve company ability in producing innovative technology especially in the strong technological base company [29]. Marketing competencies have relationship in financial and non-financial performance [30]. There is a positive relationship between distinctive marketing competencies and organizational performance [31].

H1: Marketing competencies have positive influence on employee performance.

### **Employee Training**

Training is a systematic process to increase the employee's skill, knowledge, and competency, which can help the employee perform actively on the job [32]. Training can help increase productivity; it can even motivate the employees to do better, as the more they know, the more comfortable they are in doing specific tasks [32]. Providing employees with appropriate training could improve employee capabilities where a systematic method could help the employees to learn more efficiently, gain more skills and be more productive at delivering their duties and responsibilities [11]. Training can enhance the employee competencies by mastering their skill, knowledge, or behaviours [33]. When employees are empowered, they will have a sense of value and confidence with what they are doing and tend to perform better which could efficiently sustain the organizational performance [22]. Employee training refers to programs that used to provide relevant information to employees and cultivate new skills that can help employees to achieve the goals and objectives of the organization [34]. As a result, investment in employee training can help result in beneficial organizational outcomes [35].

H2: A significant positive relationship can be analysed between employee training and marketing competencies and performance of the employees.

## **Employee Motivation**

Motivation is the process in psychology that led to determination of voluntary action, encouragement and focus to any actions in achieving mission and vision [36]. Through motivation, employee can become dedicated with loyal with the company or organization [2]. Motivation is the collective process to support person in achieving specific objective [37]. Enthusiasm and eagerness contributed to the quality of employee work relating to motivation [38]. Skilful staff effectiveness and efficiency in the organization also can be limited if staff not motivated [39]. There are several theories on motivation, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory, Fifty-fifty Theory and Vroom's Expectancy Theory. Throughout this study, the Vroom's expectancy theory will be implemented.

Vroom's expectancy theory is based on the principle of any effort from employee contributed to performance and rewards [40]. Three key variables identified for expectancy theory which are Valence, Expectancy, and Instrumentality [40]. Valence defines as desire to the offer or rewards based on the reward attractiveness, expectancy is the concern on the perceived relationship between performance & effort, and lastly is instrumentality refers to the relationship between performance and reward available from the view of employee [40]. High Valence, Expectancy, and Instrumentality result to increase of employee motivation and they will work harder [41]. Valences is a strength of a person's preference for a desired outcome or goal [42]. The Expectancy theory has several factors for implementation in motivating employees, such as organizational rewards and personal goals. These two factors are vital as it could contribute to a higher level of motivation on the employees' part to perform better, as they have no significant ties to the organization [43].

This research will use Vroom's expectancy theories after few valuations of others motivation theory as because most of the worker hiring in MATTA Fair event is part-time employee. Therefore, the company or the HRM team facing limited time to know the needs and motivating factors of the workers. The most important and most efficient method would be just like what have mentioned in the Vroom theory as explained on rewards and personal goals to perform better [43] and no significant ties to the organization. The company need to let the employees what are the company's requirement and hope on them, then they will have the own goal and motivate them to achieve the objective of the company as employee will be motivated to execute a high-level effort when he or she knew that the effort that he or she has been paid off will lead a good performance appraisal and rewards like commission, bonus, promotion and increment of salary [44].

Employee performance improves if there was motivation as they feel rewarded intrinsically [45]. Referring to [46] stated that employee performance and motivation are related each other.

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between employee motivation and the marketing competencies and performance of employees.

## **Effective Communication**

The employee needs communication within the organization is to get more information about personal, job-related matters, information about the decision making of the organization decision making, complaints and to evaluate their superiors [26]. There are four domains within effective communication which are (i) business communication where it is the employee communication skills, (ii) management communication focusing on management skills and capabilities for communication, (iii) corporate communication, communication focused on formal communication and (iv) organizational communication addressing more philosophical and theoretically oriented issues [47]. Effective communication divides into four dimensions which are line management communication (internal), team peer communication (internal), project peer communication (internal) and corporate communication (internal) [48]. Internal communication would be focused on as it is employed and should emphasize the stakeholder communication skills. It is also part of the internal team peer communication, and internal project peer's communication, which is the case for the tourism industry.

Several studies have shown that various internal communication such as innovative organizational communication initiatives, open communication channels, constant feedback, and information sharing through peer communication is positively associated with work engagement [49]. Several researchers have also successfully found a positive relationship between effective internal communication and organizational effectiveness, where they claimed that using effective internal communication can improve productivity and reduce absenteeism. Marketing competencies existed when an employee can perform higher quality services and products and reduce costs, such as employee training fees [50].

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between effective communication and the employees' marketing competencies and performance.

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## 6. Theoretical Framework

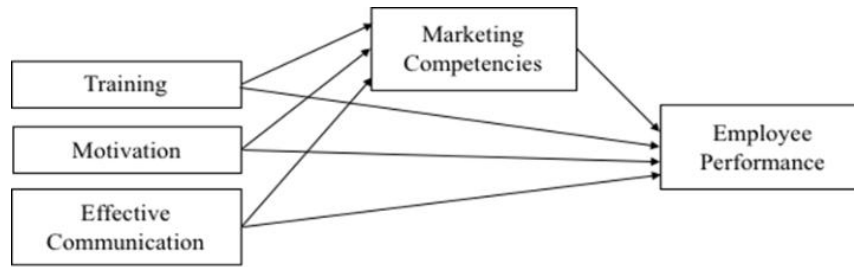


Fig 1. Theoretical Framework

## 7. Methodology

### Research Design

A quantitative non-experimental descriptive research was used as there is no manipulation of data.

### Sampling

Participants were sampled using purposive sampling as the participants can yield relevant information as needed by the research [51]. Purposive sampling was also chosen because the researcher collected data by attending the MATTA Fair. MATTA Fair is an annual event organized specifically for the tourism industry in Malaysia where a lot of the hospitality companies would attend. This makes MATTA Fair a suitable place to collect the data. The participants who completed questionnaire are the employees at the MATTA Fair, selling their packages and products. G-power software was utilized to know the minimum sample size needed to have adequate power in running the analysis. With  $\alpha$  set at 0.05, and power at 0.95, the result indicated that the minimum sample size needed in this research is 138 people.

### Data Collection Method

140 employees from 20 tourism companies that joined MATTA Fair in Perak participated in the data collection through questionnaire distributed to them. The questionnaires were distributed for two days where hard copies of the questionnaires were distributed and collected again. This is to ensure that participants would fill out and return the questionnaire. It is also more convenient for the participants as they only had to fill it out and return it when the researcher came to collect the questionnaire. Also due to a low response rate employee emails were also collected, and a link for the questionnaire were emailed to them to answer at their convenience. Items in the questionnaire looked at factors of training, motivation and effective communication towards the marketing competencies and employee performance in the tourism industry.

## 8. Measures

### Internal Consistency

To measure the inter – item consistency, Cronbach's alpha was used, along with rho\_A, and Composite Reliability. Table 2 shows the result of Cronbach's alpha, rho\_A, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Table 1 indicated that, all measures of reliability where values ranged from 0.6 or greater are considered as acceptable [52]. Results from Table 1 indicated that Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the measurement model values ranged from 0.649 to 0.770, rho\_A of the model measurement values ranged from 0.654 to 0.773 and the value ranged of the composite reliability is from 0.779 to 0.839. Overall, it indicates that the items are acceptable and is consistent. The AVE of the variables are close to 0.50 and it is acceptable for the AVE to be at 0.5 [53].

**Table I** Internal Consistency

	Cronbach's	rho_A	Composite	AVE
	Alpha		Reliability	
Effective Communication	0.702	0.708	0.816	0.527
Employee Performance	0.649	0.654	0.779	0.415
Marketing Competencies	0.770	0.773	0.839	0.465
Motivation	0.649	0.656	0.790	0.487
Training	0.679	0.691	0.805	0.509

### Discriminant Validity

Fornell and Larcker criterion, cross-loading of indicator and Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) were used to measure the discriminant validity. Discriminant Validity Test measures the differences between the measured constructs. In other words, it makes sure that constructs that are unrelated theoretically are unrelated [54].

Fornell and Larcker criterion also assessed the discriminant validity by comparing the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) with the correlation of latent constructs [54]. Based on Table II, in total, the measurement model demonstrated adequate discriminant validity because to the latent construct had a higher indicator compared to the other latent constructs. Moreover, the square root of each constructed AVE had a bigger value than the correlations with other latent constructs [54].

**Table II** Fornell and Lacker Criterion

	EC	EP	MC	M	T
Effective Communication	<b>0.726</b>				
Employee Performance	0.346	<b>0.644</b>			
Marketing Competencies	0.177	0.544	<b>0.682</b>		
Motivation	0.104	0.243	0.326	<b>0.698</b>	
Training	0.216	0.561	0.553	0.371	<b>0.713</b>

## 9. Result

### Demographic Profile

140 respondents were analysed for descriptive statistics. The respondents in this study were female 57% and 43% consisted of males. 31% of the respondents ranged from the ages of 26 to 33 years old (44 people), 28% from 18 to 25 years old (39 people), 24% were between 34 to 41 years old (33 people), 13% were 42 to 49 years old (18 people) and 4% were between 50 to 57 years old (6 people). Majority of the participants were Chinese (64%), 21% of the respondents being Malay and 15% Indian. Academic level for the participants were 41.4% Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (high school) graduates, 33.6% bachelor's degrees, 13.6% as others since they have not graduated school yet. Besides, Diploma and Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) consist of 11%. 44% of the participants were from entry-level followed by the respondents who possess of 1 to 5 years working experience (31.2%), 6 to 10 years (16%), and more than 10 years (8%). 59% of the participants were full time employee with the remaining 41% working part time.

### Hypothesis Testing

Five (5) hypotheses were generated for this research (Please refer to Fig. 2 and Table III). The Bootstrap function was utilized for this research where 5000 subsamples were taken from the original sample [58]. The bootstrap result approximates the normality of data. When T-statistic is larger than 1.96 with a two-tailed t-test and a significant level of 5% then the path coefficient will be significant. Based on the result on table 5 its can be seen that only "Effective Communication - Marketing Competencies" linkage and "Motivation- Employee performance" linkage is not significant due to their T- statistic is lower than 1.96 which are 0.751 and 0.134, respectively [58].

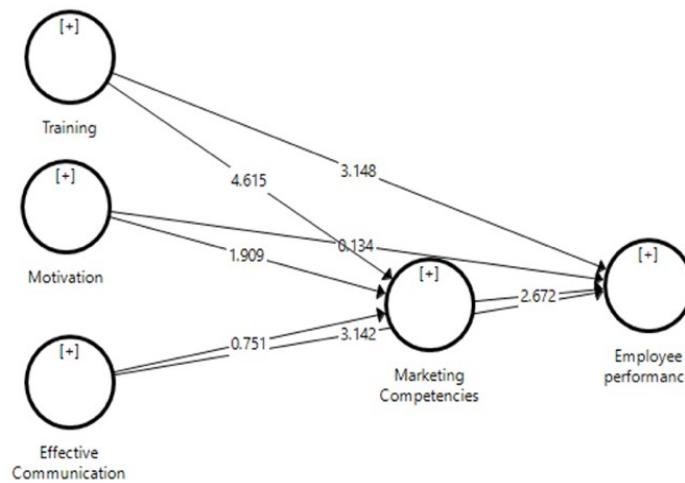
Based on the result from Table 7, "Marketing Competencies-Employee performance", "Motivation-Marketing Competencies" and "Training-Employee performance" linkage being classified as the linkages which

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have strong evidence against the null hypothesis in favour of the alternative due to their  $P < 0.05$ . Moreover, the linkage of the "Effective Communication - Employee performance" is being considered as moderate significant against the null hypothesis due to its value of 0.002 ( $0.001 < P > 0.01$ ). "Effective Communication - Marketing Competencies" and "Motivation- Employee performance" were found to be not statistically significant as the  $P > 0.10$  which is higher than the threshold of the P-value.

**Table III** Summary of Hypotheses Testing of Initial PLS Path

Relationship	SD	T Statistics	P Value	Supported
H1 Marketing Competencies -> Employee performance	0.12	2.672	0.008	<b>Yes</b>
H2 Training -> Employee performance	0.108	3.148	0.002	<b>Yes</b>
Training -> Marketing Competencies	0.106	4.615	0.000	<b>Yes</b>
H3 Motivation -> Employee performance	0.08	0.134	0.894	No
Motivation -> Marketing Competencies	0.073	1.909	0.056	No
H4 Effective Communication -> Employee performance	0.069	3.142	0.002	<b>Yes</b>
Effective Communication -> Marketing Competencies	0.076	0.751	0.453	No



**Fig 2.** Hypothesized PLS Path Model

### 10 Discussion

Table III signifies significant positive relationship between training, marketing competencies and the employee performance ( $p < 0.05$ ). Strong correlation of 0.801 and 0.751 each found in relationship between training with employee performance and training with marketing competencies. With result of p-value  $< 0.05$  indicating on convincing evidence against the hypothesis (null) between 'Training-Employee Performance' and 'Training-Marketing Competencies'. As referred [32], employees can perform better if training is provided by improving their skillset, competency, and knowledge.

Age and academic have a significant positive correlation towards training which gained the top two highest value of Pearson correlation 0.330 and 0.298 and both consist of p-value 0.000. The result shown is in line with previous research which he stated that older adults are slower and less effective compared to younger people in learning new skills [59]. Based on the demographic analysis, the frequency analysis of age indicated that most

of the workers are in the Gen Z category which is between the ages of 26 to 33 years old. The correlation result of academic is also aligned with research where they mentioned that learning through and from the experience of work would be easier when the trainee has been provided with the knowledge, concept and skills that can be transformed in the workplace [60]. The frequency analysis of academic shown that most of the respondents have completed high school (SPM, SPTM, Diploma and Degree).

Table VI also showed that the p value for Motivation to Marketing Competencies and Motivation to Employee Performance are 0.053 and 0.895, respectively. No statistically significant findings for Motivation to Marketing Competencies and Motivation to Employee Performance  $p > 0.05$ . Besides that, moderate positive correlation between relationship of motivation to both factors at 0.597 (marketing competencies) and 0.628 (employee performance). With that results, marketing competencies and employee performance does not have significant relationship with motivation. These findings contradicts with studies that found positive correlation between employee performance and skill of employee in marketing [61], but it was closer to where motivation like reward [62], is not effective as they do not create a lasting commitment. They merely, and temporarily, change what we do. This study's findings could also be because a lot of the participants of the study are entry level and is not truly engaged with the company's motivational plan.

Although there was no relationship between effective communications with the marketing competencies, the study found that employee performance had a significant positive relationship with effective communication. Based on the result, it is shown that the p-value for the Effective Communication- Marketing Competencies linkage and Effective Communication- Employee Performance linkage is 0.458 and 0.002 respectively, with a correlation of 0.548 indicating a moderate positive relationship, there is also a high moderate relationship between effective communication and the employee performance with 0.714. Having effective communication within the organization is a vital component because for employees to perform better, the management would need to have an open communication. Companies do not want to adhere to old fashioned ways of management, and this includes the way they communicate with their employees on the feedback process [63]. Communication could influence employee's performance through motivation, but it also directly impacts employee performance.

Communication could also lessen conflict between members, creating a mutual understanding between them, thus enhancing the relationship between parties within the organization [64]. Employee training was found to be the most significant contributing factor towards marketing competencies with a p value of 0.000 and a correlation of 0.751. Training is an extremely useful tool for the organization to enhance the employee performance for a variety of reasons. It could not only enhance their marketing skills, but it could also prevent employees from being burned out, which would help increase productivity [65].

## 11. Conclusion and Recommendation

The Covid-19 pandemic that hit globally really give a massive impact on the international and local tourism industry. Malaysia tourism has shown 68.2 percent (%) negative growth in international tourist arriving in the first quarter of 2020 compared the same period in 2019 [66]. To ensure the survival of Malaysia tourism industry that badly hit by the pandemic, all tourism industry player needs to strategies their organization as well their employee performance to get ready for this change and when the global tourism industry recovered.

Throughout this research, training and practical communication is the key to maintained employee performance in the tourism industry due to dependency of this sector from domestic traveler during the recovery period for one or two years after pandemic. Besides, training, and effective communication needed for our tourism sector because it can assist our domestic traveler and change their perception of our tourism industry. Effective communication, training and developing employee marketing competencies also necessary to all tourism sectors as 88.3 percent % of domestic traveler travel after movement restriction order (MCO) travel independently without use tour guide service [2].

Based on the result, employee training, effective communication skill and employee marketing competencies are the factor that needs to consider for the tourism industry player to maintain their employee performance. In future research, employee IT literacy and technological readiness can become the factors for analysis. The justification of these two factors chosen based on post-MCO domestic travel behaviour that comes from 88.3% travel independent arrangement and 98.9% prefer to use online booking site [2].

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