Employer Brand Knowledge (EBK), Sustainability Practices and Employer Attractiveness: A Perspective of Millennial Employees

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Abstract: Employer attractiveness is crucial in talent management as it helps attract, retain, and engage top talent, thereby ensuring a competitive edge and long-term organizational success. This study aims to determine the relationship between Employer Brand Knowledge (EBK) and various dimensions of sustainability practices on employer attractiveness, particularly among Millennial employees. A quantitative research method was employed, with 90 questionnaires collected from Millennial employees in a publicly listed company in Malaysia. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 25.0 to test the hypotheses. The findings reveal that only one dimension of EBK namely employer image has a significant positive relationship with employer attractiveness. Contrary to our expectations, none of the sustainability practices was found to be related to employer attractiveness. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how EBK influences the perception of employer attractiveness as it not only broadens the theoretical understanding but also provides practical insights for employers seeking to improve their attractiveness to the Millennial workforce. It is also suggested that employers who are more familiar with employees, have a positive reputation, and maintain a strong image are more likely to be attractive to millennials. Implications and recommendations for future research are also discussed in the study.

Keywords: Employer attractiveness, employer brand knowledge, sustainability practices, millennials, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Currently, the world of the 21st century is experiencing a revolutionary rate of change (Lim. 2023). Companies with the ability to anticipate and adapt to these changes may have a chance at ongoing success and to remain competitive (Rotatori et al., 2021). It is crucial for companies to fully understand the needs and goals of their employees to work with them accordingly. Such changes include the diverse generational mix in today's workforce where each generation holds different and unique characteristics thus leading to shifts in the way companies are managing their workforce (Becker et al., 2022). One of the generations that still have a huge representative in the workplace is the Millennials generally known as Generation Ys (Chapola, 2016). The age range identifying such generation varies from source to source but the general years range of millennials that will be used throughout this research are those born between 1980 to 2000 (Goldman Sachs, 2016; Schawbel, 2015). These Millennials demand rapid career satisfaction, thus, if their demands are not met by their employers then they would not be reluctant to leave which leads to the difficulty of retaining them (Waikar et al., 2016; Yap & Badri, 2020). Attracting and retaining the workforce is pivotal since it is projected that the current and future labor will face scarcity in several fields especially where special skills are needed (Wagner & Hassel, 2015; Kiel, 2020). Thus, the war for talent has been prevalent where employer attractiveness is becoming more important to attract and retain a highly qualified workforce (Backhaus, Stone, & Heiner, 2002; Schaarschmidt et al., 2021).

Employer attractiveness is referred to as the strength that the employer makes employees feel willing and voluntarily to stay and contribute positivity to the company through employees participating, perceiving, and experiencing life and work in the enterprise (Liu, Tao, & Han, 2016). Kashive and Khanna (2017) believe that EBK influences a company's employer attractiveness. Since the Millennials' EBK affects a company's employer attractiveness, employers must understand how they can influence the Millennials' beliefs (Collins, 2007). Another peculiar attribute of the Millennials is that they tend to show a huge concern for the environment and social responsibility issues (Barber, Taylor & Dodd, 2009; Eastman, Iyer, & Thomas, 2013; Chatzopoulou & de Kiewiet, 2021). Therefore, employers who adopt sustainability practices into their business operations will be deemed attractive by these millennials (Nappi-Choulet & Decamps, 2013; Nadanyiova & Das, 2020).

Sustainability practices accommodated by some companies can be seen from the environmental factors, social factors, and economic factors. Environmental factors can be seen when organizations engage in activities that do not negatively impact the environmental resources for future generations (Goel, 2010; Jerónimo et al., 2020). Social factors can be identified when employers adopt a fair business practice for labor, human capital, and the community that will benefit these people (Elkington, 1997; Janu, 2020). In addition, in terms of economic factors is when organizations contribute some economic value to the surrounding system in a way that enhances it and promotes its capability to support future generations' needs (Spangenberg, 2005; Khan et al., 2021).

Although it is proven in some research that EBK (Kashive & Khanna, 2017) and sustainability practices (Presley et al., 2018) contribute to employee attractiveness. However, these studies have been conducted in the Western regions so there is not much research done based on Asian regions, especially Malaysia. This leaves the context relatively unexplored so there is a need for more research regarding the variables to further explore what the concept entails in the Malaysian context. Thus, this study intends to: (1) identify the relationship between employer brand knowledge (EBK) (employer familiarity, employer reputation, and employer image) and employer attractiveness; (2) identify the relationship between sustainability practices (environmental factors, social factors, and economic factors) and employer attractiveness.

2. Literature Review

Employer Attractiveness

The employer attractiveness concept has been broadly discussed in the areas of management (Bakanauskiené, Bendaraviciené, Krikstolaitis & Lydeka, 2011), applied psychology (Collins & Stevens, 2002), communication (Bergstrom, Blumenthal, & Crothers, 2002) and marketing (Ewing, Pitt, Bussy, & Berthon, 2002). It has also become an increasing focus point in the modern business press (Ritson, 2002). It is believed that employer attractiveness plays a significant role as it influences the recruitment and selection processes and the retention of professionals (Helm, 2013). In other words, an organization that has high employer attractiveness has a higher possibility to increase profits and attract qualified employees (Bakanauskiené et al., 2011). Based on Pingle and Sharma (2013), employer attractiveness can be from an external view and an internal view of an organization. The external perspective concerns the attractiveness seen by prospective employees' while the internal perspective concerns the level of attractiveness seen by an organization's current employees. This study utilized employee attractiveness from an internal perspective.

Employer Branding Knowledge (EBK) and Employer Attractiveness

EBK provides people with a template to group, retain, and recall employer-related information. These related dimensions influence employer attractiveness to induce an organization as a desired workplace (Kashive & Khanna, 2017), The EBK in this study involves dimensions such as employer familiarity, employer reputation, and employer image. Firstly, employer familiarity is deemed as the ease with which an employer brand name comes to mind and the level of awareness of an employer (Cable & Turban, 2001; Collins & Stevens, 2002). On the other hand, Highhouse, Broadfoot, Yugo, and Devendorf (2009) define employer reputation as an internationally recognized and temporarily stable reputation of an organization shared by the general public's evaluative judgment. Employer image is a combination of short-term mental descriptions of specific characteristics of a company as an employer as held by individuals. (Highhouse et al., 2009). Thus, EBK provides a template to categorize, store, and recall employer-related information (Cable & Turban, 2001).

Low and Woo (2009) conducted a study among final-year students of hospitality and tourism courses at four tertiary schools located in the Klang Valley. The findings from 280 students discovered that the relationship between employer image and employer attractiveness is particularly high thus stimulating job seekers' employment decisions at a company. In addition, Collins and Stevens (2002) also proved that there is a relationship between employer image and employer attractiveness where they used the customer-based brand equity theory to predict how positive employer image may affect the employer attractiveness thus stimulating the application decisions of engineering students. Meanwhile, Saini, Rai, and Chaudhary (2014) found that employer familiarity positively impacts employer attractiveness in a study they have done among job applicants of 12 firms in an Indian context.

Furthermore, Turban and Cable (2003) have proven that employers who have better reputations are deemed more attractive to job applicants where the data was obtained from career services offices at business schools at two universities. Collins and Han (2004) have also conducted a study where the data for 99 organizations collected from multiple sources provided evidence that employer reputation influences employer attractiveness. Moreover, Lievens et al. (2005) have received the same result where employer attractiveness is influenced by employer reputation among Belgian armed forces applicants. This is supported by Kashive and Khanna (2017) who have proven that employer reputation is directly related to employer attractiveness in a study conducted among final-year students of computer science courses noting their perception of IT companies. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between employer brand knowledge and employer attractiveness.

H1a: There is a positive relationship between employer familiarity and employer attractiveness.

H1b: There is a positive relationship between employer reputation and employer attractiveness.

H1c: There is a positive relationship between employer image and employer attractiveness.

Sustainable Practices and Employer Attractiveness

This study defines sustainability practices according to the Brundtland Commission (1987) as the development that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition, sustainability practices are the organizations' business practices to maintain the qualities that are valued in the physical environment. Sustainability practices are also characterized by environmentally friendly practices initiated by a company to become a more sustainable organization. A sustainable company considers its actions in the economic, social, and environmental dimensions (Elkington, 1997). For example, it seeks profit but reduces the negative impact of its profit-seeking activities on the environment efficiently, through environmental management, and performs social actions for the community, through social responsibility (Azevedo, Carvalho, & Machado, 2011). This study characterized sustainable practices into three dimensions. Firstly, environmental factors where organizations engage in activities that do not negatively impact the environmental resources for future generations (Goel, 2010). Secondly, social factors are referred to as adopting fair business practices for the labor, human capital, and community that will benefit these people (Elkington, 1997). Finally, economic factors which are referred to an organization's contribution to economic value to the surrounding system in a way that enhances it and promotes its capability to support future generations' needs (Spangenberg, 2005).

A study done by Aiman-Smith, Bauer, and Cable (2001) used a sample of business students and the results showed ecological rating most strongly affects employer attractiveness. This shows that organizations that are deemed attractive are those that practice sustainability towards the environment. A recent study conducted among job seekers at a career fair tested the environmental dimension of sustainability practices and found that organizations that adopt sustainability practices are deemed more attractive as employers (Jones, Willness & Madey, 2014). Another study also found that sustainability practices in terms of environmental factors do positively impact employer attractiveness among college students entering the job market (Presley et al. 2018). In another study to examine the effects of a pro-environmental corporate message on prospective applicants' attitudes toward a fictitious hiring organization, it was found that the environmental support message positively affected job pursuit intentions. In other words, the applicants are attracted to the company since it adopts sustainability practices in their business operations (Behrend, Baker, & Thompson, 2009).

Moreover, a study has proven that job applicants have higher self-images when working for socially responsible firms thus deducing that socially responsible organizations are perceived as more attractive as an employer (Greening & Turban, 2000). Furthermore, the same study that was tested on job seekers at a career fair found that organizations that have community involvement referring to social factors are deemed more attractive as an employer (Jones et al., 2014). Other researchers have supported previous research results since they found out that soon-to-graduate college students deem organizations more attractive when they conduct sustainability practices socially (Presley et.al, 2018). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2: There is a positive relationship between sustainability practices and employer attractiveness.

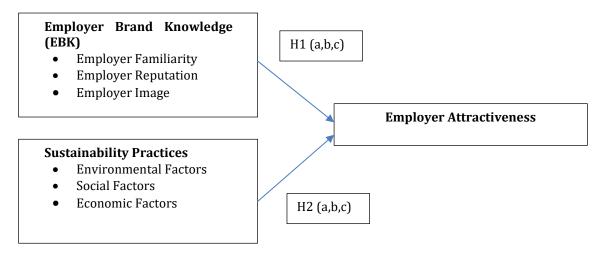
H2a: There is a positive relationship between environmental factors and employer attractiveness.

H2b: There is a positive relationship between social factors and employer attractiveness.

H2c: There is a positive relationship between economic factors and employer attractiveness.

Figure 1 displays the research framework.

Figure 1: Research Framework



3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative approach to test and verify the possibility of a relationship. The type of investigation is correlational study and hypotheses testing where variables were measured through statistics analysis. The time horizon in this study is cross-sectional which means it entails collecting data at and concerning one point in time to make inferences about a population of interest (Hall & Lavrakas, 2008). The respondents of the study were Millennial employees working in a private limited company that provides transportation services in Malaysia. The age range identifying such generation varies from source to source but the general years range of millennials that will be used throughout this research are those born between 1980 to 2000 (Goldman Sachs, 2016; Schawbel, 2015). Millennial employees were chosen as the respondents since they make up almost 70 percent of the total workforce in the company.

Data were collected using survey questionnaires. A purposive sampling technique was chosen to select the respondents as those who fit the definition of Millennial employees were given the survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was developed using the English language. Simple English language is used since it is an international language, and respondents are expected to understand all the questions easily. A simple English language will minimize the risk of mistakes during the responding session. The data collection method used in the study was the 'drop off and collect' method where respondents were given the survey questionnaire personally and had 3 days to fill up the survey. Once the survey questionnaires have been completed, the researcher personally collected the survey from the respondents.

To measure employer attractiveness, five items from Highhouse et al. (2003) were adapted for this study. The researcher used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to strongly agree. Employer Brand Knowledge (EBK) on the other hand was measured using 16 items adapted from Collins (2006). Specifically, employer familiarity and employer reputation were measured by four items respectively, Employer image on the other hand used eight items in measuring the variable. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to strongly agree. The second independent variable of the study is sustainability practices. Represented by three dimensions namely environmental, social, and economic factors, these dimensions were measured using nine items adapted from Presley et al. (2018). Each dimension was measured using three items respectively. A Likert 5-point scale ranging from 1= unimportant to 5= very important was used to measure sustainability practices. All instruments in this study have been deemed valid and reliable as they were selected from established literature and have acceptable levels of reliability values. Before data collection, a pilot study was conducted among 30 Millennial employees and acceptable reliability values were established ranging from 0.73-0.85.

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This study utilized descriptive statistics, such as percentages, means, frequencies, and standard deviations, to determine the demographic profiles of the respondents. The study also utilized multiple regression analysis to determine the predictive relationships between the variables.

4. Results

This study aims to determine the relationship between Employer Brand Knowledge (EBK) and various dimensions of sustainability practices on employer attractiveness among Millennial employees in a publicly listed company, in Malaysia. Data collected from 90 respondents indicate that the study was responded to by 54.4 percent of female respondents as compared to 45.6 percent of male respondents. Most of the respondents (37.9%) range from 25-29 years old, followed by 30-34 years old (27.7%), 35-38 years old (17.7%) and others (16.7%). The majority of the respondents are Malays (75%) and are permanent employees (78.9%). Most of the respondents had been working with the current organization for 1-4 years (33.3%) followed by 5-9 years (26.7%).

Reliability analysis is done to measure the internal consistency of the items used in the questionnaire. Table 1 displays the results of the reliability analysis for all variables. It was found that Cronbach's alpha values for all variables used in the study ranged from 0.72 to 0.85, indicating that all instruments used are reliable and at an acceptable level.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Original	Items	Items Dropped	Cronbach's Alpha
Employer Attractiveness	5		-	0.85
Employer Brand Knowledge (EBK)				
Employer Familiarity	4		-	0.72
Employer Reputation	4		-	0.89
Employer Image	8		-	0.86
Sustainability Practices				
Environmental Factors	3		-	0.82
Social Factors	3		-	0.79
Economic Factors	3		-	0.84

Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis through mean and standard deviation values for all variables. Sustainability practices that consist of environmental, social, and economic factors have the highest mean value ranging from 4.04 to 4.11, followed by employer attractiveness (M = 3.79, SD = 0.64) and EBK dimensions ranging from 3.43 to 3.59.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Employer Attractiveness	3.79	0.64
Employer Brand Knowledge (EBK)		
Employer Familiarity	3.43	0.66
Employer Reputation	3.47	0.76
Employer Image	3.59	0.62
Sustainability Practices		
Environmental Factors	4.04	0.67
Social Factors	4.06	0.70
Economic Factors	4.11	0.62

Table 3 summarises the result of a multiple regression analysis on the relationship between EBK (employer familiarity, employer reputation, and employer image) and sustainability practices (environmental,

social, and economic factors) on employer attractiveness. The R-squared value of .53 suggests that 53 percent of the variance in the dependent variable is accounted for by these predictors. Based on the findings, only one dimension of EBK namely employer image was found to be positively and significantly related to employer attractiveness (β = 0.65, p < 0.01). The other two dimensions under EBK namely employer familiarity and employer reputation were found to have no significant link with employer attractiveness. Thus, only H1c was supported in the study indicating there's only partial support for H1. Similarly, none of the dimensions under sustainability practices were found to have relationships with employer attractiveness. Thus, H2a, H2b, and H2c were not supported.

5. Discussion and Implications

The study examined the relationship between employer brand knowledge (employer familiarity, employer reputation, and employer image) and sustainable practices (environmental, social, and economic factors) on employer attractiveness. Data were collected from 90 Millennial employees in a publicly listed company in Malaysia and analyzed using SPSS. The hypotheses proposed that each dimension of EBK and sustainable practices would positively influence employer attractiveness. However, the results indicate that only employer image – one of the EBK dimensions was found to be related to employer attractiveness. In other words, companies with a high and positive employer image have a higher employer attractiveness compared to the ones with a lower employer image.

Table 3: Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable:		
	Employer Attractiveness β		
Employer Brand Knowledge (EBK)			
Employer Familiarity	0.17		
Employer Reputation	0.04		
Employer Image	0.65**		
Sustainability Practices			
Environmental Factors	-0.03		
Social Factors	0.06		
Economic Factors	-0.06		
F Value	15.55**		
R ²	0.53		
Adjusted R ²	0.50		

Employer image is the employees' beliefs on organizational attributes and associations that portray the company as an employer. This may include size, location, pay, benefits, advancement opportunities, and other objective aspects of an organization (Cable & Turban, 2001). A cognitive employer image will only target specific aspects and might change over time since it is held by individuals rather than the public (Highhouse et al., 2009). A positive employer image is thus important in guiding job seekers' efforts to differentiate an organization from its competitors. Consequently, these employer images help the employees to generate a positive affective attachment to a company thus leading to a lower workforce turnover (Low & Woo, 2009; Syal, 2021). This signifies the significance of employer image as compared to employer familiarity and reputation as part of the employer branding knowledge. The result of the study is consistent with studies conducted by Low and Woo (2009), Collins and Stevens (2002), Kashive and Khanna (2017) and; Myrden and Kelloway (2014).

There are a few possible reasons for this finding. Firstly, the Millennials tend to emphasize extrinsic values such as money, fame, and image (Ng & Johnson, 2015). Based on Smidts, Pruyn and Van Riel (2001), some individuals want to belong to a group for self-categorization and self-enhancement. Therefore, they can feel prideful when they belong to a community that has social prestige. Thus, the relationship between employer image and employer attractiveness may be attributed to the fact that these Millennial employees can base their identity on organizational membership at a well-known company. Some might even go to the extent of fully committing to the company since they want to maintain their association and the benefits of being an employee at the company. Another possible explanation for this is that it relates to person-organization fit. Employees compare

the employer's image to their wants, needs, personalities, values, and beliefs. Thus, the better the match between the employer's company and the employees' value, then the more attractive employees see the organization (Yu, 2014). This is supported by research that indicates employees compare the organization's image with their own needs, personality, and values (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). When their needs, personality, and values fit the organization's image, the organization becomes attractive to them (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Although Millennials show a great concern for the environment and social responsibility issues (Barber et al., 2009; Eastman et al. 2013), however, none of the dimensions of sustainability practices contribute to employer attractiveness. Although the respondents deemed that sustainability practices are important since the variables have most of the highest mean compared to EBK. Nevertheless, this study has proven that sustainability practices are not related to employer attractiveness. These findings were also similar to earlier studies such as Ray (2006). A few reasons in justifying the findings. Firstly, sustainability practices may be perceived by the respondents as the least envisioned benefits that these employees see in organizations (Pingle & Sharma, 2013). Even though the Millennials believe in sustainability practices, however, they do not see it as a variable that leads to employer attractiveness since they believe organizations are normally expected to take up some responsibilities associated with a responsible employer (RER). Renowned economists agree and promote a perspective that some organizations adopt these sustainability practices just for their benefit and not because of their genuine concerns about the surroundings (Jensen, 2002; Newbert, 2018). This seems to imply that sustainability practices are less about giving back to the world and more about saving face for some companies. However, there are still other companies that genuinely believe in giving back to society (Sardana et al., 2020).

As induced before, employer image is never stagnant. There are always emerging trends, advances in technology, and differences of opinion about what works and what does not. Thus, for employers to increase employer attractiveness it is imperative that they continuously exert the utmost efforts in increasing their employer image. Thus, there are some suggestions for organizations to enhance their employer image. Since employer image is only a temporary mental representation of individuals regarding an organization as an employer of choice the organization must put constant efforts into maintaining its positive employer image especially when it comes to Millennial employees. It has been identified that if Millennials are unhappy at a company they will not be reluctant to switch jobs since they know their self-worth (Marston, 2007; Perkasa & Purwanto, 2024).

Firstly, employers might want to practice transparency in leveraging social media platforms. Millennials tend to rely on the internet for information (Tulgan & Martin, 2001; Park et al., 2021). Employment websites such as Jobstreet, LinkedIn and Glassdoor are highly important in this matter. Such websites must present an accurate depiction of what it is like to be working at a company whether it provides a flexible stress-free environment or a nine-to-five kind of company. The current and former employees' positive reviews on such websites regarding an organization can be a powerful marketing tool. Employers can also share true stories and quotes from their top employees about working at the company. Social media is great for sharing such stories because it is a very visual storytelling medium. This will most likely impact the millennials since they are often on social media. An image of employees having a great time at work sends a powerful message to anyone who is considering connecting with an organization. Telling its top employees' stories on the employment website is another powerful way to attract the right applicants for its vacancies. This does not only affect external stakeholders but also internally. This is because publishing a positive employer image may reinforce positive messages about the organizational culture.

Secondly, external stakeholders such as job seekers and customers tend to visit websites like Twitter, Facebook, and Glassdoor to acquire organizational information (Dabirian, Kietzmann, & Diba, 2017; Könsgen, Schaarschmidt, Ivens, & Munzel, 2018; Korzynski et al., 2020). Thus, employees are more aware of how these external stakeholders view their company online which will impact how they evaluate their employees themselves (Helm, 2013). This aligns with the social identity theory where employees relate themselves to their employer due to how others see the employer's achievements (Bouckaert, 2001). Employees develop a sense of collective pride in being organizational members when they see their employer as attractive online compared to competitors and are confident that other external entities also share the same view. Finally, to be

an attractive employer companies might want to step up their game in the business game and become one of the leading employers in Malaysia. Since the studied company is publicly listed, it is an advantage that it already has a brand and is known by the public. One of the initiatives that the company can take is to be at par with or better than other top employers in the country. Millennials demand rapid career satisfaction (Waikar et al. 2016), thus, companies may need to work on their talent management practices such as providing better career development, giving ongoing feedback, and providing attractive compensation and benefits packages. This will lead to improved employer branding and image and subsequently be perceived by the employees and potential employees as attractive.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it provides a better understanding not only in theory but also practically of how EBK influences employer attractiveness, especially among the Millennial workforce. In the war of talent, employers and their human resource practitioners must creatively develop their employer branding to shape the perception of an organization in the job market, enhancing its ability to attract and retain top talent, while also fostering employee engagement and loyalty, which ultimately drives business success. Thus, employers must fully leverage the employer branding concept not only in retaining and motivating the current workforce but also in attracting potential employees. In addition, the study offers valuable implications for companies aiming to attract and retain millennial talent in a competitive job market.

The recommendations for future research may be able to solve the current study's limitations. First and foremost, future research may want to widen the representation of the sample in various industries using probability sampling techniques. This enables researchers to create a sample that truly represents the population. Secondly, future studies may want to consider using other alternatives to the current statistical software that is more robust such as AMOS, PLS-SEM, and Stata. Such software shall allow greater precision in results. Next, future researchers might also opt for a longitudinal study where researchers will observe the subjects repeatedly throughout the time and the duration may extend over years or even decades. Researchers will be able to detect developments or changes in the characteristics of the subjects at sample and population levels. As longitudinal study extends beyond time, researchers can establish sequences of events. Lastly, future research may want to include moderating or mediating variables to better understand the interrelated relationship between the variables.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the study is done to determine the relationship between EBK (employer familiarity, employer reputation, and employer image) and sustainability practices (environmental factors, social factors, and economic factors) on employer attractiveness among Millennial employees. Data collected from 90 Millennial employees of a publicly listed company in Malaysia reveals that employer image was the only EBK dimension that emerged as a predictor of employer attractiveness. This study not only fills a gap in existing research but also provides practical insights for organizations aiming to attract and retain millennial talent in today's competitive job market.

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