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EXPLORING THE PERSONAL GROWTH OF SINGLE MOTHER MICRO-ENTREPRENEURS IN HULU LANGAT

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ABSTRACT

There is still much to learn about the entrepreneurial experiences of single mothers. Based on studies on the expansion of single mothers' businesses, this paper makes its case. The data used in this study were drawn from recent research on single mothers in Malaysia, as well as empirical data. The entire process of becoming an entrepreneur, from seeing an opportunity to learning new skills and realizing profits, is covered under the theory of entrepreneurial value creation. Using a qualitative methodology, the data for this study were obtained. Two individuals who are members of the Women and Single Mother Society (WITUS) and entrepreneurs were interviewed in depth. The results showed that the primary obstacles were a lack of entrepreneurial abilities and business resources, social stigma, and difficulty balancing personal and professional obligations. Entrepreneurs who are single mothers primarily rely on their personal resources and unofficial support network to sustain their company. The informal support structure, while helpful, cannot strengthen their personal financial situation or ensure the continued existence of their enterprises. These entrepreneurs are single mothers, yet it doesn't appear like personal problems are holding them back. Both direct and indirect consequences of knowledge barriers are felt by growing businesses. As seen in this context, the obstacles stem from a low level of management expertise.

Keywords: Entrepreneurs, Single mother, Personal growth, Qualitative, Entrepreneurial value creation

INTRODUCTION

Single mothers have increasingly participated in micro-entrepreneurship as a strategy to improve household income, achieve financial independence, and enhance family well-being. In many developing countries, including Malaysia, entrepreneurship among single mothers has been recognized as an important mechanism for reducing poverty and advancing socio-economic empowerment (Nordin, Daud, & Hanim, 2020). Despite the growing number of women-owned micro-enterprises, single-mother entrepreneurs continue to face significant challenges in sustaining and expanding their businesses. These challenges include limited financial resources, inadequate business knowledge, lack of entrepreneurial skills, and restricted access to social and institutional support networks (Salmah Topimin et al., 2019). Such constraints often hinder their ability to compete effectively in increasingly dynamic and technology-driven markets.

Previous studies have highlighted that many single-mother entrepreneurs struggle with business sustainability due to limited exposure to entrepreneurial training, difficulties accessing capital, and insufficient knowledge of organizational management and market opportunities (Suraiya Ishak & Ahmad Rafli Che Omar, 2021). In addition, bureaucratic procedures and strict qualification requirements for financial assistance further reduce opportunities for business growth among vulnerable groups. Research also indicates that gaps in digital literacy and technological competencies negatively affect the competitiveness of micro-enterprises operated by single mothers, particularly in adapting to online business environments and digital marketing platforms (Yusof & Mahmud, 2021). These limitations demonstrate the need for continuous entrepreneurial education, mentoring, coaching, and family support systems to strengthen resilience and improve business performance.

Furthermore, organizations and community-based agencies play a crucial role in supporting the development of single-mother micro-entrepreneurs through training programs, financial aid, business consulting, and networking opportunities. Government initiatives and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Malaysia have introduced various empowerment programs to enhance entrepreneurial capabilities among single mothers; however, the effectiveness of these initiatives remains inconsistent due to resource limitations, lack of coordination, and inadequate long-term monitoring (Rahim, Osman, & Ramli, 2020). Consequently, there is a need to better understand the roles organizations play in supporting single-mother entrepreneurs, as well as the barriers to implementing sustainable entrepreneurial development programs.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences of single mothers engaged in micro-entrepreneurship by examining the organizational roles, challenges, and future opportunities for entrepreneurial development within the community. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the forms of support available to single-mother entrepreneurs, investigate organizational challenges in fostering business growth, and propose recommendations to enhance the sustainability and success of single-mother micro-enterprises. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What roles are involved in the community's development of micro-entrepreneurs who are single mothers?
2. What challenges do organizations face in fostering the growth of micro-entrepreneurs who are single mothers in the community?
3. What recommendations can support the future success of single mother micro-entrepreneurs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Entrepreneurs

Women face obstacles to becoming entrepreneurs due to family concerns, cultural constraints, a lack of technical knowledge, a lack of confidence, and mobility restrictions, according to the article "Women Entrepreneurship: Challenges and Solutions" (Gaum Manta, 2020). Novel research approaches can result from analyzing the entrepreneurial models and processes employed by female-led businesses (Arvind and Ranjith, 2023). Legal constraints, lack of experience, and high prices are among the obstacles faced by female entrepreneurs. The perception of their vulnerability and the middleman's meddling provides obstacles for female entrepreneurs. Women are important in entrepreneurship, and policies and initiatives should support them in starting their own companies. Social media can help female entrepreneurs succeed despite the obstacles they face. (Arvind and Ranjith, 2023).

A market for the product, better management, financial resources, macro-environmental conditions, and the impact of motherhood were shown to be factors that would either aid or impede women entrepreneurs in research on the subject (Kalley, Baumer, 2015). According to additional studies on female entrepreneurs, the difference between male- and female-owned companies was greater in advanced economies with a high degree of innovation when women were engaged in firms essential to producing necessities. Women will succeed in entrepreneurial endeavors as long as they have access to the right capital, network of support, and social infrastructure, which is a surprising but important conclusion (Arvind and Ranjith, 2023).

Based on a 2015 essay by Rozita Abdul Mutalib that examines the variety of entrepreneurship programs offered in Malaysia with a focus on those specifically intended for female entrepreneurs. It draws attention to the disparity in the number of programs designed to support women in business and underscores the need to empower women in entrepreneurship. The essay offers a comprehensive analysis of the current state of Malaysia's entrepreneurial environment by examining the effectiveness of government-backed support for business owners and the challenges faced by female business owners there (Rozita Abdul Mutalib, 2015).

In addition, the importance of female entrepreneurship in Malaysia is emphasized, emphasizing the critical role that women play in accelerating economic progress (Rozita Abdul Mutalib, 2015). It examines the unique challenges faced by female business owners in Malaysia as well as the various initiatives and plans implemented by government agencies to encourage female entrepreneurship. The purpose of this essay is to critically analyze this program, shed light on the opportunities and obstacles faced by female entrepreneurs, and further our understanding of Malaysia's entrepreneurial landscape (Rozita Abdul Mutalib, 2015).

The article "Women Entrepreneurship in Malaysia: A Formidable Economic Force" reports that women account for 20% of the country's 650,000 registered entrepreneurs (Cedar, 2021). Despite these obstacles, the potential and achievements of Malaysian women entrepreneurs are astounding. The full potential of many great female entrepreneurs is not realized due to cultural barriers and unequal opportunities. Given the unrealized potential of female entrepreneurs due to societal constraints, it is imperative that this problem be addressed and that a more accepting and encouraging environment for women in business be fostered (Cedar, 2021).

Malaysia has the potential to fully unleash the potential of female entrepreneurs and utilize their contributions for sustainable economic growth and progress by recognizing and addressing the societal attitudes and unfair opportunities that hinder them. To create a more affluent and inclusive entrepreneurial climate in Malaysia, it is imperative to establish a supporting ecosystem, provide equal opportunities, and encourage women entrepreneurs.

Single Mother Entrepreneur

The Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development (KPWKM) is the official ministry in Malaysia that oversees promoting the objective of women's empowerment. Under KPWKM, several initiatives, particularly those for single mothers, have been launched to enhance the socioeconomic status of Malaysian women. The first step to accessing most of the aid available to single moms in Malaysia, according to KPWM (2019), is to register with the Social Welfare Department. However, a small proportion of single mothers have registered with Women's Social Development, thereby preventing many of them from being eligible for additional government assistance (Mahat N et al., 2019).

The Malaysian government produced a specific action plan on 3 June 2015, called the Single Mothers Empowerment Action Plan (2015-2020) (KPWM, 2019). The action plan has three strategic themes: empowering the single mother economy, promoting the social well-being of single mothers, and improving the coordination of research and development for single mothers.

In line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), discrimination against women is described as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field." This declaration is reflected in the action plan (Mahat N et al., 2019).

Consequently, the action plan demonstrates the government's intention to assist single moms in accordance with the convention declaration, especially those from low-income families. The first focus's four pillars address entrepreneurship and business-related activities as a means of empowering single moms. The four strategic pillars are to: help single mothers with experience and skills find capital to launch or grow their businesses; assist single mothers with business ownership in

marketing their products and services; and educate other single mothers about the current (available) financial incentives for economic empowerment. Improving the knowledge and skills of single mothers in entrepreneurship.

The government of Malaysia appears to be interested in empowering single moms through business endeavors, as seen by the strategic action plans designed for them. To be competitive in the market, single mothers are expected to take every opportunity to grow their enterprises. That's why this inquiry aims to understand how quickly their business is developing and identify any roadblocks.

Entrepreneurial Value Creation Theory

The entrepreneurial value-creation theory, according to Mischara and Zachary (2014), encompasses all aspects of being an entrepreneur, from recognizing an opportunity to gaining knowledge and expertise to realizing profits. The notion of entrepreneurship presents a two-phase framework for generating value. Entrepreneurs use their resources to identify external opportunities and acquire the skills they need to advance to the second stage of venture development during the first stage. The desire for an entrepreneurial payoff is what drives this. This is the moment where many attempts fail. To spur growth, entrepreneurs may seek external resources such as venture capital or strategic alliances during the second stage of venture monetization. Determining entrepreneurial skills and venture quality is a problem for investors. Entrepreneurs can use incentive signals to raise investor valuation bids (Mishra and Zachary, 2014).

Malaysian women entrepreneurs are presently in the introduction phase of their business ventures, according to the entrepreneurial creation value theory, as analyzed in an article from Herbalife Nutrition Global Entrepreneurship 2020. Several factors motivate them to achieve their goals, such as the desire to support their family, to switch occupations, and to work for themselves. This theoretical justification reflects the preliminary stages of discovering opportunities for value creation through entrepreneurship. Once their businesses grow, these women will begin the second phase, sometimes known as the exploitation phase. They fiercely grasp the opportunity to benefit society, their families, and themselves in this era.

We may apply the notion of entrepreneurial value creation to our study of women entrepreneurs (WITUS) by examining how they navigate the venture-formation and financing process. Research indicates that female entrepreneurs frequently face unique challenges securing funding and resources for their planned businesses, which may limit their ability to advance from stage 1 to stage 2 of the entrepreneurial path. According to the theory, it is possible to modify the support structure and boost the success of female entrepreneurs in (WITUS) by being aware of all these barriers and utilizing the theoretical concepts of entrepreneurial efficiency and business model design.

Apart from that, the Entrepreneurial Value Creation Theory relates to our issue of the sustainable development of micro-entrepreneurs who are single mothers since it offers a framework for comprehending the ways in which these business owners may create and realize value. By emphasizing the development of entrepreneurial skills, lucrative company creation, and successful business model establishment, single mother micro-entrepreneurs can increase their chances of long-term success and sustainability. Overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities for growth and influence can be facilitated by an understanding of the feedback loops that exist between various elements of the entrepreneurial process (Mishra and Zachary, 2014).

Challenge of a Single Mother Entrepreneur

In the realm of entrepreneurship, single mothers who manage their own companies have challenges. For a business to prosper in the world of entrepreneurship, resilience and perseverance are crucial (AIContentfy team, 2023). An entrepreneur who is a single mother faces a complex combination of personal and professional challenges in addition to the usual obstacles faced by business owners (Temitope Teniola Onileowo, 2021). Not only do these resilient individuals want to build successful enterprises in this difficult environment, but they also wish to dispel prejudices and overcome the unique difficulties that come with being devout parents and new entrepreneurs.

This introduction (Domenica, 2023) lays the groundwork for an examination of the various obstacles faced by single-mother company owners as they strive to succeed in their ventures against the backdrop of motherhood. According to Faster Capital (2023), juggling a career as an entrepreneur and raising a child alone is a complex, demanding path on both the personal and professional fronts. These powerful women have to carefully balance managing their own companies with

providing for their families. They learn that time is of the essence and that they are usually overworked between client meetings and parent-teacher conferences as they navigate the challenges of managing a business and a household.

According to a study by Faizah Abd Ghani & Hazirah Hashim (2013), economic difficulties are the most common ones faced by business owners who are single mothers. These are followed by emotional and psychological difficulties, stigma, and problems with community support. Moreover, there are many obstacles that women entrepreneurs, especially single mothers, face. These include political environments, lack of infrastructure, work-family conflicts, gender discrimination, unstable businesses, lack of education and training, and inadequate business management abilities (Salmah Topimin, NoorSal Fzlinda Fabeil, Ahmad Shakani Abdullah, 2017).

In addition, single mother entrepreneurs may experience stress due to government financial policies that make it difficult to start and run a business, as well as economic challenges related to money matters, particularly debt, insufficient income, and wealth-building (Rosfatihah Che Mat et al., 2023). This may be the most difficult situation they have to cope with since they are having trouble raising the money and resources needed to start their businesses.

Despite these obstacles, single-mother entrepreneurs exhibit extraordinary resilience and perseverance. They serve as a constant source of inspiration, shattering preconceptions and exceeding societal expectations while proving that persistence, fortitude, and creativity are all necessary for success in the challenging field of entrepreneurship (Rohit Dubepatil, 2023). Although being an entrepreneur and a single mother presents difficulties, it also demonstrates the strength of these women as they carve out prosperous personal and professional lives.

Success of Single Mother Entrepreneur Business

Scholars from around the world have conducted extensive research to better understand the challenges single mothers face when starting their own businesses. Starting a business is difficult in itself, but it becomes even more difficult for a single mother due to the specific challenges she faces. Several factors are listed by (J. A. Molina, et al., 2019) as motivators for people to launch their own businesses. It appears that a person's environment, skills, personality, and demographics all play a role in whether they become a successful entrepreneur. As such, an entrepreneur's educational attainment significantly impacts their decisions. To support their families and make ends meet, single mothers with little business experience and knowledge launched small businesses on their own initiative and self-motivation.

Examining an entrepreneur's level of entrepreneurial success is the simplest way to assess their ability to overcome various business challenges. Entrepreneurs' critical success factors are those aspects of their business, including processes, benchmarks, or other components, that are essential to their enterprise's competitiveness and success in the marketplace. Success, according to researchers (J. A. Molina et al., 2019), is characterized by innate qualities, including autonomy, control over one's own destiny, and freedom and independence. Conversely, extrinsic results include things like wealth, personal income, and increased financial returns.

Before they can rejoice over their company's success, entrepreneurs frequently face challenges related to finance, capacity, market accessibility, and other factors. The situation is particularly challenging for people just beginning in the business world, such as single mothers. As it happens, some of these businesswomen who are also single mothers might not have much business experience or knowledge (Salmah Topimin et al., 2019). This means that, to overcome challenges in their business endeavors, these single-mom entrepreneurs must rely on third-party support. Another study found that, in addition to return on assets, the typical concept of organizational success is articulated in terms of financial or economic measures such as employee numbers, earnings, sales, and survival rates.

Other non-financial measures are achievement, growth, and customer happiness. Most single mothers start their own enterprises to gain more flexibility and balance in their lives, according to a survey. Raising the children and taking on the role of the family's primary breadwinner had to be balanced. Based on studies done in Malaysia, single moms decide to start their own business because they want to get advantages for both themselves and their family, like more money, flexibility, freedom, and time to spend with their children as well as access to a supportive social network. Despite their ongoing challenges, numerous stories of prosperous single-mother business owners who achieve notable success in the business sector have been documented.

It appears that past studies have demonstrated how environments may impact an entrepreneur's effectiveness by molding their inner characteristics (Azliana Mohd Jelani et al., 2021). According to a survey, successful entrepreneurs usually take

calculated risks, are creative, and are knowledgeable about market dynamics. Entrepreneurial skills, including manufacturing know-how, marketing savvy, business management acumen, and teamwork, are also essential. In addition to relying on well-established facts, entrepreneurship requires the ability to take calculated risks, navigate ambiguity, and turn opportunities into reality.

Further research has thus been done to examine the factors that lead to the success of small business owners. Some research indicates that a company's management skills, financial resources, moral fiber, and access to sufficient government support are the factors that have the biggest impact on its success. Because of this, women entrepreneurs can create jobs for themselves and others. From a social perspective, making a statement—that is, being an entrepreneur and a single mother—offers society fresh perspectives on how to structure, manage, and resolve business problems, as well as how to capitalize on business opportunities. As a result, women are increasingly encouraged to start their own businesses as a means of advancing global development (Ismail Irwan et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a **qualitative research design** to explore the lived experiences of single mothers who are micro-entrepreneurs, focusing on the roles, challenges, and support mechanisms shaping their entrepreneurial journeys. The goal is to gain in-depth insight into the systemic and personal factors that affect the sustainability of their businesses and to identify strategies for empowering these women within their communities.

Research Design

A qualitative approach was chosen for its effectiveness in capturing rich, narrative data that reflects the complexities of participants' social and economic realities. This design is well-suited to exploring the perspectives of single mothers on entrepreneurship, particularly to understand the social, emotional, and practical challenges they face (Patton, 2002). The study used semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share experiences and express their views in their own words while also ensuring consistency across key themes.

Sampling Technique

The study used purposive sampling to target individuals most relevant to the research topic—namely, single mothers actively involved in entrepreneurship. In collaboration with the Women and Single Mother Society (WITUS), a small sample of participants was selected. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed to identify further respondents through participant referrals. This approach helped to reach a hidden population that may not be easily accessible through traditional sampling methods.

Participants

The participants were single-mother micro-entrepreneurs affiliated with WITUS, all of whom were involved in small-scale business activities. These women were selected based on their experience as both entrepreneurs and primary caregivers. Each participant has faced various structural barriers, such as financial constraints, limited education, or a lack of formal business training. The study's focus on their lived experiences provides valuable insights into both the barriers they face and the resilience they exhibit.

Data Collection

Data were collected through guided, semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to provide detailed responses while giving the researcher flexibility to probe deeper into relevant issues. The interviews were structured around three core research questions:

1. What roles are involved in the community's development of micro-entrepreneurs who are single mothers?
2. What challenges does the organization face in fostering the growth of micro-entrepreneurs who are single mothers?
3. What recommendations exist for the future that would help micro-entrepreneurs who are single mothers succeed?

Each interview was conducted either in person or virtually, depending on participants' availability, and recorded with their consent for transcription and analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a method suitable for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps involved:

1. Transcribing interview recordings verbatim.
2. Reading and re-reading the data for familiarization.
3. Generating initial codes.
4. Organizing codes into potential themes.
5. Reviewing and refining themes.
6. Interpreting the data in relation to the research questions.

This approach enabled the researcher to derive meaningful insights from the participants' narratives while ensuring that recurring themes were grounded in the data.

Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, member checking was used by sharing preliminary findings with participants for feedback. Peer debriefing was conducted with fellow researchers to reduce bias. A detailed audit trail was maintained to support transparency and dependability.

Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity by using pseudonyms, and storing data securely. The study adhered to ethical research guidelines to protect participants' rights and well-being throughout the research process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on thematic analysis of interviews with single mother micro-entrepreneurs affiliated with the Women and Single Mother Society (WITUS). The findings are organized according to the three core research questions: (1) Roles in community development, (2) Organizational challenges, and (3) Future recommendations for supporting micro-entrepreneurial success.

Roles in the Development of Single-Mother Micro-Entrepreneurs

Participants identified multiple stakeholders who play significant roles in supporting the development of single mother entrepreneurs. These include:

1. **Community-Based Organizations (e.g., WITUS):** Act as intermediaries by offering emotional support, networking opportunities, and limited training or small grants.
2. **Family Members:** Offer informal support such as childcare and occasional financial help.
3. **Government Agencies and NGOs:** Perceived as important but often inaccessible due to strict eligibility criteria or lack of awareness.

"WITUS helped me connect with others in the same situation, and that gave me the motivation to keep going. But we still need more help from outside groups," shared one participant.

Despite the presence of these roles, coordination among them is minimal, leading to fragmented support systems. Participants expressed a need for stronger partnerships between local government, financial institutions, and support organizations to provide more holistic assistance.

Organizational Challenges in Supporting Growth

Organizations that aim to support single-mother micro-entrepreneurs face a variety of challenges:

1. **Knowledge and Skill Gaps:** Many single mothers lack business knowledge, especially in areas such as marketing, digital tools, and financial planning.
2. **Limited Access to Capital:** Participants emphasized that they often cannot meet formal loan or grant criteria due to informal business operations or lack of collateral.
3. **Bureaucratic Barriers:** Government programs are often seen as rigid or poorly promoted, limiting access to aid.
4. **Technology Adoption:** Digital illiteracy among some participants limits their ability to explore e-commerce or online marketing opportunities.

“I applied for a grant once, but they asked for so many documents that I didn’t have. I eventually gave up,” noted a respondent.

“I want to sell online, but I don’t really know how to start. I’m scared of making a mistake,” another added.

These findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Suraiya Ishak et al., 2021), which emphasizes how systemic and informational barriers can hinder micro-enterprise growth.

Recommendations for Future Empowerment

Participants proposed several recommendations to improve their entrepreneurial journey:

- **Skills Training and Education:** Most respondents requested more accessible and practical business training workshops tailored to their needs (e.g., digital marketing, product pricing, business planning).
- **Mentorship Programs:** Connecting with experienced entrepreneurs or business coaches was seen as a vital need for building confidence and sustaining business momentum.
- **Flexible Financial Support:** Participants expressed a strong preference for micro-loans with low interest rates or grants with simple application procedures.
- **Stronger Community Networks:** Encouraging local collaboration and peer support groups was seen as helpful for knowledge sharing and emotional encouragement.

“We need someone who can guide us step by step—not just talk, but show us how things work,” said a participant.

“Even a small fund or space to sell products would help us grow,” another suggested.

These suggestions align with national development goals for inclusive entrepreneurship and reflect the importance of a people-centered support strategy.

Theme	Description
Key Support Roles	Community groups, family, NGOs, and limited government involvement
Organizational Challenges	Skill deficits, limited funding access, bureaucracy, and digital barriers
Future Recommendations	Practical training, mentorship, accessible financing, and peer support

In summary, while single mother entrepreneurs demonstrate resilience and resourcefulness, their growth is constrained by systemic gaps in support structures, knowledge access, and capital. A coordinated, inclusive support system that empowers them through education, financing, and mentoring is essential for ensuring their long-term entrepreneurial success.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiences of single mothers in Malaysia engaged in micro-entrepreneurship, focusing on the roles, challenges, and future opportunities shaping their entrepreneurial journeys. Through qualitative interviews and thematic analysis, the research uncovered how single mothers strive to sustain their businesses despite limited access to resources, social support, and formal education or training.

The findings highlight that while community-based organizations like WITUS, family members, and informal networks play a vital role in supporting these women, the lack of structured institutional support—particularly in funding, skills development, and digital access—remains a significant barrier to growth. Organizational challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles, knowledge gaps, and technological limitations further compound the difficulties these entrepreneurs face.

Despite these obstacles, single mothers demonstrate remarkable resilience, adaptability, and a willingness to learn. Their ability to juggle personal responsibilities with business demands is a testament to their determination and capacity for growth. The study also reveals strong interest among participants in structured mentorship, accessible business training, and more inclusive financial opportunities.

To foster the growth of single-mother micro-entrepreneurs, it is crucial for stakeholders—including government bodies, NGOs, and private institutions—to collaborate to create supportive ecosystems that provide practical education, simplified funding mechanisms, and long-term mentoring. Empowering these women not only strengthens local economies but also uplifts families and communities by promoting independence, self-worth, and sustainable development.

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