Knowledge Management using Social Media: A Comparative Study between Blogs and Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Blogging and Facebook have gained increasing recognition as tools to support online information sharing and management. This study examined if, and in which aspects, blogs and Facebook scaffold and/or consolidate student users’ knowledge capture, sharing and application during their internship. A mixed-methods design was employed to investigate users’ practices and perceptions of blogs and Facebook in online information management. The study found that users generally hold positive perception on using blogs and Facebook for online knowledge management. In particular, Facebook appears to be a more facilitating platform for users to reflect upon prior knowledge, capture new experiences and provide feedback that is constructive to cultivating knowledge sharing environment. It was found that Facebook support the expression of social support among users, thereby reinforcing their motivation in participating in knowledge management processes.

Keywords
Knowledge management; Social media; Blogging; Facebook

INTRODUCTION

Social media has recently emerged as a promising technology for knowledge management (KM) (Levy, 2009; Yates & Paquette, 2011). It is defined as “a group of internet-based application that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). In the past decade, social media (e.g., blogs, social networking sites, wikis, video and photo-sharing sites, etc.) has expanded rapidly and transformed the ways of interaction between individuals (Asur & Huberman, 2010; Fischer & Reuber, 2011). With their distinctive features that allow proactive participation, social connectivity and user collaboration, social media attracted considerable attention from the general public, practitioners and researchers (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008; Scanfeld, Scanfeld, & Larson, 2010), and has increasingly been recognized as an important tool in knowledge management (Levy, 2009).

Blogging and Facebook have been regarded as two of the most commonly used social media technologies (AlAamri, 2009). Although they could probably facilitate knowledge management by capturing the narrative experiences and disseminating information and knowledge (Stiler & Philleo, 2003), relatively little research effort has been dedicated to investigate the knowledge management potentials of blogging and Facebook. This study compares these two platforms in terms of knowledge management. In this paper, both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to generate an understanding of the impact of using blogs and Facebook in facilitating students’ knowledge management activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge Management, Organizational Culture and Technologies

Knowledge management has become a heated research topic in the past decades. As one of the earliest scholars dedicated in the study of KM, Wiig (1997) proposed that the objectives of KM is “to maximize an enterprise’s knowledge-related effectiveness and returns from knowledge assets” through “systematic, explicit and deliberate building, renewal and application of knowledge” (p. 2). Taking up a more process-oriented approach, Rastogi (2000) suggested that KM is “a systematic and integrative process of coordinating organization-wide activities of acquiring, creating, storing, sharing, diffusing, developing, and deploying
knowledge by individuals and groups in pursuit of major organizational goals” (p. 40).

Graphically, the processes of KM can be represented with KM cycles (e.g., Bukowitz and Williams (2000), McElroy (1999), Wig (1993)). An integrated KM cycle (see Figure 1) comprising of three major stages of KM, organizational culture and KM technologies was put together by Valkir (2011). The three stages of KM include: 1) knowledge capture and/or creation; 2) knowledge sharing and dissemination and 3) knowledge acquisition and application. The three stages of KM supported by technologies are facilitated by a favorable organizational culture that promotes information and knowledge sharing.

**Figure 1 An Integrated KM Cycle**

![An Integrated KM Cycle](image)

Note: Taken from Valkir, 2011, p. 270

Ruggles (1997) classified KM technologies as tools that intervene in the three knowledge processing phases mentioned by Valkir (2011). Recently, social media, with their distinctive features that allow proactive participation, social connectivity and user collaboration, have become important tools in facilitating knowledge management processes in business and education institutions (Dames, 2004; Lee, 2003).

**Blogging and knowledge management**

McDermott (2000) defined knowledge as an output from active social construction. Owing to its powerfulness in disseminating information, soliciting comments and links, and classifying and archiving entries, blogs have gained vast recognition as a KM tool, especially in business organizations (Ojala, 2005). Ferdig and Trammell (2004) perceived blogs as a relatively more advanced platform for effective information and knowledge sharing when compared to the more traditional technologies such as emails and discussion forums. Research have found blogs to be effective in organizing, articulating, developing, and sharing ideas (Mortensen & Walker, 2002), as well as in developing and maintaining community relationships (Fiedler, 2003). Chu, Kwan and Warning (2012) reported that the participating university students have found blogs useful in helping them manage and share knowledge gained from their professional experiences.

**Facebook and knowledge management**

Although Facebook is one of the most commonly used social media tools nowadays, there has been very few studies concerning the use of Facebook as a KM technology. A recent study conducted by Chu & Du (2013) examined the use of Facebook by academic and public libraries in English-speaking countries a tool for knowledge sharing, information dissemination and knowledge gathering. The large volume of postings related to knowledge sharing and information dissemination appears to suggest Facebook as a potential KM tool.

Other research examined Facebook through the lens of community of practice (e.g., Wong, Kwan & Leung, 2011). Communities of Practice (CoP) are groups of people who share a common concern and seek to construct and share knowledge with others within the group (Lave & Wenger, 1991). CoP is a fundamental concept related to organizational culture as it encourages “collaboration and sharing resources in knowledge domain on the Web” (Wong, Kwan & Leung, 2011, p. 319). The same study has found that Facebook, which emphasizes interaction, sharing and collaboration, is a motivating tool that fosters social learning.

**Literature gap**

Although both blogs and Facebook have been found useful in facilitating knowledge sharing, very few studies have focused on comparing the two tools in terms of their effectiveness in scaffolding knowledge management processes and cultivating a knowledge sharing culture. Specifically, only a scarce amount of studies have examined the use of Facebook as a KM tool.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Based on the literature gaps identified above, the key purpose of this study was to examine if, and in which aspects, social media such as blogs and Facebook scaffold and/or consolidate students’ knowledge capture, sharing and application during their internship. The following specific research questions were raised to guide the investigation process:

- How do student users use blogs and Facebook for knowledge management?
- Are blogs or Facebook a better tool in scaffolding knowledge management?
- Are blogs or Facebook a better tool in cultivating a knowledge sharing culture?
RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a mixed research method, including qualitative content analysis of blog/Facebook posts, interviews and quantitative assessment of participants’ perception in order to address the research questions.

Participants

The study involved two groups of students (n=73) from the Bachelor of Information Management (BScIM) program. The first group of BScIM students (n=53) used blogs (Xanga, Blogger, Drupal and YouBlog) to document their knowledge and experience gained during their internship (a professional experience component of the program in which students were placed in an organization as summer interns over a period of 2-3 months). It consisted of three cohorts of students who enrolled in the years of 2006 (n=16), 2007 (n=16) and 2008 (n=21). The second group of BScIM students (n=20) who were admitted in the year of 2010, used Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/) when they undertook their internship.

Instructional Design

Both groups of students were given similar instruction on how to engage in the blogging/Facebook system during their internship. A blog site or a Facebook group page was set up and made accessible to only the participating students and course tutors. Students were asked to reflect and share their internship experience on the online platform every one to two days. They were also told to post a minimum of one to two comments to their peers’ logs every week. For both groups of students, their engagement in the corresponding online platform constitutes to part of their final grade of the course.

Data collection

The blog entries, posts and comments were extracted from the online blogging system and Facebook in the end of each internship period for qualitative analysis. They were recorded with the username, date and uploading time, and coded according to their knowledge management processes and socio-emotional expressions. The coding framework was developed from the preliminary coding and analysis of a subsample of selected blog entries, leading to iterative processes of analyses to refine the scheme and its subthemes.

Structured telephone interviews were used to investigate users’ perception of blogs/Facebook as a knowledge management tool. They were also required to respond to a questionnaire which prompts their perceptions of blogs/Facebook for mutual support and collaboration.

Data analysis

The content of the students’ blogs and Facebook were analyzed qualitatively using NVivo 8.0 software. Each blog entry, Facebook post or comment was considered as a unit of analysis. The content was first classified into either knowledge management processes or socio-emotional expressions. As shown in Table 1, the coding framework of knowledge management processes involved the following themes: knowledge capture, knowledge sharing and dissemination, and knowledge acquisition and application (as in Chu, Chan & Tiwari, 2012; Du & Wagner, 2007; Hmelo-Silver, 2003). According to Dalkir (2011), knowledge capture refers to capturing and identifying existing knowledge, usually with the aid of information technology to ensure that captured information, either tacit or explicit, is available to those who need it. Knowledge sharing follows once knowledge has been captured and codified. It emphasizes that knowledge is shared and disseminated throughout the organization. Knowledge application refers to “the actual use of knowledge that has been captured or created and put into the KM cycle” (Dalkir, 2011, p. 184).

On the other hand, the coding framework of socio-emotional expressions comprised emotional expressions and social support which are summarized in Table 2. Emotional expressions referred to contents that were made up of positive emotions and negative emotions, whereas social support was defined as the assistance and resource that individuals provide to others through social relationships. The coding was done by the first author and two research assistants with reference to the operational definitions of the coding themes and subthemes that shown in Table 1 and 2.

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 19.0. Responses on the Likert-type scales were summarized and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Mann–Whitney tests were employed to compare the perceptual differences between blog and Facebook users. Statistical significance level was set at $p < 0.05$. 

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### Table 1 Coding framework of knowledge management processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sample reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge capture</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge reflection</td>
<td>reflections on or discoveries of knowledge related to professional practices</td>
<td>One major difficulty to run a SME is to build a trusting relationship with your clients. Public recognition of the enterprise such as awards is definitely helpful to help create and reinforce such relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience capture</td>
<td>personal insights into the meaning and implications of professional experiences</td>
<td>At that time, I realized that an understanding towards users’ information literacy and information needs is crucial before we provide any services to the users. The professional experience provided me with such insight: Don’t just deliver the best functions to the users but the most suitable ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge sharing and dissemination</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge sharing</td>
<td>sharing, disseminating or exchanging of ideas and knowledge among the individuals</td>
<td>The Free Software Directory was a project of the Free Software Foundation (FSF) and UNESCO. They cataloged useful free software that runs under free operating systems—particularly the GNU operating system and its GNU/Linux variants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting questions</td>
<td>questions that facilitate communication and discussion among users</td>
<td>I also think gathering resources from databases is helpful but I don’t know which databases are of use. Do you have any suggestions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing feedback</td>
<td>responses to another post that contribute to knowledge building or sharing</td>
<td>To one reflective journal where a student talked about the use of cassette tapes in his organization, a participant replied: Cassette tape seems really outdated now; if you don’t tell, I can’t believe that they are still in use in some organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge acquisition and application</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge construction</td>
<td>discussion and co-construction on the understanding of a topic or knowledge area</td>
<td>A: When we think of security, we think of passwords. The creation of passwords is the best example to show the delicate balance between security and convenience. Casual manner makes password policies fail. B: Users tended to choose weak, meaningful and easy to remember passwords.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>experience of applying knowledge in solving the problems encountered in professional practice</td>
<td>Although the search functions in MS ACCESS were not user-friendly, a user could still search the specific panel. We designed a large range of keyword tables that easily hit the data entry. Therefore, we successfully increased the search results.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Some of the sample references in the table were taken from Chu, Chan & Tiwari (2012).

### Table 2 Coding framework of socio-emotional expressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Sample references</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional expressions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive emotions</td>
<td>pleasurable affective expressions including joy, happiness, gratitude and contentment</td>
<td>After I visited these two departments, I am so happy because I saw what I have learnt in Higher Diploma can really apply to real life situation, like how to catalogue and order materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative emotions</td>
<td>unpleasurable affective expressions including distress, anxiety, depression and anger</td>
<td>I cannot believe the negative environment among the employees (especially IT Operation Department) here. There are only 11 employees here, but in the past 1-year 83 employees left. It was hard to believe, isn’t it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>assistance and resource that individuals provide to others through social relationships</td>
<td>Do take care of yourself and don’t let the internship ruin your health. I am sure our PE organizations care about the well beings of their interns too.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Some of the sample references in the table were taken from Chu, Chan & Tiwari (2012).
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge management activities on blogs and Facebook

Blog entries and Facebook posts were coded according to three knowledge management processes and their subthemes. Table 3 shows the average number of Blog entries/Facebook posts each participant contributed. It provides glimpses into what knowledge management activities the participants were involved in when they engaged in blogging/Facebook.

Knowledge capture
As shown in Table 3, there are some differences between blogs and Facebook users in term of their knowledge capture activities. A relatively larger number of Facebook posts (Mean=25.35) were being coded when compared to blog posts (Mean=5.25). Specifically, Facebook users had, on average, 7.41 more “knowledge reflection” posts than blog users did.

Knowledge sharing and dissemination

Results also indicated that more feedbacks and responses was found on Facebook than blogs, which contributed to the discrepancy in their knowledge sharing and dissemination. Table 3 showed that more Facebook posts were coded in the subtheme, “providing feedback”, with an average of 4.38 posts more compare to blog.

This finding is further confirmed with the comments made by participants in the interview. They recognized that Facebook has more advanced group features. For instance, all messages posted onto the group wall would generate group notifications and greater attention among the group members (De Villiers, 2010). As noted by one of the participants (WCM), “when you posted anything in the group, everyone can view it. With notifications users can read the most updated comments from their friends easily and immediately. Hence, it helps facilitate knowledge sharing.” This finding appears to be consistent with earlier studies (Barczyk & Duncan, 2011; McEwan, 2011) that Facebook enhances collaboration and facilitates the exchange of ideas as a result of peer interaction. By actively engaging individuals in online discussion, it could support communications and peer-to-peer feedback among individuals who face common dilemmas (Selwyn, 2009; Ziegler, 2007), constituting what could be a significant collaboration platform for knowledge construction (Kabilan, Ahman, & Abidin, 2010; Wang et al, 2011).

Apart from its advanced group features, Facebook is also associated with greater offline social connection, which can promote knowledge dissemination and sharing. A blog user (CWY) suggested that “even though we always wrote something about ourselves on the blog, we used it only among our group of classmates. However, there are more functions in Facebook and we could include more people like our colleagues. For instance, my classmates can get in touch with my colleagues through Facebook. In this way, we probably can know more and learn more.” Another participant (LTK) also mentioned that “it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 Distribution of coded blogs and posts in the theme of knowledge management processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogs (n=53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge capture</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience capture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge sharing and dissemination</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge acquisition and application</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The figures represent the average number of Blog entries/Facebook posts each participant contributed.

Also, there was on average 12.69 more “experience capture” posts coded on Facebook than on blogs. This indicated that users appeared to capture deep reflections of knowledge and experience more often on Facebook than on blogs.

Consistent with existing literature (Racatham & Firpo, 2011), the finding of this study revealed that Facebook serves as an easy-to-use social media technology for its users to leverage social networking to elicit tacit knowledge. A participant (HTH) commented that “Facebook is very popular now and almost everybody knows how to use it. You don’t need to learn about it before you use it. Also the functions of it tend to be user-friendly”. This quote, together with the statistical data presented in Table 3, implied that the wide popularity and user-friendly interface of Facebook allow it overtake blogs in instant and quick knowledge capture.
(blogging) is just like writing our own diaries without interaction”. These comments probably revealed why Facebook was found to be more common than blogs in the dissemination of information and knowledge. Unlike blogs, the primary function of Facebook is for “social searching”, i.e. find out more about people who they already knew (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006). Its users mainly use Facebook to connect and maintain relationships with existing offline contacts (Joinson, 2008). Therefore, it provides greater social motivation for its users to communicate and interact with others (classmates, colleagues and academic supervisor) on Facebook.

Knowledge acquisition and application
As shown in Table 3, there is a slight difference between blogs and Facebook in term of their knowledge acquisition and application activities. In particular, their difference mainly lies on the knowledge construction. Blog users are more likely to produce entries related to discussion and co-construction on the understanding of a specific knowledge area during internship.

Socio-emotional expressions on blogs and Facebook

This study also looked at the blog entries and Facebook posts that are related to emotional expressions and social support, and Table 4 summarized the result. It showed that the difference of the amount of emotional expressions on blogs and Facebook is not obvious. However, Facebook posts were coded with 4.57 more references in “social support” compared to blog posts. This means that Facebook users seemingly had a higher level of engagement in the provision of social support.

Facebook was found to enhance social support because “its interactive element is strong”, commented by one of the participants (CKL) during the interview. For instance, its Wall function enables the users to post items and leave comments easily on each other’s Wall. It offers them a new form of communication that facilitates discussion and reciprocal interaction. In addition, Facebook users could read and respond to each other’s postings by giving ‘Like’.

As responded by a participant (SKH), “Like represents a kind of encouragement since everyone worked in different locations and it was good that they were aware of my situation”. For participant WCM, ‘Like’ was the “expression of concerns about each other’s status”. These kinds of interactive features therefore generate greater sense of social connection among Facebook users, which could be one indicative factor of the higher degree of knowledge management engagement found among Facebook users.

Table 4 Distribution of coded blogs and posts in the theme of socio-emotional expressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional expressions</th>
<th>Blogs (n=53)</th>
<th>Facebook (n=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive emotions</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative emotions</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The figures represent the average number of Blog entries/ Facebook posts each participant contributed.

Perception of social support via blogging and Facebook

Participants were asked to report their perceptions of blogs/Facebook for mutual support and collaboration. As shown in Table 5, Facebook user perceived a significantly greater support among classmates via commenting than blog users did (p=0.03). Participant LKL reported that he posted comments like, “You did a good job!” and “You learnt something new” in respond to others’ Facebook posts as a way of supporting other classmates.

In addition, the Mann-Whitney test also revealed that significantly higher ratings were given by Facebook users for their perceived support from supervisor via mutual interaction than blog users did (p<0.01). They perceived the feedback provided by the supervisor on Facebook as supportive and encouraging. For instance, participant CKT commented that his supervisor “provided constructive and productive comments on Facebook”. These findings indicated that Facebook has served as a platform for facilitating social support during internship.

This result showed that social media has a predominant influence on the social-emotional interaction between the users, which in turn may affect their knowledge management activities. As suggested by Chatti et al. (2007), “social media supports a bottom-up building of communities and networks”. By using appropriate social media technologies, it can enhance the social motivation of the users in pursuing knowledge management. As shown in the above findings, Facebook users are more likely to express social support on the platform. The perceived support from classmates and supervisors among the Facebook users was also significantly greater than that of blog users. The results clearly indicated that Facebook is a more effective social media in building a culture of support, thereby facilitating the social-collaborative process of knowledge management. As a social networking platform, Facebook comprise more interactive and collaborative features (e.g. group notification, private interactions).
message), and provides more channels to demonstrate social support (e.g. giving “Like”). With the provision of a supportive social framework, individuals are therefore more willing to connect, communicate and reflect their knowledge and experiences on Facebook.

**Table 5 Perceived support of Blogs and Facebook**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey items</th>
<th>Blogs (n = 53)</th>
<th>Facebook (n = 20)</th>
<th>Sig. Mann-Whitney</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Perceived support from classmates via commenting</td>
<td>2.67 (0.65)</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00 (0.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Perceived support from supervisor via mutual interaction</td>
<td>1.92 (0.84)</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.85 (0.59)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Ratings are based on a 4-point Likert-type scale: 1-5‘Strongly disagree’, 2-5‘Disagree’, 3-7‘Agree’, and 4-5‘Strongly agree’.

*statistically significant at p < 0.05.

**LIMITATIONS**

The small sample size and non-random sampling method serve as the major limitations of this study, which may undermine the generalizability of the findings. Only four cohorts of undergraduate students were investigated in this study. Future studies may fill these gaps by recruiting a large amount of participants and using a more sophisticated sampling method in order to consolidate the research findings.

In addition, this study mainly covered the knowledge management processes in the educational setting. It is suggested that future research can extend the scope of the study beyond classrooms and into various kinds of organizational settings including libraries, corporations, and non-profit-making organizations. Nevertheless, this study provides insight into how social media, particularly blogging and Facebook, can support the knowledge management process and what kinds of activities are mainly involved in the online platforms.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

The study demonstrated how social media impact the practice and experience of online knowledge management. While previous studies have generally adopted a theoretical deductive approach (Levy, 2009; Razmerita, Kirchner, & Sudzina, 2009) and a case study design (Matschke, Moskaliuk, & Cress, 2012; Sotiros & Alya, 2009) in investigating the role of social media in knowledge management, qualitative content analysis in this study provided a way to illustrate the kind of knowledge management processes that the individuals were involved in through the use of social media.

Another contribution of this study is the development of a coding scheme that specifically focuses on individuals’ online knowledge management processes. In this study, Facebook was found to be a more productive platform for knowledge capture and knowledge sharing compared with blogs. Specifically, Facebook users showed a high degree of engagement in reflecting knowledge, capturing daily/professional experience and providing feedbacks that support knowledge transfer.

Last but not least, this study also suggested that the choice of social media has a predominant influence on the social-emotional interaction between the users, which in turn may affect their active engagement in knowledge management. According to the students’ comments, the more interactive and collaborative features of Facebook allow them form tighter social bonds within the network, help cultivate a favorable culture for online knowledge management, hence increase their motivation in participating in sharing knowledge using the tool.

By investigating how blogs and Facebook may help scaffold students’ information sharing and knowledge construction during internship, our finding provides empirical evidence that supports the significance of social media in knowledge management within the educational setting. This study serves as an impetus for further investigations into how blogs and Facebook can be utilized to facilitate individuals’ knowledge management in diverse organizational contexts.

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