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# Personal branding of managers in service companies

## Abstract

Personal branding in the last ten years has been gaining significantly in popularity - especially in the business environment (Gehl, 2011; Wee & Brooks, 2010). Meanwhile, the literature still recognizes the need for empirical research on personal branding that examines how various professions experience personal branding. Managers are increasingly aware that the activities they perform as part of personal branding affect how the organization they represent is perceived. The aim of this article is to identify the process of building personal brands by managers. To achieve this goal, a literature review and qualitative research were carried out in the form of individual in-depth interviews. The choice of the research method is justified by the subject of the analysis. The study covered a group of nine people with at least two years of experience in a managerial position and employed in service companies located in Greater Poland. As a result of the conducted research, it was found that personal branding is perceived as a multi-stage process in which social media is credited with increasing use. In addition, organizations only support building personal brands by managers and executives. The article is a field for further exploration of publications and research.

**Keywords:** personal branding, branding, personal brand, managers, contemporary organizations

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## Introduction

Personal branding in literature is defined within many disciplines or theoretical concepts and taking into account various research perspectives. As a result, it causes difficulties in operationalization and comprehensive definition of the concept of "personal branding". Also, in literature there are rarely links of this concept with the achievements of organization sciences, and especially with the achievements of marketing in the area of brand management (Wojtaszczyk & Maszewski, 2014).

Meanwhile, in the last ten years, personal branding has been gaining significantly in popularity – especially in the business environment (Gehl, 2011; Wee & Brooks, 2010). The literature still recognizes the need for empirical research on personal branding that examines how various professions experience personal branding (Jacobson, 2020). Nowadays, recruitment specialists, career counselors and consultants dealing with career planning are more and more interested in the subject of building a personal brand (Shepherd, 2005). Kowalczyk (2020) also notes that personal brands are being built more and more consciously by specialists in various fields (e.g. IT specialists, doctors, scientists, lawyers or craftsmen), influencers (e.g. bloggers, youtubers), artists, and managers.

Building one's own brand is for many managers a new quality in their professional functioning, and also forces them to reevaluate their thinking about themselves - especially in the context of activity on social media, the importance of which in personal branding is emphasized by Kampioni-Zawadka (2014). With technological advances that facilitate online communication and the emergence of multiple social platforms, "a career has become a personal brand that needs to be managed in the virtual age" (Gioia et al., 2014). The literature also indicates that an important role in building a personal brand by modern managers is also played by: shifting responsibility for employees' careers from organizations to individuals (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014) or mismatch (Chłoń-Domińczak et al., 2016) and the volatility of the labor market resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, managers are

increasingly aware that the activities they perform as part of personal branding affect how the organization they represent is perceived and assessed by customers, contractors, employees and other stakeholders. Also, the importance of the manager's brand and its visibility is increasing as the role of managers is to spread companies' missions, values and ideas to both internal and external stakeholders (Chen et al., 2013) and to reinforce or support the company's brand (Górska & Mazurek, 2021).

In this article, based on a review of selected, recent literature and the results of qualitative research, an attempt was made to identify the process of building a personal brand by managers in service companies located in Greater Poland.

This article contributes to existing literature in several ways. First, it fills the research gap defined as an insufficient number of publications that refer to the concept of "personal branding" and examine it on a group of managers employed only in service companies. Secondly, the article refers to the most recent publications in which the concepts of "personal branding" and "personal brand" have been studied, which in turn made it possible to present the latest concepts of defining these concepts.

The article consists of four parts. The first is a review of the literature. The second part presents the methodology of the qualitative research (i.e. the purpose, method and scope of the research). The third part describes the obtained results of the qualitative research. The article ends with a summary, along with limitations and recommendations for future research.

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## Review of the literature

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The vast majority of purchasing decisions are based on a sense of trust, confidence or other emotions that are evoked in people by a specific product, service or person. This is also the essence of branding. It is a process of influencing people, and its effectiveness is primarily influenced by the identity of the brand built. Currently, branding is a concept addressed not only to companies, because a new trend is emerging (Rampersad, 2010). Interest in the personal brand and in personal branding has significantly increased in recent years (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2019). Nowadays, these concepts are the subject of much international discussion (Morgan, 2011; Wetsch, 2012).

Among them, there is the view that a personal brand is an image created of a given person in the mind of another (Walczak-Skałeczka, 2018), and it can also be considered the most important factor of personal success (Peter & Gomez, 2019). A personal brand reflects a person's skills, abilities and lifestyle (Gehl, 2011; Hearn, 2008). Setty (2006) claims that "we all have our own personal brand because we all make a promise to the world (...). By living your life, you are living your brand. Your brand is your true face." Contemporary researchers note that a personal brand can be used in competing to enter the labor

market (Close et al., 2011) and to pursue the desired profession (Parmentier et al., 2013). It is important, however, that the concept of a "personal brand" should be considered in various contexts, related for instance to the social or professional group it concerns. Therefore, it is worth pointing to the differences resulting from the economic, social and cultural spaces in which a personal brand is built each time (Walczak-Skałeczka, 2018).

However, in many scientific publications, the term "personal brand" is used interchangeably with the term "building a personal brand", which results in definition difficulties and undoubtedly constitutes a barrier to the development of this research area (Gorbatov et al., 2018).

While there has been a significant increase in scientific attention to personal branding in the last ten years, it is still a fragmented phenomenon that deserves academic attention (Scheidt et al., 2018). Although there are definitions of personal branding based on empirical research (Khedher, 2019) or more conceptual work (Bendisch et al., 2013), there is still no single, comprehensive definition of this concept that could be successfully applied in both literature and business practice. This article attempts to classify the definition of the concept of personal branding appearing in recent literature. As a result, it was found that personal branding is defined as: 1) a marketing concept, 2) a process, 3) image seen from various points of view (Table 1).

As a result of the review of the latest literature, it was found that the concept of "personal branding" is defined mainly in scientific publications of international scope, which indicates the interdisciplinary nature of the issues raised. Personal branding also appears as a source for new academic impulse, as it may sensitize scholars to opportunities for intensifying collaboration with practitioners to enrich and disseminate knowledge in their fields (Scheidt et al., 2018).

A personal brand is built both in private and professional life – by creating yourself as a valuable employee (Rampersad, 2010). In this process, the greatest importance is attached to creating the image for instance through behavior, manner of expressing oneself, mastering verbal and non-verbal communication, or the level of education. Equally important is striving to distinguish yourself from other people through qualifications, personality traits or appearance. However, the process of building a personal brand should primarily consist of planned activities implemented from a strategic perspective (Gorbatov et al., 2018).

The starting point for building a personal brand is the analysis of oneself in terms of self-definition – recognition of one's own identity (Wojtaszczyk & Maszewski, 2014). Self-recognition of a person's identity is the first stage in building a personal brand. In this process, after the diagnosis stage, there is a planning phase, i.e. setting goals related to a given personal brand. This, in turn, requires the definition of a per-

# Personal branding of managers in service companies

**Table 1**

*Classification of the definition of the concept of “personal branding”*

Classification of the definition	Definition	Author(s), year of publication
personal branding as a marketing concept	Concept related to the marketing strategies that a person adopts in order to promote their major personal characteristics	Zarkada, 2012
	A way of auto-marketing similar to any product or company branding process.	Gujarathi & Kulkarni, 2018
	A marketing concept similar to promoting products and services that has now been extended to people.	Peter & Gomez, 2019
personal branding as a process	Conscious process with a clear aim and goal.	Khedher, 2014
	Long-term process which varies for different individuals.	Sidor-Rzadkowska, 2019
	Entire process of establishing, maintaining, and developing an individual's human brand.	Scheidt et al., 2018
personal branding as an image seen from various points of view	Investments made by individuals to improve their public image.	Ilies, 2018
	It involves capturing and promoting the strengths and uniqueness of your target audience.	Khedher, 2019
	Conscious and intentional effort to create and influence the public perception of an individual.	Wróblewski & Grzesiak, 2020

Source: author's own work.

sonal value proposition (PVP) (Morgan, 2011), from which tangible benefits are derived. The analysis of the human identity and the determination of PVP build the stage of planning a personal brand. The next phase of the personal branding process is to define ways to achieve professional and personal goals. This is about taking actions in the field of career management and relating to possible paths of personal development, the choice of the target audience and the means of communication. Due to the fact that in the process of building a personal brand, a person is exposed to many failures, it requires a high level of internal motivation to act and knowledge of self-motivation techniques. Controlling the effects of undertaken actions, i.e. measuring the strength of a personal brand, is also a constant element of the branding process (Wojtaszczyk & Maszewski, 2014).

Personal branding became an important concept also due to the ability to present oneself easily to others through social media sites. Activity in social media, i.e. expressing yourself on websites, forums or blogs, and publishing posts on social media such as Facebook or Twitter, allows someone not only to build an attractive personal brand, but also to reach a wider audience with their message, i.e. through building a wider network of contacts and stronger influence on others. With the rise of social media, many managers have begun to participate in social media as an integral part of both public relations and self-marketing campaigns (Saad & Yacob, 2021). Although social media is an excellent tool for creating, presenting and maintaining an attractive personal brand, it should also be remembered that inadequate use of the available tools can result in unfavorable presentation on the web (Jarska, 2017).

However, personal branding is primarily used to achieve goals related to obtaining a specific and desired position on the labor market - for example by increasing the revenues achieved (Walczak-Skałeczka, 2018), visibility and value in relationships with others (Peter & Gomez, 2019), as well as employability (Khedher, 2014).

Also, in recent years, businesses have begun to recognize the importance of creating a personal brand as it is particularly impactful on company reputation and business performance as well as markets themselves (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). An attractive personal brand – especially of a manager, can attract talented professionals, as well as generating interest in their products amongst investors.

## Methodology of qualitative research

In order to achieve the aim of the article, a qualitative study was conducted in the form of individual in-depth interviews (IDI). The choice of the research method is justified by the subject of the analysis. Its advantage over other methods of qualitative research is the possibility of a deeper understanding of the subject of the research, as well as obtaining an individualized view of the subject of the research (personal branding is a subjective phenomenon, and therefore it is very important to include the individual actor's perspective). The theoretical basis for the research was the assumptions of the grounded theory.

Taking into account the limitations accompanying the selected research method, the author attaches great importance to research reliability during each stage of the research process.

Due to time and cost constraints, the study comprised three women and six men aged 28-50. The author adopted the following criteria for selecting respondents: 1) at least two years of experience in a managerial position, 2) employment in a service company whose headquarters are located in Greater Poland and listed in the Business Navigator. The selection of the sample for the study was deliberate and was carried out using the snowball technique. Detailed data on the surveyed group of managers is presented in Table 2.

For the purposes of this article, it was assumed that a manager is a person holding a managerial position, having appropriate knowledge and skills, including managerial skills, a specific personality and experience in managing organizations. It is important that in modern organizations, for a manager to be able to effectively perform the managerial duties entrusted to them, they should have not only knowledge and abilities, but also specific managerial skills (Żukowski, 2008) and an attractive personal brand.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with the use of ICT tools. Each of them lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. All the questions asked were open-ended. In the case of seven individual in-depth interviews, the respondents consented to them being recorded. Transcriptions were made of the recordings. In the remaining two cases, handwritten notes were made during the study, which were then entered into the computer. The in-depth interviews began in June 2021 and the qualitative part of the research continued until August 2021. The interview scenario enabled more extensive interviews while allowing respondents enough flexibility for the free expression of thoughts.

The content was coded using the “line by line” method, due to the tendency of the respondents to break off sentences frequently and change the topic of the conversation. This allowed a comprehensive approach to specific thematic areas. When generating the codes, the following principles were suggested: keeping statements as precise and simple as possible,

strictly following the data content, and avoiding one’s own judgments (Douglas et al., 2009). Initial, potential thematic threads were outlined at the code generation stage. Specific codes were then assigned to appropriate thematic threads: 1) Definitions of the concept “personal branding”, 2) Stages of the personal branding process, 3) Personal branding tools, 4) Support for personal branding in modern organizations. Each of the indicated parts, based on the quoted fragments of interviews with respondents, has been described and commented on in this article (Douglas et al., 2009).

The collected material was subjected for analysis and synthesis using the NVivo software. All information that could be tracked back to respondents was anonymized, including names and companies in which they operate.

## Results of qualitative research

### Definitions of the concept “personal branding”

Based on a review of the latest literature, it was found that personal branding is defined as: 1) a marketing concept, 2) a process, 3) an image seen from various point of views. During individual in-depth interviews, two respondents clearly defined building a personal brand as building an image seen from different point of views. “In my opinion, this is tantamount to building an image seen from different point of views. That is why it is so important to build a personal brand coherently and consistently” (woman, 32). “Building a personal brand, i.e. consciously creating your own image in someone’s eyes. It is acting in accordance with the values and communicating, for example, one’s goals, achievements or professional position to other people” (man, 37).

In addition, the surveyed managers, referring to the knowledge acquired during training with personal brand specialists, identified personal branding as a process of creating one’s own image/brand, which

**Table 2**  
Detailed data on the surveyed group of managers

Lp.	Gender (F/M)	Age	Type of service activity	Period of work in a managerial position
1.	F	32	IT	4
2.	F	43	HR	7
3.	F	48	education	11
4.	M	28	IT	3
5.	M	33	transport	5
6.	M	37	gastronomy	7
7.	M	43	education	12
8.	M	48	tourism	11
9.	M	50	transport	18

Source: author’s own work.

is about defining, describing and selling yourself. "In my opinion, this is the process of creating your own image. As a rule, this is how we strive for interest in our person and what we are currently doing" (man, 33). "Building a personal brand is the process of defining, describing and promoting oneself" (man, 50).

One of the respondents, referring to his professional experience, compared the process of building a personal brand to the recruitment process: "As I deal with the recruitment process on a daily basis, personal branding is a similar process. In both cases, it's about presenting your best side" (woman, 43).

Similarly to the literature, the respondents identified a strong relationship between personal branding and auto-presentation. One of the respondents also indicated that building a personal brand is an activity bordering on PR, marketing, psychology and communication: "Building a personal brand is simply a marketing activity to show us in the best possible light" (man, 28).

However, one of the surveyed managers stated that: "I have not come across a general definition of this concept yet, such as in the case of demand. On many popular blogs there are entries on effective self-promotion, building your own image, etc., so in my opinion they are the same concepts" (woman, 48).

It is important that the surveyed managers, when answering the question about what is necessary to build a personal brand, primarily indicated: 1) confirmed knowledge (certificates of completed courses and studies), 2) professional experience, 3) professional contacts, 4) activity in social media.

The respondents stated that building a personal brand also requires: 1) creativity, 2) openness, 3) truth, 4) consistency, 5) honesty, and 6) commitment. Regarding this question, commitment was most often mentioned by the surveyed managers. "When it comes to a personal brand, this involves creativity, openness, truth and consistency" (man, 50). "In my opinion, the key to building an attractive personal brand is being fully committed in the entire process. It is important to build it coherently in various channels such as LinkedIn or Twitter, and to ensure that this concept implies our true values, goals and expectations" (woman, 48). "Building a personal brand requires commitment, openness and honesty. My name is my brand, and looking at my example, I make it more attractive by speaking at a conference or by publishing engaging posts on LinkedIn" (man, 28).

During the interview, managers emphasized how important it is to build a personal brand simultaneously and adequately in private and professional life. "You build personal brand throughout your life. It is a certain process which, in order to be attractive, should proceed in parallel and adequately both in the private and professional spheres" (man, 37). "You cannot build a personal brand in your professional life in isolation from your personal life" (man, 50).

This statement is agreed in literature for example by Walczak-Skałeczka (2018) or Rampersad (2010).

### Stages of the personal branding process

The personal branding process includes the identification of one's values and positioning, the choice of the target audience, the means of communication, and control. The interviews confirmed that the managers follow this process and its subsequent stages. In addition, most of them shared the view formulated in the literature that personal branding is a multi-stage process, not a one-time action.

Many respondents emphasize that they want to be perceived as experts in their field and industry: "When I think about building my brand, it is synonymous with positioning myself as an expert. I can't talk about things that I don't understand" (woman, 48).

The key is to understand what you want to achieve by building your brand. Do I want to be known, I want to be an expert or I want to find my space. It is also important to be interested in the current events in our industry and to speak on topics that interest us. Interaction with our observers also plays an important role. (man, 33)

As a manager, I try to build my own expert brand. Thanks to this, I am recognizable in the industry and "my field". By building a personal brand, what I say and write is more trusted. I feel fulfilled and my knowledge and experience pay off because I share them with other people. (man, 50)

One of the respondents noted that: "a derivative of building a personal brand is to stand out among other managers and the labor market not only as an expert, but also as a trustworthy or simply interesting and friendly person" (man, 50). Furthermore, managers stated that the first step in building a personal brand is to get acquainted with the opinions about the person: "The first stage should be to interview people from our immediate environment about how they judge us. Then it is necessary to conduct a self-analysis and define our goals" (man, 48).

Another step in the personal branding process is the choice of the target audience. The managers emphasize that they want to be recognizable among business partners, investors, but also the public. Meanwhile, some respondents underline that they are unwilling to be public personas, and their brand is limited only to their business environment. "The first step in this process should be getting to know yourself and the people you want to communicate with – for example investors, clients" (woman, 32). "I'm in business and I'm not looking for media attention. I am not a celebrity, I do not want my brand to be associated with, for example, scandals or the world of celebrities in general" (man, 50). "I focus on building the attractiveness of my brand among internal and external clients of my company" (man, 28).

Another step in the personal branding process is communication. Respondents emphasized how

important it is to maintain consistency between the communication message, the chosen medium and the selection of the recipients of the message. "You need to choose communication channels and create consistent, attractive messages. It is important to update them on an ongoing basis, as well as to interact with their recipients" (woman, 32).

In this question, some respondents emphasize the importance of the press and the Internet, while TV and the radio are considered less important. "I don't feel the need to build my brand on TV or in the press. For us, young people, the most important thing is a presence on the Internet" (man, 28). "I work on the appearance of my profiles on social media, participate in training on a personal brand, and start to act consistently" (man, 28).

Controlling is not commonly used by the interviewed managers, as only a few of them explicitly stated that they control their media appearances: "I try to keep track of what appears on the Internet about me and my company. Even during my vacation I can't give it up" (man, 37).

However, one of the respondents stated that he did not pay attention to the information that appeared about him on the Internet, in the press or on television, and adheres to the principle: no matter how they write, it is important not to misrepresent the name.

### Personal branding tools

Managers were asked what tools can be used to build a personal brand. They mentioned: 1) social media such as LinkedIn, GoldenLine, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram, 2) original podcast or videocast, and 3) own website or blog.

However, the surveyed managers also said that a personal brand is built not only on the Internet, but also in the real world. Although the pandemic caused the virtualization of work and interpersonal contacts, nowadays conferences, fairs and other events are returning in their traditional form more and more often, and active participation in them is a very effective way to build personal brand as an expert in a given field. It is important that the respondents noted that the purpose of building a personal brand should determine the choice of tools: "Depending on your profession and what you want to achieve, you build your brand differently and use other tools for this purpose. This process cannot be generalized" (man, 33).

### Support for personal branding in modern organizations

Only one of the respondents admitted that his organization does not support the process of building personal brands by employees:

There are no personal branding activities carried out in my company – as is the case with employer branding. Managers independently create their image more or less effectively in and outside the organization. This is mainly limited to occasional postings on LinkedIn and

Twitter. When it comes to other employees, they do not receive any support in the field of personal branding. (man, 33)

The surveyed managers also stated that they initiated or supported initiatives in the field of building a personal brand in their organizations. "I learned about a personal brand and the process of building it while browsing various internet blogs. After several training sessions and courses in this field, I decided that it was worth organizing similar training for employees in managerial positions and other managers in my organization. We are active in this area all the time" (woman, 43). "Certainly, we provide employees with many opportunities to build their brands. I mean, for example, publication of articles in our corporate communication channels, participation in fairs or workshops. On the other hand, managers have many other areas in which to build brands, starting with a dedicated tab on the company's website, where they can update their descriptions and publications, and ending with participation in the most important international industry events" (man, 48).

Respondents also stated that even if their organizations do not currently offer support for the process of building personal brands by employees, they intend to change this in the near future: "I have noticed that the topic of building a personal brand is becoming more and more popular. To date each of us has done this in their own way, but in the future it may be worth considering introducing a series of training sessions and workshops in this field in our company" (man, 28).

The surveyed managers emphasized the importance of independence in the process of building a personal brand, which in relation to employees usually takes place without the support of the organizations employing them. The situation is different in the case of managerial and managerial positions, which may indicate inequalities in access, for example, to tools for building personal brands.

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### Summary

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Qualitative research in the form of individual in-depth interviews made it possible to achieve the aim of the article and provided interesting conclusions.

First, as a result of its implementation, it was confirmed that there is no single, generally accepted definition of the concept of "personal branding". The surveyed managers most often understood personal branding as a process that should begin with recognizing the strengths and features that distinguish a given person. Moreover, they pointed out that building a personal brand can be defined as a marketing concept or image in the eyes of other people, which is confirmed by the literature review. This is of particular importance in connection with the observed mismatch and volatility of the labor market, on which it is increasingly difficult to build and manage an attractive personal brand (Kowalczyk, 2020).

Secondly, the article confirms that personal branding is a multi-stage process, not a one-time action. Managers also emphasize that they want to be perceived as experts in their field and industry and how important it is to maintain consistency between the communication message, the chosen medium, and the selection of the recipients of the message. Also, as a result of the study, it was found that observing the progressive digitization, managers identified social media as the most important tool for building a personal brand.

The conducted qualitative research also led to the conclusion that discrepancies were identified between the support for personal branding received by managers and that received by other employees. Meanwhile, the personal brand of each employee, regardless of the position held, is the showcase of the organization in which they work (Ślifirska, 2019).

An evident limitation for the conducted qualitative research is the fact that it included a sample of only nine people. Moreover, the respondents constituted a homogeneous group, i.e. a group of managers employed in service companies whose headquarters are located in Greater Poland and listed in the Business Navigator. The author of the article recognized a research gap that should be filled by undertaking research in the field of personal branding of a qualitative nature (although it would also be desirable to triangulate research methods) on a group that also includes managers from manufacturing companies and by classifying the enterprises they represent into micro, small, medium-sized and big enterprises. Thus, the article opens the field for further research exploration.

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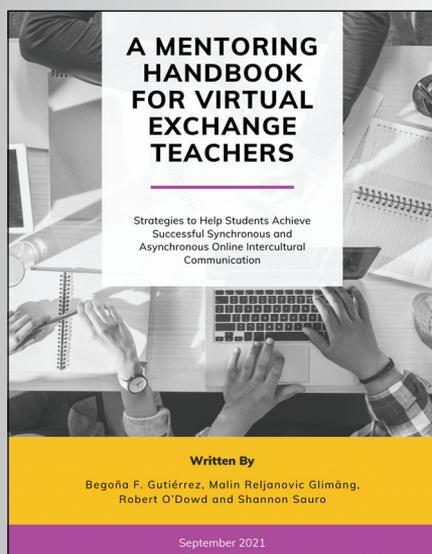
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## WE RECOMMEND



**Begoña F. Gutiérrez, Malin Reljanovic Glimäng, Robert O'Dowd and Shannon Sauro**  
*A Mentoring handbook for virtual exchange teachers. Strategies to help students achieve successful synchronous and asynchronous online intercultural communication*

It is often assumed that students will somehow be naturally prepared to navigate online interactions effectively and efficiently. This assumption is often held in the field of foreign language education by teachers who undertake virtual exchanges. However, there is considerable evidence in the literature to suggest that students who participate in virtual exchanges are usually not naturally aware of effective communication strategies in asynchronous or in synchronous communicative contexts. This handbook is designed for virtual exchange teachers to help support students effectively use these tools.

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