

Promotion of Sustainable Tourism Industry: Government Initiatives through Instagram as a Social Media Platform



Ms.Maitrayee Shetye^{1*}, Dr. Rashmi Nair²

^{1*}Research Scholar at D.Y Patil Deemed To Be University Navi Mumbai. Email id: maitrayee.shetye@gmail.com

²Associate Professor at MET Institute of PGDM. Email id: rashmin_pgdm@met.edu

Abstract

The ever-evolving digital communication technologies have profoundly changed the tourism promotion landscape, especially social media platforms. This research explores the impact of government campaigns in promoting sustainable tourism using Instagram as a digital platform. The study is qualitative in nature and employs Braun and Clarke's six-step method of thematic analysis to analyse Instagram posts from official government tourism accounts. The research examines the sustainable tourism messages shared through images, captions, and hashtags and their effects, interpreted through the Stimulus - Organism - Response (S-O-R) approach. The study shows that government Instagram campaigns successfully raise awareness for sustainability, create favourable destination images, promote sustainable tourism practices and showcase grassroots tourism initiatives. The digital campaigns not only stimulate tourist perceptions and intentions but also boost the market presence of local businesses. The research also shows that heightened digital visibility supports the development of tourism entrepreneurship by providing opportunities to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) such as homestays, tour operators and artisans. Through extending the S-O-R model to economic and entrepreneurial outcomes, the study offers insights into the role of digital tourism communication in sustainable development and inclusive economic growth. This study adds to the body of research in sustainable tourism, digital marketing and entrepreneurship, particularly in emerging tourism destinations.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Instagram Marketing, Tourism Entrepreneurship, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Government Tourism Initiatives

1. Introduction

Sustainable tourism is a type of tourism that focuses on the sustainable use of natural and cultural resources and the socio-economic benefits in the long term for local populations. It aims to advocate for sustainable travel practices that do not harm the environment, culture or society. Globally, many regions have embraced sustainable tourism to avoid negative impacts from tourism development on the environment and culture (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2021). In India, places like Maharashtra have a tremendous potential for sustainable tourism, with their varied flora and fauna, picturesque views, multiple cultural practices and off-the-beaten-track destinations, especially with the advent of digital technologies.

Tourism has become one of the fastest-growing industries of the global economy and plays a vital role in economic growth, job creation and cultural exchange (Watson & Deller, 2022). Over the past few years, there has been a significant shift in the manner in which tourism destinations are marketed and experienced. This shift has been fuelled by the explosion of new communication technologies and social media in particular (Sigala, 2020). Crucially, tourism sector is also a chief enabler of entrepreneurship, in particular the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), eco-tourism, homestays and community-based tourism enterprises that support inclusive and sustainable economic growth (Ratten, 2020).

Increasingly, social media channels (Instagram, YouTube, Facebook) and travel blogs are used to promote tourism. These help destinations to share their beauty with the world in a fast and inexpensive way, thus increasing their appeal for potential travellers (Leung et al., 2013). Travel bloggers and vloggers play a pivotal role in this process as they share their travel stories, photos, videos and reviews, which shape the expectations and intentions of prospective visitors (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Social media has shifted the focus of traditional marketing from the top-down approach to user-generated content and tourism influencers' promotions, making digital content one of the most important aspects of travel planning in the modern world (Alghizzawi et al., 2018).

Of the social media platforms, Instagram is one of the most powerful and effective tools for promoting tourism because of its visual nature. This platform allows users to publish high-quality photos, videos and storytelling, which are great for tourism marketing. Instagram marketing is important in shaping tourism perceptions and affecting behaviours, particularly in terms of promotion through influencers and visual storytelling (Casaló et al., 2020). Beyond promotion, Instagram is a marketplace that boosts the profile of local tourism entrepreneurs and allows small and medium-scale enterprises to reach larger audiences, which in turn

helps drive entrepreneurialism, innovation and sustainable business opportunities.

Beyond digital marketing, government policies also contribute to sustainable tourism development and regional development in India. The initiatives, such as the ones promoted by the Ministry of Tourism, the Swadesh Darshan Scheme, the Dekho Apna Desh Campaign and many state-level tourism development programs, are aimed at promoting domestic tourism, enhancing infrastructure, and exploring local tourism. These schemes not only provide livelihood opportunities for local communities but also promote sustainable tourism. In addition, government initiatives for a digital campaign and policy support to the tourism industry develop a conducive environment for tourism entrepreneurship by empowering local entrepreneurs, enhancing the participation of SMEs and promoting inclusive and sustainable business models (Khalid et al., 2021).

There have been significant changes in the tourism industry in recent years with the rise of sustainability and the use of digital communication technologies. Sustainable tourism is essential to preserve the environment, culture and socio-economic progress of tourism destinations. But sustainable tourism is promoted effectively through innovative forms of communication that can reach a larger audience and have a greater impact on changing tourists' behaviour (Sharma et al., 2021).

Moreover, new tourism destinations and the less popular destinations struggle to gain exposure in the competitive tourism market. In such situations, government programs promoting destinations through social media platforms can be instrumental in boosting these destinations and promoting sustainable tourism. In turn, greater digital visibility via these platforms can create new business opportunities, open up market opportunities for local tourism, and support the development of SMEs and community-based enterprises (Kuckertz et al., 2020).

While there is a burgeoning research literature in the area of social media marketing and tourism promotion, these studies have so far mainly examined aspects related to influencer marketing, private tourist operators or general online marketing. There is a lack of studies on government-led social media marketing strategies to promote sustainable tourism destinations, especially in emerging tourism destinations. Crucially, very little is known about how such digital initiatives influence not only tourism promotion but also support and accelerate the development of entrepreneurial opportunities, SMEs and sustainable business ecosystems within the tourism industry.

Thus, it is important to understand how social media strategies developed by governments impact tourism promotion, perceptions of tourists and

sustainable tourism development, as well as facilitate entrepreneurial opportunities and economic growth (Gössling et al., 2020). Thus, the current study intends to understand the impact of government initiatives through social media in sustainable tourism promotion. Moreover, it aims to examine how social media platforms shape destination awareness, informing tourists' travel choices, and support sustainable tourism entrepreneurship, local businesses, and inclusive business models.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design is used in this study to understand sustainability narratives in government tourism authorities' Instagram posts. Qualitative research is suitable for analysing digital marketing content as it provides insights into the meanings, themes and patterns of visual and textual information. The research explores the interpretation of the narratives of sustainability communicated and promoted through social media and how these narratives affect tourism promotion strategies. Moreover, the qualitative design allows for an analysis of how these digital narratives support the growth of tourism entrepreneurship and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and promote inclusive tourism economic development.

2.2 Research Approach

The research adopts an interpretive approach, aiming to interpret the subjective meanings in digital messages. Instagram posts are examined as cultural artefacts representing government efforts to advance sustainable tourism.

It also enables the exploration of the role of digital storytelling and sustainability promotion in value creation for tourism businesses, increased market awareness of local tourism businesses, and the development of entrepreneurial ecosystems in tourism destinations.

2.3 Data Source and Selection Criteria

The research is based on secondary data from government tourism Instagram accounts. These accounts were chosen as they are institutional efforts to market destinations and share sustainability agenda.

The data includes:

1. Instagram images
2. Captions
3. Hashtags

Posts promoting sustainable tourism initiatives were selected for analysis. The selection criteria included:

- Posts explicitly related to sustainability, eco-tourism, or responsible tourism

- Posts highlighting natural landscapes, cultural heritage, or conservation efforts
 - Posts promoting government tourism campaigns
- The presence of content reflecting local economic activities, local community engagement and

promotion of local businesses were also included to represent the use of digital campaigns in promoting tourism entrepreneurship and SMEs. The Instagram content examined in this study are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Instagram Content Analysed for Thematic Interpretation

Content Type	Description	Analytical Role
Images	Visual representations of destinations, culture	Sustainability communication & destination image
Captions	Text accompanying posts	Narrative framing & behavioural messaging
Hashtags	Keywords and campaign tags	Trend identification & thematic clustering
Campaign Elements	Government slogans, initiatives	Policy communication & promotion strategy

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

This study used data collected through an audit of posts on government tourism Instagram accounts, over a specific timeframe. Posts were selected based on keywords, hashtags and visual cues related to sustainable tourism. Relevant posts were recorded and classified according to their content (photos, captions, hashtags). Where relevant, we also considered posts that highlighted local vendors, artisans, homestays, and community tourism initiatives as these are indicators of entrepreneurial activities within local tourism.

2.5 Data Analysis Technique

This research uses the six-phase process of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) for the data analysis. This approach is a common method of qualitative analysis used to identify, analyse and interpret patterns in textual and visual data. Thematic analysis is well-suited to this study as it provides a structured approach to exploring both sustainability narratives and their implications for tourism entrepreneurship, small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development and inclusive economic opportunities.

2.6 Thematic Analysis Process

Phase 1: Data Familiarisation

The initial stage of the analysis involved examining the Instagram posts, captions and hashtags to familiarise with the data. This phase also involved making preliminary observations about mentions of local businesses, tourism activities and community-based economic activities that were present in the dataset.

Phase 2: Initial Coding

During this stage, themes related to sustainable tourism communication were identified and coded. Codes were applied to aspects like environmental communication, cultural depictions and tourism marketing. Other codes were introduced to represent entrepreneurial dynamics, such as representation of local businesses, promotion of

tourism services and representation of community-based initiatives.

Phase 3: Theme Identification

The codes were organised into themes that encapsulated key ideas. Themes represented the key areas of sustainability communication in tourism promotion. At this point, the themes were also analysed in terms of their role in entrepreneurship, participation of SMEs and local economic development.

Phase 4: Theme Review

Themes were refined to ensure their clarity and relevance. This included ensuring that the themes captured the data and research objectives. Attention was given to themes focusing on environmental sustainability and business-related themes such as local enterprise development and access to digital markets.

Phase 5: Theme Definition and Naming

Themes were defined and labelled to capture their essence. The definitions were refined to achieve clarity and consistency. Themes were organised to emphasise the connection between digital promotion, sustainable tourism and new entrepreneurial cultures in tourism destinations.

Phase 6: Interpretation and Framework Integration

The final phase involved interpreting the themes in relation to the study’s theoretical framework, namely the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model.

1. Stimulus: Instagram campaigns, sustainability messaging, visual storytelling
2. Organism: Tourist perceptions, environmental awareness
3. Response: Behavioural intentions and sustainable travel interest

The analysis was also extended to explore how digital stimuli impact not just tourists' perceptions, but also economic outcomes, such as facilitating

interaction with local businesses; supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs); and stimulating the development of local tourism businesses.

2.7 Reliability and Validity Considerations

In terms of analysis, a coding process was applied to ensure reliability and themes were identified through a review. Patterns were consistently identified across various content elements, such as images, captions and hashtags. This was achieved by adopting the viewpoints of sustainability and entrepreneurship to ensure that the analysis is relevant in terms of tourism development, enterprise creation and business ecosystems.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The research utilises open and publicly accessible data from official government tourism Instagram accounts. Private data has not been accessed, and only publicly available data has been analysed. The research upholds ethical standards by using the analysis for academic research only and by recognising the influence of social platforms in promoting sustainable and inclusive tourism.

3. Results

Five major themes were identified through the thematic analysis of the government tourism promotion agencies' Instagram posts. Table 2 shows the main themes identified.

Table 2. Major Themes Identified from Thematic Analysis

Theme	Key Focus Area	Interpretation
Sustainability Awareness	Environmental conservation, eco-tourism	Promotes ecological responsibility
Destination Image Construction	Visual branding, landscapes, heritage	Enhances destination attractiveness
Responsible Tourism Behaviour	Ethical travel practices	Influences sustainable behaviour
Community-Based Tourism	Local culture, community participation	Supports inclusive development
Government Tourism Campaigns	Policy initiatives, promotional strategies	Drives awareness and engagement

These themes reflect sustainable tourism promotion and perceptions using digital communication. Further, the results show how these digital stories contribute to local economic engagement, business visibility and the formation of tourism-related business clusters. The thematic map of sustainable tourism promotion is shown in Figure 1.

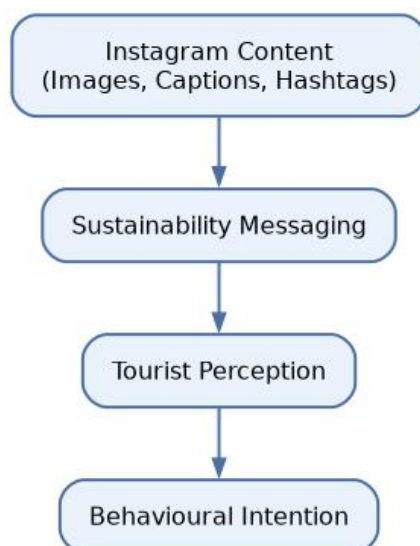


Figure 1. Thematic Framework of Sustainable Tourism Promotion Based on Thematic Analysis

3.1 Sustainability Awareness

A significant number of posts focused on environmental protection and sustainable tourism activities, raising awareness on conservation of resources. The posts often showcased biodiversity conservation, eco-tourism and conservation of natural resources. Images depicting forests, animals,

beaches and nature reserves were often used to promote sustainability. The captions and hashtags also highlighted the importance of environmental responsibility, urging travellers to adopt sustainable practices and visit eco-friendly destinations. Such posts were instrumental in raising awareness about

the need to balance environmental sustainability with tourism activities.

In addition to raising awareness, this type of sustainability content also helps drive eco-tourism entrepreneurship by creating a market for eco-friendly tourism services such as eco-resorts, nature tours and sustainable travel experiences provided by small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

3.2 Destination Image Construction

Positive destination image was created on Instagram posts using attractive images of nature, animals, and cultural heritage. Stunning images and compelling captions helped in the creation of a desirable and aspirational destination image. These portrayals promoted destinations as distinctive, culturally vibrant and environmentally important, with subsequent impacts on tourist attitudes and behaviour.

The application of storytelling, involving accounts of heritage, nature and local culture, added to the emotional value of the content. This also assisted in distinguishing destinations and promoting their branding strategies in the tourism industry.

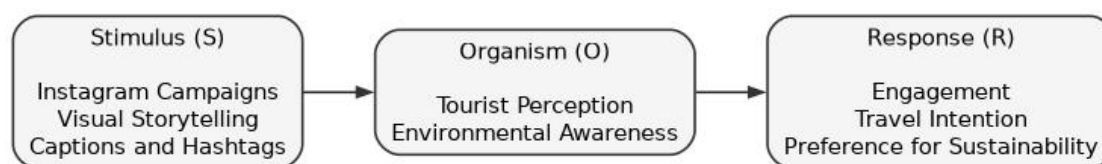


Figure 2. Digital Communication Process Influencing Tourist Perception and Behaviour

This behavioural shift also provides a conducive environment for sustainable business practices, as consumers are more likely to seek out services that are eco-friendly and socially responsible. This, in turn, supports entrepreneurs and SMEs adopting sustainable business practices, leading to long-term sustainable business and competitiveness in tourism.

3.4 Community-Based Tourism

Community engagement in tourism was often emphasised through posts that focused on showing local communities, traditional culture, and local businesses. Images often portrayed local craftspeople, cultural shows, traditional ways of life and community-based tourism activities. This portrayal highlighted the role of community involvement in tourism and demonstrated how local communities are involved in heritage preservation and tourism enhancement. It also showcased tourism's contribution to livelihoods and inclusive economic growth. The emphasis on community-based tourism is associated with the rise of grassroots entrepreneurship through which local communities engage as entrepreneurs with small businesses, handicrafts, cultural tourism services, and homestays. This representation raises

Creating a positive destination image also opens market opportunities for local tourism entrepreneurs as increased tourism leads to more revenue for small-scale businesses such as homestays, tour operators, handicraft vendors, and other service providers. This suggests the significance of digital marketing in creating market opportunities and business development in tourism.

3.3 Responsible Tourism Behaviour

Several posts urged tourists to practise responsible tourism behaviours such as litter control, cultural awareness and environmental conservation. These messages were conveyed through both image and text and often included hashtags encouraging responsible practices. The promotion of responsible tourism sought to change tourists' behaviour and promote sustainable travel. Through their emphasis on reducing environmental footprint and respecting local culture, these posts played a role in promoting environmentally sustainable and socially responsible tourism. The flow of communication and its influence on tourist behaviour is shown in Figure 2.

awareness of local entrepreneurs and promotes the creation of inclusive and sustainable tourism economies.

3.5 Government Tourism Campaigns

The Instagram posts showcased government campaigns promoting eco-tourism programs and sustainable initiatives. This included campaigns on national tourism promotion, cultural discovery and sustainable tourism, all presented in a visually appealing and informative manner. These campaigns successfully raised awareness about tourism destinations and promoted sustainable travel by shaping traveller choices. Hashtags, slogans and visual narratives increased the effectiveness of these campaigns. Besides promotion, these government campaigns are institutional enablers that facilitate tourism entrepreneurship through increased destination awareness, increased tourist demand, and opportunities for small and medium enterprises and local businesses. They play a role in building entrepreneurial ecosystems by connecting policy and market opportunities and promoting inclusive economic development in tourism sector. The interpretation of findings based on the S-O-R framework is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Mapping of Findings Using the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Framework

S-O-R Element	Components Identified in Study	Outcome
Stimulus (S)	Instagram campaigns, visuals, captions, hashtags	Exposure to sustainability messaging
Organism (O)	Tourist perceptions, environmental awareness	Cognitive and emotional response
Response (R)	Engagement, travel intention, preference for sustainability	Behavioural outcomes

The application of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework to the study findings is illustrated in Figure 3.

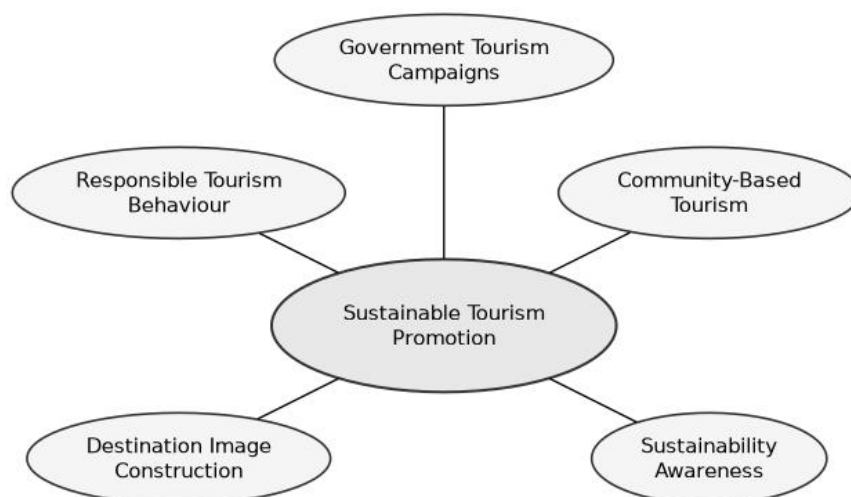


Figure 3. Application of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Framework in Tourism Promotion

4. Discussion

The study shows that government tourism agencies employ Instagram as a digital platform to strategically communicate sustainable tourism. Instagram content serves as a stimulus to shape tourism perceptions and attitudes towards sustainability by providing visual, sustainability-oriented and destination narratives. The insights from this study highlight the increasing role of digital media in evolving the way tourism promotion is done from a one-way to a two-way, participatory and experience-based communication process (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Specifically, Instagram offers interactive and real-time communication and distribution of sustainability messages, increasing the impact of government tourism campaigns. The storytelling and sustainability communication through Instagram images play an important role in raising environmental awareness among potential tourists. Through photos, captions, and hashtags, government campaigns convey messages related to sustainable tourism principles, environmental and cultural conservation. These communication methods are vital in eliciting cognitive and emotional reactions from tourists to result in a more informed and mindful approach to travel (Rees et al., 2015). The results are in line with previous studies that emphasise the contribution of digital media in

the formation of perceptions and behavioural intentions in tourism (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). This research illustrates the use of the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model to understand the impact of digital tourism campaigns on tourist behaviour. Tourism campaigns on Instagram, sustainability communication and storytelling of sustainability are stimuli (S) that affect the organism (O) - perception of tourists, environmental consciousness and sustainability attitude (Islam et al., 2018). This, in turn, triggers behavioural responses (R) such as increased tourist engagement with tourism information, desire to visit sustainable destinations, and choice for sustainable tourism practices (Lou & Yuan, 2021). This confirms the importance of digital communication tactics in influencing psychological and behavioural aspects of tourism consumption. This study not only underscores the impact of digital tourism communication on tourist behaviour but also reveals its role in promoting tourism entrepreneurialism and regional growth. Greater visibility of destinations through Instagram campaigns creates opportunities for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) such as homestays, tour operators, artisans and community-based tourism businesses. These digital campaigns offer such support to local businesses by connecting local culture, services and experiences to potential

tourists and offering opportunities for entrepreneurship in tourism (Nambisan et al., 2019). This implies that Instagram is not only a marketing platform but also acts as an economic inclusion and entrepreneurial platform.

Moreover, the focus on local culture and community-based tourism suggests that the government's digital campaigns promote inclusive development by encouraging local community engagement in tourism. Communities are positioned as both cultural ambassadors and economic players and thus enhance the tourism-livelihood nexus. This is consistent with the goals of sustainable development, which integrates economic, social and environmental aspects (Hall et al., 2021). Here, online promotion of tourism serves as a conduit between policy and economic impacts.

The study also implies that sustainable tourism promotion does not only impact tourist perceptions but also market demand for sustainable tourism products. With increasing environmental awareness among tourists, there is an increasing demand for sustainable accommodation, ethical travel and cultural considerations in tourism (Khan et al., 2022). This trend in market demand opens the door for entrepreneurs to explore new and sustainable business opportunities in line with the changing market needs (Díaz-García et al., 2015). As such, sustainability communication can be seen as a market creation strategy that promotes the development of sustainable enterprises.

From a strategic point of view, government tourism campaigns have a two-fold role. Firstly, they advertise destinations and shape tourism consumption patterns and secondly, they play the role of institutional facilitators for tourism enterprises. Through enhancing destination awareness and promoting sustainable tourism, these campaigns help attract more tourists, which, in turn, benefits destination enterprises and job creation (Font et al., 2019). This underscores the need for digital communication strategies to be aligned with economic and entrepreneurial development objectives to ensure sustainable tourism development (Li et al., 2018).

In summary, the research adds to the body of knowledge by broadening the scope of the S-O-R model from behavioural to economic and entrepreneurial impacts. It shows that digital tourism campaigns not only affect tourist perceptions and behaviours but also have far-reaching impacts on matters related to business opportunities, SME involvement and inclusive economic development (Brouder, 2020). This holistic view enhances the study's relevance to the fields of sustainable entrepreneurship, innovation and regional development.

5. Conclusion

The research underscores the increasing significance of social media, especially Instagram, in the promotion of sustainable tourism by governments. Through the examination of digital content produced by government tourism stakeholders, the study showcases how sustainability promotion, storytelling and branding strategies affect tourist attitudes and intentions. The use of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model offers a systematic analysis of how digital stimuli influence consumer awareness, attitudes, and behaviours towards sustainable tourism. The research not only highlights the impact on tourist behaviour but also the economic and entrepreneurial benefits of digital tourism marketing. Public sector Instagram campaigns for tourism not only increase destination awareness but also stimulate tourism entrepreneurship by empowering local businesses, such as small to medium enterprises (SMEs), homestays, and community-based tourism ventures. This underscores the contribution of digital media in promoting inclusive development and fostering local business ecosystems in tourism. The research indicates that the integration of sustainability messages into digital marketing approaches can have benefits for the environment and the economy. The research also highlights the need for coordinated government tourism policy and entrepreneurship to leverage digital promotion. In summary, the study advances knowledge of sustainable tourism, digital communication and entrepreneurship, providing insights for policymakers, tourism managers and local businesses to harness the potential of social media for sustainable and inclusive growth.

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