

SPECIAL APPLICATION OF MARKETING RESEARCH

WEEK 10 CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

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WEEK TEN

CUSTOMER SERVICE MANAGEMENT RESEARCH

10.1 Introduction

Welcome to week ten lecture on customer service management research! It is my joy to have you in this class. We have been focusing on research carried out in the prelaunch stage of research cycle. We now want to focus on research done on growth and maturity stage of product lifecycle. Last week we examined sales analysis research. We continue the same trend today by focusing on customer service research. Customer service is at the heart of any successful business hence the need to equip our selves with skills on how to enhance it. In this lecture we will focus on purpose, procedure and benefits as well as challenges of conducting customer service research.

10.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

1. Describe customer service research
2. Discuss purposes of customer service research
3. Examine various types of customer service research
4. Evaluate methods of conducting customer service
5. Discuss roles of communication technology in customer service research

10.3 Quotes on customer service management and research

1. "Customer service shouldn't just be a department; it should be the entire company." – Tony Hsieh
2. "The customer's perception is your reality." – Kate Zabriskie
3. "Great customer service is not just about being polite; it's about understanding your customer's needs and expectations." – Unknown
4. "If you don't genuinely like your customers, chances are they won't buy." – Tom Peters
5. "Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning." – Bill Gates
6. "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." – Charles Darwin (often applied to customer service adaptability)
7. "Every contact we have with a customer influence whether or not they'll come back." – Shep Hyken
8. "Customer service is an opportunity to exceed your customer's expectations." – John Goodman
9. "The best way to predict the future is to create it." – Peter Drucker (related to proactive customer service strategies)
10. "To keep a customer demands as much skill as to win one." – American Proverb

Connecting research and customer service

1. "In the world of business, the customer is not always right; they are always a valuable source of insight." – Unknown
2. "The data we collect about customers is only as good as the insights we generate from it." – Unknown
3. "Research in customer service is not just about understanding what customers say, but also about deciphering what they truly mean." – Unknown
4. "Effective customer service research turns complaints into actionable insights that drive improvement." – Unknown
5. "Customer feedback is a goldmine for research; it reveals not just satisfaction but opportunities for innovation." – Unknown
6. "Quantitative and qualitative research in customer service helps us bridge the gap between perception and reality." – Unknown
7. "Understanding customer behavior through research allows businesses to tailor their service strategies effectively." – Unknown
8. "The most powerful research tool is the voice of the customer; it guides strategic decisions and enhances service quality." – Unknown
9. "Research in customer service reveals trends and patterns that can significantly impact customer loyalty." – Unknown
10. "Without research, we are navigating in the dark; data illuminates the path to exceptional customer service." – Unknown

10.4 Definitions of customer service management research

Several definitions of customer service research have been put in place. For instance: Customer service management research refers to the systematic study of how organizations manage customer interactions and satisfaction to enhance service quality and loyalty (Johnston, & Clark, 2008). This field of research investigates the processes and strategies that organizations employ to effectively meet customer needs and expectations, focusing on service design and delivery (Bitner & Hubbert, 1994). On their part (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler (2018) note that Customer service management research encompasses the exploration of methodologies that enhance the customer experience, utilizing feedback and performance metrics to refine service offerings. Similarly, Kumar & Reinartz (2016) show that customer service research involves analyzing the impact of service interactions on customer retention and satisfaction, often leveraging data analytics to inform decision-making. In conclusion, Lovelock & Wirtz (2016) view Customer service management research as one that examines the relationship between service delivery and customer loyalty, seeking to identify best practices for enhancing organizational performance.

From these definitions we observe that the definitions of customer service management research collectively highlight its multifaceted nature. Here are a few observations:

1. **Focus on Customer Interaction:** Many definitions emphasize the importance of managing customer interactions, which is central to enhancing satisfaction and loyalty. This reflects a broader trend in business where customer experience is prioritized.
2. **Process and Strategy Orientation:** The definitions indicate that effective customer service is not just about individual interactions but also about the strategies and processes organizations use. This suggests a systematic approach to service delivery.
3. **Data-Driven Insights:** The emphasis on using feedback and data analytics points to a growing reliance on measurable outcomes to inform service improvements. This aligns with trends in other fields, where data is crucial for decision-making.
4. **Impact on Business Performance:** Several definitions mention the link between service quality and organizational performance, reinforcing the idea that good customer service can drive business success.
5. **Holistic Perspective:** The definitions indicate that customer service management encompasses various aspects, including service design, delivery, and the relationship with customer loyalty, suggesting that a comprehensive approach is necessary.

Overall, these definitions reflect the evolving landscape of customer service, where understanding and enhancing the customer experience is essential for competitive advantage.

10.5 Purposes of customer service management research

1. **Understanding Customer Needs:** Customer service research helps organizations gather insights about what customers truly want (B2B International, 2018). For example, a company like Amazon conducts regular surveys and analyzes customer feedback to improve its service offerings, ensuring they meet evolving customer expectations.
2. **Improving Service Quality:** Research identifies gaps in service quality (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2018). For instance, a restaurant chain may conduct satisfaction surveys to uncover issues related to wait times or menu diversity, ultimately enhancing the dining experience.
3. **Enhancing Customer Loyalty:** Analyzing customer data helps identify factors that contribute to loyalty (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). Starbucks leverages customer feedback and loyalty program data to tailor promotions that improve retention.
4. **Driving Innovation:** Customer service research can inspire innovation (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Companies like Apple gather customer insights to inform the development of new features that enhance user experience.
5. **Benchmarking Performance:** Organizations use research to benchmark their service performance against competitors (Johnston & Clark, 2008). Airlines often conduct customer service research to measure performance relative to industry standards.
6. **Identifying Training Needs:** Research can reveal areas where staff may need additional training (Hart, Heskett, & Sasser, 1990). For example, a retail chain may analyze customer service interactions to identify common issues, informing staff development programs.

7. **Measuring Customer Satisfaction:** Regularly assessing customer satisfaction through surveys allows companies to track changes over time (Oliver, 1999). This ensures they remain responsive to customer needs.
8. **Enhancing Brand Image:** Customer service research provides insights into how service quality affects brand perception (Anderson & Mittal, 2000). Companies like Zappos use customer service excellence as a core part of their branding strategy.

10.6 Types of customer service research

Customer service research plays a vital role in understanding and enhancing the interactions between organizations and their customers. In an increasingly competitive marketplace, businesses must not only meet but exceed customer expectations to foster loyalty and drive growth. By employing various research methods—such as surveys, focus groups, and social media analysis—organizations can gather valuable insights into customer needs, preferences, and behaviors. This research informs strategic decision-making, helps identify areas for improvement, and ultimately contributes to a better overall customer experience. As companies strive to adapt to changing consumer demands, effective customer service research becomes an essential tool for ensuring long-term success and customer satisfaction. Various types of customer service research include:

- **Surveys and Questionnaires:** Surveys are a common method for collecting quantitative data about customer satisfaction and preferences (Fowler, 2014). For example, a hotel chain might use post-stay surveys to gather feedback on guest experiences and identify areas for improvement.
- **Focus Groups:** Focus groups involve small, diverse groups of customers discussing their experiences and perceptions of a service (Krueger & Casey, 2014). A technology company might conduct focus groups to gather insights on a new product's usability and customer expectations before launch.
- **Customer Interviews:** One-on-one interviews allow for in-depth exploration of customer experiences and feelings (Creswell, 2013). A clothing retailer could conduct interviews with loyal customers to understand their shopping motivations and service expectations.
- **Mystery Shopping:** This method involves trained individuals posing as customers to evaluate service quality (Grewal et al., 2009). For instance, a restaurant chain may use mystery shoppers to assess staff behavior, service speed, and overall dining experience.
- **Online Reviews and Social Media Analysis:** Analyzing customer reviews and social media interactions can provide valuable insights into customer sentiment (Liu, 2011). For example, a brand like Nike monitors social media platforms to gauge customer reactions to new product launches and address any concerns promptly.
- **Net Promoter Score (NPS):** NPS measures customer loyalty by asking how likely customers are to recommend a service (Reichheld, 2003). A software company might use NPS surveys to determine customer satisfaction levels and track changes over time.

- Usability Testing: This type of research evaluates how easy and user-friendly a service or product is (Rubin & Chisnell, 2008). For instance, an e-commerce site may conduct usability tests to identify navigation issues that frustrate customers.
- Longitudinal Studies: These studies track customer behavior over time to identify trends and changes (Cohen, 2010). A subscription service might use longitudinal research to analyze customer retention rates and identify factors influencing long-term loyalty.

These various types of customer service research provide organizations with valuable insights into customer preferences, satisfaction, and overall service quality, allowing them to make informed decisions for improvement.

10.7 The Roles of Modern Communication Technology in Enhancing Customer Service Research

Modern communication technology has revolutionized the way organizations conduct customer service research, transforming traditional methods into more dynamic and efficient processes. In an era where customer expectations are rapidly evolving, businesses are leveraging advanced tools and platforms to gather real-time feedback, analyze customer behavior, and enhance overall service quality. From social media monitoring and data analytics to AI-driven chatbots and CRM systems, these technologies enable organizations to gain deeper insights into customer needs and preferences. As a result, companies can respond swiftly to customer concerns, personalize experiences, and ultimately foster greater loyalty. The integration of modern communication technologies into customer service research not only streamlines the research process but also empowers businesses to make informed decisions that enhance customer satisfaction and drive success.

- Real-Time Feedback Collection: Modern communication technologies, such as mobile apps and websites, allow organizations to collect customer feedback in real time (Homburg, Kuester, & Keller, 2009). For example, ride-sharing apps like Uber use in-app surveys immediately after a trip to gauge customer satisfaction and identify areas for service improvement.
- Social Media Monitoring: Social media platforms provide a wealth of data on customer sentiment and behavior (Liu, 2011). Companies like Starbucks actively monitor their social media channels to analyze customer feedback and respond to concerns, enabling them to adjust their service strategies promptly.
- Data Analytics: Advanced data analytics tools enable organizations to analyze large volumes of customer data to uncover trends and patterns (Chaffey, 2019). For instance, Amazon uses sophisticated algorithms to analyze purchasing behavior, allowing them to personalize recommendations and improve the overall shopping experience.
- Chatbots and AI: Artificial intelligence (AI) and chatbots facilitate customer interactions and gather data on customer preferences (Gnewuch et al., 2017). For example, many e-commerce sites use chatbots to answer common customer queries, simultaneously collecting valuable data about customer needs and preferences.

- **Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Systems:** CRM systems integrate communication channels and customer data, allowing businesses to streamline customer interactions and enhance research efforts (Payne & Frow, 2005). For instance, Salesforce enables companies to track customer interactions across multiple platforms, providing insights that inform customer service strategies.
- **Online Review Platforms:** Websites like Yelp and TripAdvisor allow customers to leave reviews and ratings, serving as a rich source of qualitative data for businesses (Liu, 2011). Hotels and restaurants often analyze these reviews to identify strengths and weaknesses in their service offerings.
- **Video Conferencing Tools:** Technologies such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams enable businesses to conduct virtual focus groups and interviews, reaching a broader audience and facilitating in-depth discussions (Jiang et al., 2020). This accessibility allows organizations to gather diverse customer insights that inform service enhancements.

Modern communication technologies significantly enhance customer service research by providing organizations with tools to collect, analyze, and act on customer feedback in real time, leading to improved service delivery and customer satisfaction.

10.8 Procedure of conducting customer service research

Conducting effective customer service research is essential for organizations aiming to understand and improve their interactions with customers. In a competitive marketplace, businesses must adopt a systematic approach to gather insights that inform strategic decisions and enhance customer satisfaction. This process begins with clearly defined research objectives and the selection of appropriate methods for data collection, ranging from surveys and interviews to focus groups and observational studies. By carefully developing research instruments and analyzing the resulting data, organizations can uncover valuable trends and insights. Ultimately, the findings not only guide actionable improvements in service delivery but also foster a culture of continuous enhancement that aligns with customer needs and expectations. Through these well-structured procedures, companies can position themselves for success in delivering exceptional customer experiences. Below are specific steps followed:

1. **Define Research Objectives:** The first step in conducting customer service research is to clearly define the objectives. Organizations need to determine what specific information they want to gather, such as customer satisfaction levels, service quality perceptions, or areas needing improvement (Burns & Bush, 2010). For example, a retail chain may set an objective to assess customer satisfaction with its online shopping experience.
2. **Select Research Methods:** Based on the objectives, researchers must choose appropriate methods for data collection. Common methods include surveys, interviews, focus groups, and observational studies (Zikmund et al., 2013). For instance, a hotel might decide to use post-stay surveys to gather quantitative data on guest experiences.
3. **Develop Research Instruments:** Once the methods are selected, researchers need to develop the tools or instruments for data collection. This could involve designing questionnaires

for surveys or creating discussion guides for focus groups (Fowler, 2014). An example is a restaurant that designs a customer feedback form asking about meal satisfaction, service speed, and cleanliness.

4. **Sampling:** Identifying the target population and determining the sample size is crucial. Researchers must decide who will participate in the study, ensuring that the sample is representative of the broader customer base (Kelley et al., 2003). For example, a subscription service might aim to survey a mix of long-term and new customers to gain diverse insights.
5. **Data Collection:** Implementing the chosen methods to gather data is the next step. This can involve distributing surveys via email, conducting interviews over the phone, or facilitating focus group discussions (Creswell, 2013). A technology company, for instance, might conduct usability testing sessions to observe how customers interact with a new app.
6. **Data Analysis:** After data collection, researchers must analyze the results to identify trends, patterns, and insights. Quantitative data can be analyzed using statistical methods, while qualitative data may require thematic analysis (McDaniel & Gates, 2013). For example, a business might analyze survey results to calculate the Net Promoter Score (NPS) and identify key drivers of customer satisfaction.
7. **Reporting Findings:** The final step involves compiling the research findings into a report that highlights key insights, conclusions, and actionable recommendations. This report should be clear and accessible to stakeholders (Lundahl & Skarhed, 2018). For example, a marketing team might present the findings of a customer satisfaction survey to executives, suggesting specific improvements based on the data.
8. **Implementing Changes:** Based on the research findings, organizations should take actionable steps to improve customer service. This could include staff training, process changes, or service enhancements (Hart et al., 1990). For instance, a company may decide to implement a new customer support training program based on feedback indicating that service representatives need better product knowledge.

These procedures outline a systematic approach to conducting customer service research, ensuring that organizations can gather meaningful insights to enhance their customer service strategies.

10.9 Benefits of Conducting Customer Service Research

Conducting customer service research is a critical component for organizations aiming to enhance their interactions with customers and improve overall service quality. As businesses strive to meet and exceed customer expectations in a competitive landscape, understanding the benefits and challenges associated with this research becomes essential. The benefits are multifaceted, including enhanced customer satisfaction, informed decision-making, and increased loyalty. However, organizations also face significant challenges, such as resource constraints, data interpretation difficulties, and the need to maintain customer engagement. By recognizing both the advantages and obstacles of customer service research, businesses can better navigate the complexities of gathering and utilizing customer insights to drive meaningful improvements.

Benefits of customer service research

- **Enhanced Customer Satisfaction:** Conducting customer service research allows organizations to gather insights directly from customers, enabling them to identify and address pain points (Oliver, 1999). For example, a retail store that analyzes customer feedback may discover that long checkout lines are a common issue, leading to improvements that enhance the shopping experience.
- **Informed Decision-Making:** Customer research provides data-driven insights that guide strategic decisions. Businesses can use this information to tailor their services to better meet customer needs (Payne & Frow, 2005). For instance, a software company might adjust its product features based on customer preferences gathered through surveys.
- **Increased Customer Loyalty:** By actively seeking customer feedback and implementing changes, organizations demonstrate that they value customer opinions, which can foster loyalty (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). For example, a restaurant chain that responds to guest feedback by improving menu options can strengthen customer relationships.
- **Competitive Advantage:** Companies that leverage customer service research can differentiate themselves in the market. By understanding customer expectations, businesses can offer superior service compared to competitors (Zeithaml et al., 2018). An example is Zappos, which uses extensive customer feedback to enhance its service offerings, setting itself apart in the online retail space.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regular customer service research encourages a culture of continuous improvement within organizations (Hart et al., 1990). For instance, a hotel that routinely surveys guests can continuously refine its services based on evolving customer preferences and industry trends.
- **6. Customization of Services:** Customer service research enables organizations to tailor their offerings to meet specific customer needs (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016). For example, Netflix uses viewer data to personalize recommendations, improving user engagement and satisfaction.
- **Predictive Analytics:** By analyzing customer feedback and behavior, businesses can forecast future trends and customer needs (Chaffey, 2019). Retailers can use this information to prepare for seasonal demands, ensuring they stock the right products at the right time.
- **Employee Engagement:** Research can also assess employee satisfaction and engagement, which directly impacts customer service quality (Heskett et al., 1994). For instance, a company that regularly surveys its employees can identify areas for improvement, leading to a more motivated workforce that provides better service.
- **Risk Mitigation:** Identifying customer issues early through research can help mitigate risks associated with poor service (McDaniel & Gates, 2013). For example, a telecommunications provider may uncover recurring complaints about service outages, allowing them to address the issue before it escalates into a larger problem.

- **Enhanced Brand Reputation:** Organizations that actively seek and respond to customer feedback can enhance their brand reputation. For example, companies like Starbucks that prioritize customer feedback in their decision-making processes are often viewed positively by consumers, leading to stronger brand loyalty (Kumar & Reinartz, 2016).

10.11 Challenges of Conducting Customer Service Research

- **Resource Constraints:** Conducting comprehensive customer service research can require significant time, personnel, and financial resources (Burns & Bush, 2010). Smaller businesses may struggle to allocate the necessary resources for in-depth research efforts.
- **Data Privacy Concerns:** Collecting customer data raises privacy concerns, particularly with stricter regulations like GDPR. Organizations must ensure they comply with legal requirements while maintaining customer trust (McDaniel & Gates, 2013). For example, a company that fails to protect customer information may face backlash and reputational damage.
- **Respondent Bias:** Survey results can be affected by respondent bias, where individuals may not provide honest feedback due to social desirability or other factors (Fowler, 2014). For instance, customers might give overly positive ratings to avoid conflict, skewing the data.
- **Complexity of Analysis:** Analyzing qualitative data, such as open-ended survey responses, can be challenging and time-consuming (Creswell, 2013). Organizations may struggle to extract actionable insights from complex customer feedback without appropriate tools and expertise.
- **Changing Customer Expectations:** Customer preferences and expectations can evolve rapidly, making it difficult for organizations to keep their research relevant (Liu, 2011). A technology company, for example, must continuously update its research efforts to adapt to new consumer trends in a fast-paced environment.
- **Interpreting Data:** Organizations may struggle to interpret complex data accurately, leading to misinformed decisions (Creswell, 2013). Misinterpretation of survey results can result in implementing changes that do not effectively address customer needs.
- **Maintaining Engagement:** Ensuring that customers participate in research efforts can be challenging. Low response rates can lead to biased results, affecting the validity of the research (Fowler, 2014). For instance, a company may find it difficult to encourage customers to complete lengthy surveys.
- **Cultural Differences:** When conducting research across different demographics or regions, cultural differences can influence customer perceptions and responses (Hofstede, 2001). For example, a global brand might receive varying feedback based on cultural attitudes towards service in different countries.
- **Integration of Findings:** Organizations may find it challenging to integrate research findings into existing strategies and processes (Zeithaml et al., 2018). Even with valuable insights, if the organizational culture does not prioritize customer feedback, implementation may be ineffective.

- **Cost of Implementation:** While research can provide valuable insights, the costs associated with implementing changes based on those insights can be prohibitive, especially for smaller businesses (Burns & Bush, 2010). For example, a company may identify the need for a new customer relationship management system but find the investment too high.

In conclusion, while the benefits of conducting customer service research are substantial, providing organizations with valuable insights and fostering a customer-centric approach, the accompanying challenges must not be overlooked. Effective research can lead to improved customer satisfaction, loyalty, and competitive advantage; however, organizations must be prepared to address issues related to resource allocation, data analysis, and participant engagement. By balancing these benefits and challenges, businesses can develop robust strategies that not only enhance customer experiences but also contribute to long-term success and sustainability in their respective markets. Embracing a proactive and systematic approach to customer service research ultimately positions organizations to thrive in an ever-evolving consumer landscape.

10.10 Current Trends in Customer Service Research

Customer service research is undergoing significant transformation as organizations increasingly recognize the importance of understanding customer experiences and expectations in a rapidly evolving marketplace. Current trends are shaped by advancements in technology, shifting consumer behaviors, and a growing emphasis on personalized service. From the integration of artificial intelligence and real-time data collection to the adoption of omni-channel research strategies, businesses are leveraging innovative tools to gain deeper insights into customer sentiment. Additionally, the focus on customer experience metrics and ethical data practices reflects a commitment to not only meet but exceed customer expectations. This landscape of customer service research is critical for organizations striving to enhance their service delivery and build lasting customer relationships. Below is a summary of these trends:

- **Increased Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI):** AI technologies are transforming customer service research by automating data collection and analysis. Chatbots and virtual assistants gather real-time feedback, allowing organizations to respond promptly to customer inquiries and concerns (Gnewuch et al., 2017). For instance, companies like Sephora use AI-driven chatbots to assist customers and gather insights about their preferences and shopping behaviors.
- **Omni-channel Research:** With customers interacting across various platforms, businesses are adopting omni-channel approaches to gather comprehensive feedback (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). For example, a retail chain may use surveys and social media monitoring simultaneously to capture customer sentiment across different touchpoints, ensuring a holistic view of the customer experience.
- **Sentiment Analysis:** The application of sentiment analysis tools enables organizations to evaluate customer emotions expressed in feedback and social media posts (Liu, 2011). For instance, brands like Coca-Cola use sentiment analysis to assess public reactions to their marketing campaigns, helping them refine their strategies based on consumer sentiment.

- **Real-Time Data Collection:** Modern technologies facilitate real-time data collection, allowing organizations to act quickly on customer feedback (Homburg et al., 2009). For example, online service providers like Uber collect customer ratings and comments immediately after each ride, enabling them to make swift improvements in service quality.
- **Focus on Customer Experience (CX) Metrics:** Organizations are increasingly prioritizing metrics that assess the overall customer experience rather than just satisfaction. Metrics such as Customer Effort Score (CES) and Net Promoter Score (NPS) are becoming standard tools for measuring customer loyalty and likelihood to recommend (Reichheld, 2003). For example, many companies, including Apple, utilize NPS to gauge customer loyalty and identify areas for service enhancement.
- **Data Privacy and Ethics:** As data collection methods become more sophisticated, there is a growing emphasis on data privacy and ethical considerations in customer service research (McDaniel & Gates, 2013). Companies are adopting transparent practices to reassure customers about how their data is being used. For instance, major retailers like Target have updated their privacy policies to align with regulations like GDPR, ensuring they maintain customer trust.
- **Personalization through Data Insights:** Leveraging big data analytics, businesses can create highly personalized customer experiences based on research insights (Chaffey, 2019). For example, Netflix analyzes viewer behavior to personalize content recommendations, enhancing user engagement and satisfaction.

These current trends in customer service research reflect the evolving landscape of customer interactions and the importance of leveraging technology and data insights to enhance service quality and customer satisfaction. By staying abreast of these trends, organizations can better position themselves to meet customer needs in a dynamic marketplace.

10.11 Review Questions

1. What are the primary benefits of conducting customer service research for organizations?
2. How does the use of artificial intelligence enhance the effectiveness of customer service research?
3. Explain the concept of omni-channel research and its significance in understanding customer experiences.
4. What role does sentiment analysis play in customer service research, and how can organizations apply it?
5. Why is real-time data collection important for improving customer service, and how can it be implemented?
6. Discuss the difference between traditional customer satisfaction metrics and newer metrics like Customer Effort Score (CES) and Net Promoter Score (NPS).
7. What challenges might organizations face when conducting customer service research, particularly concerning data privacy?
8. How can big data analytics contribute to personalization in customer service?

9. Provide an example of how a specific company has successfully implemented customer service research to enhance its offerings.
10. What are some emerging trends in customer service research, and how do they reflect changes in consumer behavior?

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