

Acceptability of Virtual Tour Guiding as an Effective Knowledge Enhancer for Tourism Management Students

Niña S. Burce, Joan Valerie G. Javier, Angie Lyn T. Lazaro, Katherine Marie G. Gabriel, Micaella Mae A. Punsalan, and Marienela R. Francisco

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Abstract

The objective of this descriptive-correlational study is to evaluate the acceptability of tourism management students to virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. This study identifies the perception and action towards acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer for tourism management students relying on the context of their general beliefs and expectation on the effectiveness of virtual tour guiding through the use of the conceptual framework derived from Richard Gregory's Top-Down Processing Theory. The researchers used purposive sampling in conducting the study to the tourism management students. The findings of the study revealed that the tourism students have high regards on the acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer in terms of providing real-world experience, technology-based learning, generating interactivity, communication skills, offering powerful immersion, and providing extensive itinerary planning. Specifically, these are by giving informative learning experience about tourism, cultures, geography in a destination through technology. The fact that virtual tour guiding is a new training method for tourism management program, the students believe that practicing virtual tour guiding like actual tour guiding in a destination can provide a different yet informative experience about the place where they are visiting. Thus, the result concluded that virtual tour guiding is perceived as acceptable for tourism management students as an effective knowledge enhancer because of their high general beliefs, expectations, and perception on the actual experiences on virtual tour guiding.

Keywords: *virtual tour guiding, acceptability, effective knowledge enhancer, technology-based learning, descriptive-correlational research, Top-Down Processing Theory, tourism management students*

Introduction

For the last couple of decades, we have witnessed rapid advances in technology, the evolution of computer digitalization, and the emergence of new electronic devices, methods, and applications on a nearly daily basis. As virtual tourism and travel respectively take off, hotel chains and tourist attractions which then understand how to take advantage of the trend will position themselves for success to give their tourists an immersive impression of a particular activity, setting, or destination by means of technology. Wherein, the technical advances in electronic miniaturization and processing capabilities are allowing the progression of forceful systems that make audiences and the general public to discover different "kinds of realities" (European Commission, 2017). Digital platforms such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) have grown substantially and become prominent in recent years. Notably, with the scrutinized use of immersive visualization in tourism education aided to an interesting educational experiences and skills

associated with tourism expertise, along with excellent interpersonal skills attributed to a better grasp and interaction.

On the other hand, a series of issues and problems that arise in the context of resources and geographical constraints, compelling institutions to use digital platforms, hybrid forms, methods, and tools for a variety of teaching endeavors. Technology-based learning process is thought to be more effective and helpful to students, as well as to enhance instructors' effectiveness. Moreover, universities and colleges around the world are trying to adopt and integrate virtual techniques to help educational activities and tasks. More explicitly, in the field of tourism education, virtual guided tours are being applied as a valuable educational platform that leads to a more interesting and engaging, having brought expressive visuals in more unique settings, and strengthening students' potential to create specialized skills. Furthermore, the simulation of existing sites comprising a set of video images or through online travel conventions, for which visitors can use video communication to elevate and explore the use of immersive visualization to support equity, engagement, and learning for tourism management students. For instance, this may be an entertainment activity that was previously conducted as a virtual event for students, in the form of virtual guided tours that provide an overview, immersed experience, and useful perspective that enables promising tourists to acquire comprehensive knowledge of the destination without actually being there.

Seeing as social interaction in the virtual world facilitates, the exchange of information about tourist destinations, the sharing of personal experiences gained from visiting a destination, and the provision of up-to-date travel information which is more relevant than from a guidebook. The light of the fact that virtual worlds offer an interactive and entertaining visitor experience, tourism marketers usually use similar visual semiotic systems to promote destinations in virtual environments. As they do in the actual experience in travelling, enabling for instance, tourist information booths, replicas of popular attractions and guided tours. Besides, virtual tourism can activate the imagination of on-site destination users and increase the brand relevance of destinations and acts as a mechanism to fulfill the growing demand for impressive tourist experiences. With this existing paradigm shift in virtual guided tours, the study would like to find its acceptability to Tourism students.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the level of acceptability of tourism students to virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. Also, seeing the global tourism to be most affected due to broad implementation of travel restrictions during Covid-19, virtual tour guiding has been one the innovative approaches to augment the need in promotion in tourism.

Generally, this study is to give the tourism management students, tourists, tour guide, instructors, and the future researchers an idea addressing the acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. In that case, if researchers can determine whether virtual tour guiding is a viable option, it may benefit students by equipping them with the skills needed for the industry application, but also travelers, teachers, and future researchers.

This study aims to determine the acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer for tourism management students. Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the general beliefs and expectations of tourism management students on virtual tour guiding in terms of:
 - 1.1 Providing real-world experience
 - 1.2 Technology-based learning
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- 1.3 Generate interactivity
- 1.4 Communication skills
- 1.5 Offering powerful immersion
- 1.6 Provides extensive itinerary planning
2. What is the perception of tourism management students on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer?
 - 2.1 Providing real-world experience
 - 2.2 Technology-based learning
 - 2.3 Generate interactivity
 - 2.4 Communication skills
 - 2.5 Offering powerful immersion
 - 2.6 Provides extensive itinerary planning
3. What is the level of acceptability on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer for tourism management students?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the general beliefs and expectations of tourism management students on virtual tour guiding and the perception of tourism management students on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer?
5. Is there a significant relationship between the general beliefs and expectations of tourism management students on virtual tour guiding and the acceptability of tourism management students on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer?

Statement of the Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between the general beliefs and expectations of tourism management students on virtual tour guiding and their perception on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between the general beliefs and expectations of tourism management students on virtual tour guiding and their acceptability on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer.

Framework

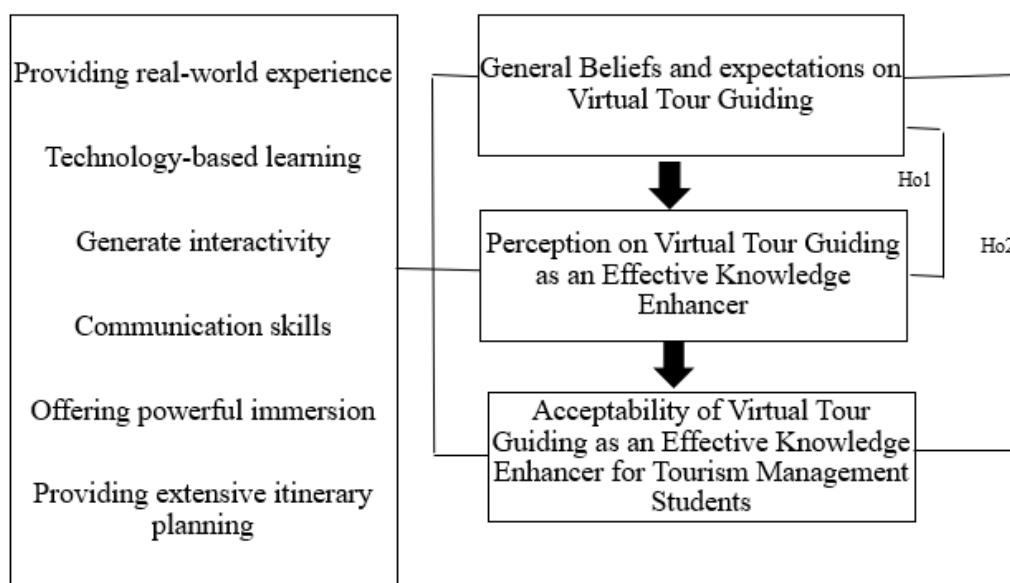
This study is supported by Top-down Processing Theory by a British Psychologist Richard Gregory in 1970. Top-down theories are hypotheses-driven and stress the importance of higher mental processes such as expectations, beliefs, values, and social influences. Throughout our lifetime we construct schemas, which consist of past experiences, prior knowledge, emotions, and expectations, and then use these schemas to form hypotheses upon the arrival of new information.

Top-down processing, perceptions begin with the most general and move toward the more specific. These perceptions and actions are heavily influenced by our expectations and prior knowledge, and inferences.

Top-down processing theory helped to identify the perception and action towards acceptability of the tourism management students to virtual tour guiding as effective knowledge enhancer on context of their general beliefs and expectations, as well as the stored knowledge of the participants on the effectiveness of virtual tour guiding based on their pre-existing knowledge, inferences based on their actual experience (*February 22, 2021*) and finally the perception and action towards acceptability of virtual tour guiding as effective knowledge enhancer for tourism management students.

Top-down processing happens when our general knowledge guides our specific perceptions. The upper part of the figure depicts the general beliefs and expectations of tourism management students on virtual tour guiding. Tourism management students can form perception by relying on the indicators listed and pre-existing knowledge present in virtual tour guiding, such as it provides real-world experience, technology-based learning, generates interactivity, communication skills, offering powerful immersion, and provides extensive itinerary planning. At the end, tourism management students can form their perception on the virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer and lastly its acceptability as an effective knowledge enhancer for the tourism management students.

Figure 1
Conceptual Paradigm of the Study



Methods

Descriptive-correlational type of research was used to identify, assess, and discuss the general beliefs, expectations, and perceptions of tourism management students about virtual tour guiding as a knowledge enhancer. The respondents of the study were tourism management students, specifically those who attended the virtual tour guiding event through an online platform. The researchers used purposive sampling to determine the respondents of the study. Tourism management students from different colleges were chosen to be respondents to collect data coming from their experiences in virtual tour guiding event. This study used an electronic survey questionnaire to gather data. The questionnaire is composed of four parts. The first part regards the profile of respondents who experienced a virtual guided tour. Second, is the general beliefs and expectations of the students on virtual tour guiding. Third is the perception of tourism management students on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. Lastly, how the following factors influence the level of acceptability of tourism management students to virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. The survey questions helped the researchers gain enough data to know the acceptability of tourism management students whether virtual tour guiding is an effective or not as an effective knowledge enhancer.

The names and contact information of the respondents from the virtual tour guiding event was secured from the event organizers. One by one, all respondents were asked for permission to be part of the study. Students who opt not to participate were not forced. Personal information such as photo, name, contact number, email and name of school are not disclosed in the presentation of the result of the study. All the respondents of the event were sent an electronic questionnaire via email and Facebook Messenger. A total of 123 tourism management students responded and completed the survey questionnaire (96 from local colleges, 27 from private colleges and universities). Following the assessment, the data from the electronic survey were gathered, tabulated, evaluated, and drawn a conclusion.

Weighted Mean was used to assess the data gathered from tourism management students who evaluated virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. On the other hand, Pearson r and T-test for significant relationship were used to test the hypotheses. Moreover, the following Likert Scale was used to determine the level of general beliefs and expectation/ perception/acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer for tourism management students.

Scale Used for the Level of General beliefs and Expectations/ Perception and Acceptability

Weight / Scale	Mean Range	Verbal Interpretation	
		<i>General Beliefs and Expectations / Perception</i>	<i>Acceptability</i>
5	4.50 – 5.00	Very High	Highly Acceptable
4	3.50 – 4.49	High	Acceptable
3	2.50 – 3.49	Average	Somewhat Acceptable
2	1.50 – 2.49	Low	Not Acceptable
1	1.0 – 1.49	Very Low	Highly Not Acceptable

Results

This presents the result, analysis, and interpretation of data gathered from the tourism management students on their acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer.

Table 1 suggests that students generally have high general beliefs and expectations for various aspects of virtual tour guiding, emphasizing the importance of real-world experiences, technology-based learning, interactivity, communication skills, and immersion in their learning experiences.

Table 1

General Beliefs and Expectations of Tourism Management Students to Virtual Tour Guiding

General Beliefs and Expectations	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Providing real-world experience	3.82	High
Technology-based learning	4.21	High
Generating interactivity	3.88	High
Communication skills	4.06	High
Offering powerful immersion	3.97	High
Providing extensive itinerary planning	3.97	High
Overall Weighted Mean	3.99	High

As shown from the above table, “technology-based learning” obtained the highest weighed mean of 4.21, verbally interpreted as “high” This shows that respondents believe that virtual tour guiding provide a different yet, informative experience about the place where they are visiting. The respondents have high belief that they can see and experience destinations without travelling to them by just experiencing this virtual event. The fact that virtual tour guiding is a new training method for tourism management students who use advanced technology, the students believe that practicing virtual tour guiding like as actual tour guiding can provide knowledge of learning experience about tourism, culture, geography of a specific destination through technology. This result supports the findings of Chiao et al. (2018), which concluded that the outcome after the use of the digital tour-guiding platform indicated learning effectiveness. Students became more aware of the culture characteristics and surrounding environments of a destination after learning about them in the virtual world. In relation to the present study, the high general belief of the students about the knowledge they gain on the impact of using technology by providing information because access is easier through the use of technology. Students may have a belief that this can be a new interaction with a full pledged concept, emphasizing the importance of interacting with people and devices in a virtual touring environment.

On the other hand, "providing real-world experience" obtained the lowest weighted mean of 3.82, yet still verbally interpreted as "high". The tourism management students still believe that virtual tour guiding can recreate a realistic representation or physical experience of a particular destination that is just as real as reality and can also engage interactive experience between the tourists even virtually. However, the result does not imply that tourism management students were not to believe in cooperating for the potential benefits of the virtual tour leading realistic and interactive experience. Despite this, the students demonstrated that they had strong views in this sentiment. Students may have different thoughts about the event, which is why these two received the lowest scores in terms of general beliefs.

With an overall weighted mean of 3.99 which is verbally interpreted as “high”, the tourism management students have a “high” general belief in virtual tour guiding. It is thought that because the circumstances like students will not be allowed to experience an actual tour will necessitate doing so through the use of technology, it is natural for tourism management students to hold strong general ideas about virtual tour guiding as they have firsthand knowledge or experience in tour guiding as a subject while taking the course.

Table 2

Perception of Tourism Management Students to Virtual Tour Guiding as an Effective Knowledge Enhancer

General Beliefs and Expectations	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Providing real-world experience	3.78	High
Technology-based learning	4.22	High
Generating interactivity	3.97	High
Communication skills	4.07	High
Offering powerful immersion	3.84	High
Providing extensive itinerary planning	4.01	High
Overall Weighted Mean	3.98	High

Table 2 shows the result of the tourism management student's perception on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. As shown from the above table, "technology-based learning" obtained the highest weighted mean of 4.22. This result means that most tourism management students have experienced virtual tour guiding can give informative learning experience about tourism, culture, and geography of a destination through technology. The result further implies that the students who act as tour guides in the virtual tour and the audience who watched and listened gained a thorough understanding and processing of information, as well as providing feedback on the development learning experience of the tourism management students. This result can be sustained by the recent study investigated by Pestek and Sarvan (2021), wherein their study revealed that virtual reality technology had a significant impact on the tourism and hospitality sector through three major interfaces: future tourism planning and management, technology-based learning for tourism destinations and VR potential in changing customer needs. This is related to students' high expectations for technology-based learning, which are met based on the learning outcome or the necessary information that they need to acquire for industry application. Furthermore, based on the perception of the tourism management students to their experiences, it appears that they both enjoyed the experience they encountered and received from virtual tour guiding.

However, the lowest perception of tourism management students to virtual tour guiding is "providing real-world experience". Despite this, tourism management students have a "high" perception to virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer in terms of providing real-world experience obtaining 3.78 weighted mean. This result indicates that tourism management students might think that virtual tour guiding can never replace the actual travel experience and knowledge. From the tourism management students' beliefs and expectations in generating interactivity experience to perception about providing real-world experience, it is not surprising that their level of perception on virtual tour guiding is the lowest. This could be explained by the difficulties or problems they encountered when using technology to complete the task. Barriers may include connectivity, devices, even access to technology, or, most significantly, the engagement and presence on the tourist destinations. However, acknowledging that virtual tour guiding has assisted them in developing their skills and competences, leading them to believe that virtual tour guiding makes virtual effective. In line with the study conducted by Spielmann and Mantonakis (2018), where the simulated setting together with all of its related effects (virtual guided tours) is built up with the goal of matching the real-world experience as closely as possible. Thus, considering that virtual tour guiding really acquired good participation in accessing the technology that enhance the overall experience and knowledge of the students like the ordinary setting. In comparison, the experience and knowledge they gained during the event may have altered their impression of virtual tour guiding. In this time of pandemic, it is preferable to take a virtual tour that will guide you even if the pandemic ends unexpectedly. A virtual tour guide, at the very least, can prepare them for the regular environment, assuming they have gained good engagement.

Generally, the tourism management students have "high" perception on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer having 3.98 weighted mean. It is thought that students perceived virtual tour guiding can make an engaging experience to see things and information they may have gained or learned from the event by means of technology. Consequently, tourism management students have a high perception in virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer.

Table 3
Acceptability of Tourism Management Students to Virtual Tour Guiding as an Effective Knowledge Enhancer

General Beliefs and Expectations	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Providing real-world experience	3.89	Acceptable
Technology-based learning	4.23	Acceptable
Generating interactivity	3.93	Acceptable
Communication skills	4.12	Acceptable
Offering powerful immersion	4.00	Acceptable
Providing extensive itinerary planning	4.14	Acceptable
Overall Weighted Mean	4.05	Acceptable

Table 3 shows the acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer for tourism management students. As shown in the above table, technology-based learning obtained a weighted mean of 4.23. This result means that the level of perception of the tourism management students is a reflection of their acceptability to virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer, as shown by their beliefs, expectations, and perceptions. The use of their stored knowledge and expectations, as well as the actual experience gained, have all aided tourism management students in concluding the acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. This result may be affirmed by the findings of the study conducted by El-Said and Aziz (2021), which has concluded that various tourism stakeholders accepted innovative methods like virtual tours (VTs) to retain their attractions firmly in the presence of potential visitors. As they also concluded that the qualities relating to the Virtual Technology (VT) itself, such as how simple it is to use, how it can generate interactivity, and, most importantly, how valuable the tour is, have the greatest impact on whether or not a person adopts VTs. In comparison to the study, the tourism management students still believe that how virtual guided tours can provide real-world experience and can generate interactivity has the most impact on whether or not people are willing to use VTs or not. Although, this is not about the technological experience, but the technological version of a guided tours which is artificially created or enhanced an experience for the tourists. On the other hand, providing real-world experience is the least acceptable with the result of 3.89, but still considered as "acceptable." From the tourism management student's beliefs and expectations to the actual experience gained, it is not surprising that their level of perception on providing real-world experience is the lowest. This might be conveyed tourism management students experienced that there is so many basic interaction problems, cannot feel the sense of reality on the particular destination and frequently wished that the tour would reveal important, contextually relevant details like an experienced realtor or tour guide might.

Finally, the overall weighted mean of the acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer for tourism management students was 4.05, which was verbally interpreted as "acceptable." The result from this table indicates that tourism management students' beliefs, expectation, and perception regarding to virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer are acceptable. Wherein, according to study of Sofronov (2018), it was found out that travel and tourism educators have already started to examine the potency of using technology and media in virtual worlds to improve learning outcomes. Asserted that virtual worlds employ guided tour concepts, providing real-world simulations and develops an effective learning experience along with acquired skills and knowledge in the field.

Nevertheless, the respondents recognize that virtual tour guiding gradually increase the engagement of giving information and a tour of a location even virtually with technology, contributing them to accept that virtual tour guiding is an effective knowledge enhancer. Thus, virtual tour guiding is acceptable as an effective knowledge enhancer by the respondents.

Table 4
Test for Significant Relationships on the following Variables

Variables	Computed r-value	Verbal Interpretation	Computed t-value	Decision	Interpretation
General beliefs and expectations of tourism management students and perception on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer	0.97	Very High	43.89	Reject Ho	Significant
General beliefs and expectations of tourism management students and acceptability on virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer	0.77	High	13.27	Reject Ho	Significant

The table shows the result of the test for significant relationship between general beliefs and expectations with the perceptions and acceptability of the tourism management students in virtual tour guiding. The computed correlation coefficient r-value (0.97) suggests a very high positive correlation between the general beliefs and expectations of tourism management students and their perception of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. This indicates that as the general beliefs and expectations increase, so does the perception of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. The computed t-value of 43.89 is associated with a rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho1). This implies that there is a significant relationship between the variables being compared. In this case, it suggests a significant association between the general beliefs and expectations of students and their perception of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer.

Moreover, the computed correlation coefficient r-value (0.77) indicates a high positive correlation between the general beliefs and expectations of tourism management students and their acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. This suggests that there is a positive relationship between these two variables, though not as strong as in the previous comparison. The computed t-value of 13.27 is associated with a rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho2), indicating a significant relationship between the general beliefs and expectations of students and their acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer.

Discussion

This study identified the acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer from tourism management student's beliefs, expectations and perception through the use of the conceptual

framework derived from Richard Gregory's Top-Down Processing Theory, the following findings are drawn:

The findings of the study revealed that tourism management students have high general beliefs and expectations regarding virtual tour guiding based on their general belief. Among all the aspects, it is the technology-based learning that got the highest beliefs while providing real-world experience got the lowest.

Furthermore, almost tourism management students perceived virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer relying on their general beliefs and expectation, to the actual experience they have gained in virtual guided tour held on 22nd of February, 2021. However, it is the technology-based learning where they are perceived as the highest. On the other hand, providing real-world experience got the lowest interpretation.

Through the use of their stored knowledge and expectations, as well as the actual experience gained, have all aided tourism management students in concluding the acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. It was identified that the indicators of virtual tour guiding is acceptable effective knowledge enhancer. Results further revealed that technology-based learning for tourism management students was perceived as acceptable. Meanwhile, providing real-world experience is the least acceptable.

For the hypotheses, both analyses show a significant positive relationship between the general beliefs and expectations of tourism management students and their perceptions or acceptability of virtual tour guiding as an effective knowledge enhancer. The very high and high correlation coefficients indicate a strong and positive association in both cases. The rejection of the null hypothesis further supports the idea that these relationships are statistically significant.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions are forwarded.

Seemingly, technology acts as a medium to address the growing demand for education. In this regard, virtual tour guiding is expected to be one of the significant technology products in the tourism industry but is believed to not replace the actual travel experience.

The research concludes that the result is linked to the Top-down Processing Theory, which was applied in this study. Students' perception levels are defined by how they perceive their experiences based on their general beliefs and expectations in terms of the six indicators represented. Through that perceptions begin with the most general and move toward the more specific. Thus, the researchers concluded that virtual tour guiding is perceived as acceptable for tourism management students as an effective knowledge enhancer because of their high general beliefs, expectations, and actual experiences on virtual guiding.

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