

A Study of Complaint Behaviour Intentions of Airline Passengers

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Abstract *Since airline industry is a prime service industry and interaction of service providers and service seekers is dominant which increases the chances of service failures in each step of service delivery process. Service failures are unpreventable in the core service delivery system and consumer complaints are like keys to identify the failures in the services of an organization. Behavioural intentions of complainants can be voice, private and third party (Singh, 1988). The present study aims to examine the airline passenger's complaint behaviour intentions. This study also examines the effect of demographic variables on consumer complaint intentions. The results of descriptive statistics and t-test shows that complainants are dominantly engaged in voice actions and there is no significant difference between the voice, private and third party intentions of complainants and non-complainants.*

Keywords: *Service Failure, Consumer Complaint Behaviour*

INTRODUCTION

Any lacking in the delivery of service leads to dissatisfaction of customers which results to various consequences like negative word of mouth, decisions not to repurchase, end of loyalty etc. Customer dis/satisfaction with a service is influenced significantly by the customer's evaluation of service features. Research has shown that customers will make trade-offs among different service features depending, among other issues, on the criticality of the service (Ostrom and Iacobucci, 1995). On the other hand, if the organisation takes these service failures as challenges and deal it with effective response the dissatisfaction of the customers can be converted into satisfaction and in some instances loyalty can be gained. The question arises here is how an organisation came to know about the service failures on their part unless and until some customers complaint about it. And in most of the cases, customers do not complain following a service failure but they involved in activities like brand switching and negative word-of-mouth (e.g. TARP, 1986). So, customer's complaint is one of the ways to know about any lacking in the delivery of service by an organisation.

For service providers, customer complaints are becoming significant to improve upon. Since all organisations experience some degree of customer dissatisfaction, it becomes essential for them to know about the area of dissatisfaction and they will only come to know when customer complaints to them. According to Andreason (1988, p. 675), on the basis of several studies, it is possible to 'conclude that consumers experience problems in about 20 percent of their purchases, complain to the seller (...) 40 percent of the time and perceive that they have received satisfaction from this complaining behaviour 60 percent of the time'. However the author emphasize that all the aspects involved in consumer complaint behaviour 'vary significantly across purchase categories'.

Since airline industry is a prime service industry and interaction of service providers and service seekers is dominant which increases the chances of service failures in each step of service delivery process. The present study aims to examine the airline passenger's complaint behaviour intentions in terms of voice, private and third party. This study also examines the effect of demographic variables on consumer complaint intentions.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Service failures are unpreventable in the core service sectors like airline industry. The reason of these failures can be service delivery system, employee response to customer needs and requests and unprompted and unsolicited employee actions (Bitner, Booms and Tetreault, 1990). Organisations come to know about few of these failures when customers complaint to them. According to Michel (2002), ninety percent of the angry customers do not complain. As a result, organisations are unable to track the causes of their dissatisfaction and also lost the opportunity of solving their problems.

Reasons for not complaining include inadequate levels of dissatisfaction (Halstead, 2002; Singh and Pandya, 1991), lack of customer motivation and ability to complain (Blodgett et al, 1993); Huppertz, 2003), the product's or service's relative unimportance means that it is not 'worth complaining about' (Andreasen, 1988; Huppertz, 2003), the expectation that complaining would result in a poor outcome (Tax et al, 1998), personality (Davidow and Dacin, 1997), and not knowing where and/or how to complain (Bearden and Teel, 1983; Day et al, 1981).

Blodgett, Wakefield and Barnes (1995) indicated that the pay-off gained from retaining a dissatisfied customer is many times greater than the cost of remedying the complaint. And a dissatisfied customer expects not only to receive a fair settlement but also to be expected treated with courtesy and respect. So, service providers can view the complaining behaviour process as an opportunity to solidify and strengthen their relationships with their customers.

Chang, Chen and Chang (2008) suggest that airlines face a very specific problem that could influence the satisfaction of customers, namely that they offer multiple opportunities for mistakes to occur during service delivery and are therefore particularly prone to service failures, and many internal mistakes or external disruptions could cause customers to experience service failure. It is specifically the response to a service failure (service recovery) that could give airlines a competitive advantage, as an organisation's response to a service failure could either restore customer satisfaction and reinforce loyalty, or aggravate the situation by driving the customer to a competitor.

Whether the initial reaction to service failure is one of mere disappointment or one of anger, a customer's negative attitude can become much stronger if the firms fail to resolve the service failure. Fortunately, the use of appropriate service failure recovery efforts can convert a problematic situation into a favourable service encounter, thus enhancing repurchase intentions and positive word-of-mouth communications (Spreng, Harrell, and Mackoy, 1995) and restoring or even enhancing customer loyalty (Kelley, Hoffman, and Davis, 1993). The analysis of service

failures and service recoveries is beneficial to service organizations as it allows management to identify and rectify common failure situations (Hoffman, Kelly and Rotalsky, 1995). Responding to service failure tends to result in secondary satisfaction which helps the firm build strong, long-standing and beneficial relations with customers. (Etzel and Silverman, 1981; Gilly, 1987; Westbrook, 1987). Past research reveals a linkage between customer satisfaction and two specific activities performed by an organisation, customer complaint handling procedures and the nature of compensation. For example, providing an opportunity for customers to express their feelings and then listening conscientiously to customers' complaints has been found to increase customers' perceptions of fairness and satisfaction (Goodwin and Ross, 1992). As per Landon (1980) consumer complaint behaviour as 'an expression of dissatisfaction by an individual consumer (or on a consumer's behalf) to a responsible party in either the distribution channel or to a complaint handling agency'. Consumer complaint behaviour as an action taken by an individual which involves communicating something negative regarding a product or service to either the firm manufacturing or marketing that product or service or to some third party organisational entity (Ruoh-Nan, Y and S. Lotz, 2009).

A service organisation considers complaining behaviour process as an opportunity to strengthen their relationships with their customers (Blodgett, et al 1995). Generally, a dissatisfied customer responds to service failures in a no. of ways. Dissatisfied customers either takes no action or take all the options by voicing a complaint to the seller, and to the third party, and exiting. In the literature many researchers, academicians and practitioners address this issue. A review of the consumer complaint behaviour literature shows the conceptualization of consumer complaint behaviour cited by Hirschman (1970), Day and Landon (1977) and Singh (1988).

An initial classification scheme was a hierarchical framework proposed by Day and Landon (1977). They suggested that consumers first decide whether to convey an expression of dissatisfaction (action) or to take an action. The second level decision concerns whether the response taken is public or private. Public actions include seeking redress directly from the organisation, taking legal action or complaining to public or private agencies. Private actions include boycotting the seller (brand switching) and/or engaging in negative word-of-mouth. Complaining to an airline following poor service on a flight would constitute public action; deciding not to fly with that airline again would constitute private action. Day (1984) suggested that the goals of complaining could be classified into three broad themes: redress seeking (complains to organisation or takes legal action in the hope of obtaining some form of compensation), complaining (engaging in negative word-of-mouth to make others aware

of the service failure) and personal boycotting (switching to an alternative provider).

Singh (1988) concluded CCB not as a homogeneous, unidimensional phenomenon but as consisting of three distinct dimensions- voice action CCB (refers to complaints directed toward the seller and also no action taken by the consumer), private action CCB (refers to negative word of mouth and exit from the exchange relationship) and third party CCB (refers to complaint actions directed at some formal third party like business bureau. Many researchers applied the Singh's (1988), taxonomy of CCB to religious services (Goff & Gibbs), restaurant service, (Shahid, 2013).

Many researchers examined the customer evaluations of service quality on gender basis (Snipes and Thomson, 2006) and role of gender in service failure and recovery (Mc Coll et al, 2003). It was found that there were significant differences between male and female respondents regarding their perceptions how service recovery should be handled. Women want their views heard during service recovery attempts and to be allowed to provide input. Men, in contrast, do not view voice as important (Mc-Coll Kennedy, Daus and Sparks, 2003).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample Design and Data Collection

The stratified sampling method is used in the study. The population is stratified on the basis of type of carrier. Accordingly, in Apr-Jun, 2008 the market share (domestic)

of full service carrier and low cost carrier was 36.5% and 63.5% and in the year 2010 it was 34.8% and 65.1% respectively.

For data collection the market share of the airlines is considered (irrespective of the airline) through survey method. A total of 305 (or 61%) of the 500 distributed questionnaires were sufficiently completed and returned by respondents. Out of which 20.98% (64) of the respondents didn't mention the name of the airline. The response percentage of respondents is 26.89% (82) and 52.13% (159) of full service carrier and low cost carrier respectively.

The questionnaire consists of a precise description about the respondents' latest dissatisfying /negative domestic air travel experience. Then, 10-items of consumer complaint behaviour intentions were measured on 6-point scale 1 being least likely to 6 being most likely taken from Singh, 1988.

SPSS 14 was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics like frequency, mean and percentage were applied to analyse demographic profile of the passengers. Independent t-test was applied to know about the significant difference between complainers and non-complainers.

Results and Discussion

The demographic composition of complainants (N=201) and non-complainants (N=104) is show in Table 1. It is clear from the table that out of 201 complainants, 134 (66.67%) are male and 67 (33.33%) are female. Majority of the respondents fall in the age group 20 to 40 i.e 144

Table 1. Demographic Composition of Complainants and Non-Complainants

S.No.	Variable	Complainants, N= 201		Non-Complainants, N=104	
		No. of respondents	Percentage	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Gender				
	(a.) Male	134	66.67	67	64.42
	(b.) Female	67	33.33	37	35.58
2.	Age (in years)				
	(a.) less than 20	14	6.96	06	5.77
	(b.) 20-40	144	71.64	59	56.73
	(c.) 40-60	37	18.41	27	25.96
	(d.) above 60	06	2.99	12	11.54
3.	Income (in Rs.)				
	(a.) less than 20,000	56	27.86	21	20.19
	(b.) 20,000-40,000	68	33.83	30	28.85
	(c.) 40,000-60,000	43	21.39	25	24.04
	(d.) above 60,000	34	16.92	28	26.92
4.	Travel Frequency				
	(a.) less than 5	74	36.82	46	44.23
	(b.) 5-10	79	39.30	31	29.80
	(c.) 10-15	34	16.92	17	16.35
	(d.) above 15	14	6.96	10	9.62

constituting 71.64% followed by 40 to 60 i.e. 37 (18.41%), 14 (6.96%) respondents fall in age group less than 20 years and 6 respondents (2.99%) belongs to above 60 years of age group. 68 respondents i.e. 33.83% belongs to the income group Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 40,000, 56 respondents i.e. 27.86% belongs to the income group less than Rs. 20,000, 43 (21.39%) falls in income group Rs. 40,000 to Rs. 60,000 and 34 respondents (16.92%) have the income above Rs. 60,000. The table presents 79 respondents i.e. 39.30% travelled by air 5 to 10 times in a year, 74 (36.82%) travelled less than 5 times in a year, 34 respondents (16.92%) travelled by 10 to 15 times in a year and 14 respondents (6.96%) travelled above 15 times in a year by air.

To study the airline passenger's complaint behaviour intentions, a 10-items scale developed by Singh (1988) to measure CCB intentions categorized into three dimensions: voice, private and third party is used. The intentions data were obtained on a most likely/least likely scale (coded 1

through 6).

Table 2 describes the descriptive statistics of airline passenger's complaint behaviour intentions. The results show that mean value for voice intentions (Mean= 3.96, SD= 0.80) is highest than private (Mean= 3.93, SD= 0.97) and third party (Mean= 2.78, SD= 0.85) intentions. It means that the respondents are actually engaged in voice actions.

There are 66% of the respondents complaint to the airline about the service failure and 34% of the respondents did not complaint. The highest mean score of voice intention (Mean=4.18, SD= 0.74) of complainants with respect to other two intentions i.e. private and third party (Table 3) show that complainants preferred voice actions.

Table 4 reveals that there is no significant difference between the voice, private and third party intentions of complainants and non-complainants at 5% level of significance.

Table 2. Statement wise response to Consumer Complaint Behaviour (CCB) Intentions

N = 305

CCB Intentions	Statements	Mean	SD
VOICE	1. Forget about the incident and do nothing	4.12	1.33
	2. Definitely complain to the airline staff members	3.85	1.16
	4. Complain to the airline staff members and ask them to take care of your problem	3.90	1.09
Grand Mean		3.96	0.80
PRIVATE	3. Decide not to travel by that airline	3.62	1.16
	5. Speak to your friends and relatives about your bad experience	4.02	1.23
	6. Convince your friends and relatives not to travel by that airline	3.54	1.29
Grand Mean		3.73	0.97
THIRD PARTY	7. Complain to a consumer agency and ask them to make the airline take care of your problem	3.07	1.10
	8. Write a letter to the local newspaper about your bad experience	2.72	1.06
	9. Report to the consumer agency so that they can warn other consumers	2.78	1.09
	10. Take some legal action against the airline	2.55	1.08
Grand Mean		2.78	0.85

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) of CCB Intentions of Complainants and Non-Complainants

CCB Intentions	Complainants, N=201 Mean (SD)	Non-Complainants, N=104 Mean (SD)
VOICE	4.18 (0.74)	3.54 (0.74)
PRIVATE	3.94 (0.93)	3.31 (0.90)
THIRD PARTY	2.92 (0.87)	2.51 (0.73)

Table 4. Independent t-test Between Complainants and Non Complainants

CCB Intentions	Complainants N=201		Non-complainants N=104	
	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
VOICE	7.214	.000	7.198	.000
PRIVATE	5.644	.000	5.705	.000
THIRD PARTY	4.073	.000	4.304	.000

* at 5% level of significance

Table 5. Comparison of Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) of CCB intentions of Complainants on the Basis of Gender Complainants

N=201

Consumer Complaint Behaviour Intentions Mean		Males, N=134		Females, N= 67	
		SD	Mean	SD	
VOICE	1. Forget about the incident and do nothing	2.63	1.28	2.66	1.21
	2. Definitely complain to the airline staff members	4.10	1.17	4.25	0.89
	4. Complain to the airline staff members and ask them to take care of your problem	4.18	1.08	4.18	0.82
Grand Mean		3.64	0.75	3.70	0.66
PRIVATE	3. Decide not to travel by that airline	3.61	1.18	4.01	0.95
	5. Speak to your friends and relatives about your bad experience	4.22	1.19	4.30	1.09
	6. Convince your friends and relatives not to travel by that airline	3.75	1.34	3.99	1.13
Grand Mean		3.86	0.97	4.10	0.83
T H I R D P A R T Y	7. Complain to a consumer agency and ask them to make the airline take care of your problem	3.16	1.16	3.27	1.10
	8. Write a letter to the local newspaper about your bad experience	2.87	1.16	2.90	0.97
	9. Report to the consumer agency so that they can warn other consumers	2.96	1.14	2.96	0.93
	10. Take some legal action against the airline	2.62	1.16	2.72	1.08
Grand Mean		2.90	0.92	2.96	0.77

Table 6. Comparison of Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation) of CCB Intentions of Complainants On the Basis of Age Complainants, N=201

CCB INTENTIONS Mean		Age less than 20, N=14		Age 20 to 40, N=144		Age 40 to 60, N=37		Age above 60, N=6	
		SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
VOICE	1. Forget about the incident and do nothing	2.43	0.85	2.69	1.31	2.46	1.07	3	1.67
	2. Definitely complain to the airline staff members	4.14	0.53	4.12	1.16	4.32	1.00	4	1.10
	4. Complain to the airline staff members and ask them to take care of your problem	4.21	0.58	4.12	1.04	4.38	0.95	4.33	0.82
Grand Mean		3.60	0.47	3.64	0.78	3.72	0.55	3.78	0.78
PRIVATE	3. Decide not to travel by that airline	3.93	0.62	3.76	1.13	3.46	1.19	4.67	0.82
	5. Speak to your friends and relatives about your bad experience	4.14	0.86	4.24	1.18	4.24	1.23	4.83	0.75
	6. Convince your friends and relatives not to travel by that airline	3.79	0.97	3.78	1.29	3.95	1.41	4.33	0.82
Grand Mean		3.95	0.61	3.93	0.95	3.88	0.99	4.61	0.49
T H I R D P A R T Y	7. Complain to a consumer agency and ask them to make the airline take care of your problem	3.21	0.80	3.18	1.20	3.16	1.04	3.83	0.98
	8. Write a letter to the local newspaper about your bad experience	3.14	0.66	2.77	1.11	3.03	1.14	3.83	0.75
	9. Report to the consumer agency so that they can warn other consumers	3	0.88	2.94	1.08	2.92	1.14	3.5	1.05
	10. Take some legal action against the airline	2.93	0.83	2.59	1.11	2.76	1.28	2.83	1.33
Grand Mean		3.07	0.68	2.87	0.88	2.97	0.89	3.5	0.82

Table 7 Statement Wise Response (Mean and Standard Deviation) to Level of Seriousness, Frequency of Failures Encountered and Affect on Satisfaction

N=305

Statements Mean		A. Level of Seriousness		B. Frequency of failures encountered		C. Affect on Satisfaction	
		SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
G1	Employee Response to Service Delivery System Failures						
G1A	Response to unavailable service						
1	Cancelled flight without prior notice	4.35	0.85	1.70	0.76	4.37	0.74
2	Non-availability of seat at departure terminal	3.86	1.03	1.54	0.82	4.15	0.83
3	Overbooking of passengers	4.17	0.84	1.51	0.73	4.29	0.72
4	No provision of any refreshment when there is long delay in flight	4.15	0.86	1.93	0.99	4.41	0.65
5	Flight delay	4.38	0.77	2.40	1.04	4.51	0.67
6	Non-availability of right information about flight delay	4.22	0.84	2.21	1.09	4.50	0.67
	Grand Mean	4.18	0.54	1.88	0.64	4.37	0.48
G1B	Response to unreasonably slow service						
7	Delay in refund of cancelled ticket	4.37	0.79	1.69	0.89	4.47	0.71
8	Rescheduling without prior notice	4.50	0.69	1.63	0.84	4.51	0.67
9	Provision of food not on time	4.03	0.91	1.65	0.88	4.36	0.78
10	Delay of baggage delivery	4.30	0.80	1.86	1.07	4.50	0.66
	Grand Mean	4.3	0.58	1.71	0.73	4.46	0.52
G1C	Response to other core service failures						
11	Mishandling of baggage	4.59	0.69	1.59	0.85	4.54	0.69
12	Food & beverage not of high quality	4.36	0.74	1.6	0.86	4.50	0.72
13	Missing of baggage	4.68	0.59	1.35	0.67	4.59	0.64
14	Exchange of baggage	4.64	0.70	1.35	0.65	4.6	0.69
15	Inconvenience due to non working of air condition in aircraft	4.24	0.88	1.36	0.66	4.50	0.72
16	Printing mistake on ticket	4.35	0.72	1.27	0.62	4.49	0.69
	Grand Mean	4.48	0.47	1.42	0.50	4.54	0.51
G2	Employee Response to Customer Needs and Requests						
G2A	Response to special needs customers						
17	Mishandling of carry-on items/delicate items	4.45	0.67	1.36	0.66	4.47	0.66
G2B	Response to customer preferences						
18	Less leg space	3.71	0.95	1.68	1.04	4.09	0.78
19	Allow to carry-on items at one sector & deny the same at another	4.35	0.75	1.43	0.76	4.51	0.71
	Grand Mean	4.03	0.69	1.56	0.79	4.3	0.62
G2C	Response to admitted customer error						
20	Staff shows unwillingness to assist the customer in solving the problem arises due to customer error	4.00	0.99	1.43	0.68	4.28	0.85
G2D	Response to potentially disruptive others						
21	Co-passengers show interrupted behaviour	3.96	0.83	1.44	0.69	4.2	0.78
G3	Unprompted and Unsolicited Employee Actions						
G3A	Attention paid to customer						
22	Inefficient staff	4.08	0.88	1.69	0.84	4.38	0.71

G3B	Truly out-of-the-ordinary employee behaviour						
23	Unfriendly & unhelpful attitude of ground staff members	4.36	0.76	1.73	0.79	4.48	0.71
24	Unfriendly & unhelpful attitude of crew members	4.42	0.75	1.65	0.81	4.54	0.68
	Grand Mean	4.39	0.69	1.69	0.73	4.51	0.63
G3C	Employee behaviour in the context of cultural norms						
25	Theft of items which are under the scrutiny of airline staff members	4.61	0.64	1.36	0.59	4.62	0.73
G3D	Gestalt evaluation						
26	Unfriendly & uncomfortable ambience for the travellers	4.27	0.88	1.73	0.89	4.57	0.69

The Tables 5 and 6 provides information about the complaint behaviour intentions of male, female and the respondents divided in four age groups i.e. less than 20 years, 20 to 40 years and 40 to 60 years and above 60 years among complainants. It has been seen that female in comparison with male and the respondents fall in the age group above 60 years got the highest mean score of voice, private and third party intentions which indicated that these respondents are preferred to complaint with the specified intentions.

In 'voice' behaviour intentions, male (Mean=4.18, SD= 1.08) and the respondents belongs to the age group 40 to 60 years (Mean=4.38, SD= 0.95) are highly intended to complain to the airline staff members and ask them to take care of the problem where as female (Mean= 4.25, SD= 0.89) are highly intended to definitely complaint to the airline staff members about the service failure.

In 'private' behaviour intentions, the highest mean value of male (Mean= 4.22, SD= 1.190), female (Mean= 4.30, SD= 1.09) and the respondents belong to the age group above 60 years (Mean= 4.83, SD= 0.75) show that they are highly intended to speak to friends and relatives about their bad experience.

In 'third party' behaviour intentions, the highest average values of male (Mean= 3.16, SD= 1.16), female (Mean= 3.27, SD= 1.10) and the respondents belongs to the age group above 60 years (Mean= 3.83, SD= 0.98) reveals that they are highly intended to complain to a consumer agency and ask them to make the airline take care of their problem.

The effect of service failures on customer satisfaction is analysed with the help of mean and standard deviation as presented in Table 7. Among all service failures, the failures that fall under category of employee behaviour in the context of cultural norms (Mean= 4.62, SD= 0.73) highly affected the satisfaction of customers i.e. if employee behaved negatively to cultural norms such as equality, honesty and fairness it definitely affected the satisfaction of customers.

CONCLUSION

Consumer Complaint Behaviour is a complex phenomenon. It refers to responses triggered by perceived dissatisfaction that is neither psychologically accepted nor quickly forgotten in consumption of a product or service (Homburg and Furst, 2005). The complexity in consumer complaint behaviour is reflected in the number of alternative taxonomies, schema and definitions proposed to explain this kind of behaviour. This study has provided significant information and insights on consumer complaint behaviour in airlines. The main objective of this study is to examine Singh's (1988) taxonomy of consumer complaint behavioural intentions (voice, private and third party) and effect of demographic variables on consumer complaints. The result of the study indicates that the passengers of the airlines are more intent to voice than private and third party. But there is no significant difference between voice, private and third party intentions of complainers and non complainers.

Passengers who choose to complain are found younger, middle income and more frequently travelled. In case of gender, male passengers complaint more than their female counterparts. But the majority of the female complainers are more likely to voice their complaints than their male counterparts. The results concur with Kau et al, 1995 and Heung and Lam, 2003 that female complainers have a higher intention to complain and tell others about the complaint if they are dissatisfied.

The study indicates that the young passengers are more inclined to complain than the older age group. But the old age group is more intent to take private actions for complaining and the reason may be not to indulge themselves in complex and time consuming complaining process. The findings are supported by Heung and Lam (2003) that the younger and middle age groups are more demanding towards the services. They complaint because they want that organization should rectify the failure situations and take appropriate action.

As far as service failures are concerned, they are unpreventable in the service delivery process of an organisation. The reasons of the failure may be known or unknown to the organization. The results of the study showed that the service failures encountered by customers' effect their satisfaction specifically when the employees behaved negatively to cultural norms such as equality, honesty and fairness.

For organizations, customer complaints are one of the sources to know about the service failure and the subsequent dissatisfaction of customers. Hence complaints and the process of handling them are important issues for service providers. However, many organizations still regard customer complaints as both an unpleasant fact of business life and a waste of time and money in investigating the concerns (Atalik, 2007).

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