STUDY ON HIGH EMPLOYEE ATTRITION IN SELECTED BPO COMPANIES IN INDIA: A KEY ISSUE IN BPO INDUSTRY

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RESEARCH TOPIC: STUDY ON HIGH EMPLOYEE ATTRITION IN SELECTED BPO COMPANIES IN INDIA: A KEY ISSUE IN BPO INDUSTRY

1.ABSTRACT

The study titled "Study on High Employee Attrition in Selected BPO Companies in India: A Key Issue in the BPO Industry" aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of employee attrition within the BPO sector, focusing on managing and controlling attrition rates across various stages of the employee life cycle. This research seeks to identify the underlying causes of high employee turnover and offers solutions to mitigate this pressing issue, drawing on data from 12 major BPO companies operating across 19 states, 35 cities, and 2 union territories, thus encompassing five major zones of India.

The primary objective is to investigate the persistent problem of high attrition rates in the BPO industry and to develop effective retention strategies. The study employs robust data analysis and interpretation methods, including chi-square tests, percentage ranking, Kruskal-Wallis H tests, factor analysis, and various graphical representations such as pie charts and graphs, to ensure a thorough and nuanced understanding of the issue.

Key findings reveal that despite considerable efforts by BPO companies to manage attrition, the challenge remains significant. Major factors contributing to attrition include low salary, inadequate compensation, poor management support, lack of career growth opportunities, and job insecurity. These findings highlight the need for a multifaceted approach to retention management, starting from the moment an employee joins the organization rather than as a reactive measure when they are about to leave.

The study provides a strategic roadmap for the BPO industry, outlining the factors contributing to high attrition and recommending specific retention strategies to be applied at different stages of the employee life cycle. Implementing these strategies is expected to enhance employee longevity, boost productivity, improve industry reputation, and increase overall employee satisfaction.

In conclusion, this research highlights the critical importance of a proactive and comprehensive approach to retention management in the BPO sector. By addressing the root causes of attrition and applying targeted strategies, the BPO industry can achieve sustainable growth, foster a stable workforce, and ultimately enhance its competitive edge in the global market.

Key words: Attrition, Retention, BPO, Turnover.

2.BRIEF DESCRIPTION ON THE STATE OF THE ART OF THE RESEARCH TOPIC

Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) involves contracting a specific business task, such as payroll, accounting, telemarketing, data recording, social media marketing, or customer support, to an external service provider. BPO typically addresses non-core business functions, utilizing either new or existing technologies in innovative ways to enhance business processes.

2.1 BPO in India

India's BPO industry has played a crucial role in the global outsourcing market, handling 56% of the world's business process outsourcing activities. The demand for Indian BPO services has been growing at an annual rate of 50%. The sector generates 70% of its revenue from contact centres, 20% from data entry work, and 10% from IT-related work. This growth has positioned India as the world's preferred destination for BPO services, outpacing competitors like Australia, China, the Philippines, and Ireland.

Several factors contribute to the BPO boom in India, including economies of scale, business risk mitigation, cost advantages due to cheap labour, and a vast pool of skilled, English-speaking professionals. Research by the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) highlights that the quality orientation of leading BPO companies, 24/7 service availability, India's strategic geographic location, and an investor-friendly tax structure have all made the Indian BPO industry highly popular. Consequently, India has become the top destination for outsourcing IT-related business processes from companies in the US and UK.

2.2 Concept of Attrition:

Attrition is the normal phenomenon where employees leave an organization voluntarily or involuntarily due to professional or personal reasons related to the company's environment and culture. It is typically measured using the attrition rate, which calculates the number of employees leaving the company either by resignation or termination. The attrition rate, also known as churn rate or turnover, is distinct from internal job role movements, which may or may not be included in overall attrition but can be specific to a particular unit.

2.3 Attrition in BPO Sector

The attrition rate in the BPO industry is notably high, averaging around 35 percent, which is significant for any sector. In contrast, an average Indian call centre employee remains with a company for about 11 months, whereas a UK call centre employee typically stays for three years. Analysts indicate that the general attrition rate fluctuates between 20 and 40 percent, while the best companies maintain an average of around 15 percent (NASSCOM, 2009). Despite the industry's potential for significant growth, it continues to grapple with high attrition rates, primarily due to factors such as elevated stress levels and limited growth opportunities. In some segments, attrition has peaked at nearly 60 percent.

The Indian Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry has evolved significantly since its inception in the 1980s, becoming a global leader in the sector due to its cost advantages, skilled workforce, and strong infrastructure. However, the industry faces several challenges, including high employee attrition rates, cultural differences, data security risks, and communication barriers. These issues, if not addressed effectively, can undermine the industry's potential for sustained growth and competitiveness. This thesis aims to explore the predominant factors

contributing to high employee attrition in the BPO sector, assess their impact on organizational efficiency and employee satisfaction, and propose strategic solutions to mitigate these challenges. By examining these critical aspects, this study seeks to provide actionable insights that can help BPO organizations improve retention rates, enhance operational efficiency, and maintain their competitive edge in the global market.

3.PROBLEM DEFINITION/STATEMENT

The BPO industry in India is experiencing a significant challenge with high attrition rates. This persistent issue is exacerbated by the distinct operational characteristics of the BPO sector, such as demanding work schedules, high stress levels, and limited career advancement opportunities. **To address this pressing concern, this research aims to identify and analyze the major factors contributing to high attrition rates among employees in selected BPO companies across various zones in India.**

4.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Following are the objectives of the study

I. **Primary Objectives**:

❖ To study the problem of high attrition in the BPO sector in India

❖ To identify the major reasons causing attrition amongst the employees of BPO sector

❖ To identify the impact of employee retention strategies on attrition

II. **Secondary objectives**:

▪ To rank the factors of attrition in order of their criticalities to target the root cause

▪ To establish the relationship between 7 critical factors and attrition in the BPO industry

▪ To identify and compare the attrition rate of employees at the pre training, Training and post training phase

▪ To suggest innovative measures to control the attrition rate based on the findings

5.SCOPE OF WORK

This research focuses on the BPO industry in India, with the objective of identifying the reasons for employee attrition and for this purpose the study targets three key stakeholder namely BPO Agents(employees),Operations managers and Placement consultants of 12 major BPO companies operating across 5 major zones of india;35cities,18states,2 union territories with an aim of covering maximum part of India in order to provide provides a comprehensive view of attrition factors and retention strategies applicable across diverse geographical and cultural contexts.

6.ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION BY THE THESIS

This thesis makes several original contributions to the understanding and management of attrition in the BPO sector by addressing critical gaps in existing research. Attrition in the BPO industry is a multifaceted challenge, complicated by unique working conditions such as irregular hours, job monotony, limited career progression, and rotational shifts. While numerous studies have explored the causes of attrition and proposed solutions, they often focus

on specific geographic areas. To address this limitation, this research encompasses a broader scope across India to identify attrition patterns prevalent in the BPO sector.

Attrition in the BPO industry occurs at three distinct stages: pre-training, training, and post-training. To date, no research has systematically compared attrition rates across these stages. This study aims to fill this gap by evaluating and contrasting attrition at each stage, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of where interventions might be most effective.

While various employee retention strategies exist, they generally lack specificity regarding the optimal stage for implementation during an employee's lifecycle. By identifying attrition rates at different stages, this study seeks to develop targeted retention strategies that are tailored to each phase, thus bridging a critical gap in existing literature.

Additionally, Placement agencies are crucial in supplying manpower to BPOs and have a unique perspective on why employees join and leave the industry. Despite their importance, there is a lack of research utilizing placement agencies as a primary information source. This thesis addresses this gap by incorporating insights from selected placement agencies that serve diverse BPO companies, thus enriching the study's findings.

Through these contributions, this research not only enhances the understanding of attrition in the BPO sector but also offers practical strategies for mitigating it, ultimately contributing to more effective workforce management in the industry.

7.METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

7.1 Research Design:

A combination of Descriptive research and exploratory research is to be undertaken that would include surveys and fact-finding enquiries of different kinds to have a better understanding of the stated problem and to gain more insight about the same.

7.2 Hypothesis:

Following are the Hypothesis based on the objectives:

7.2.1 Association between the 7 critical factors and attrition in the BPO Sector

1. H0: There is no association between attrition and job dissatisfaction factors.

<div align="center">V/s</div>

   H1: There is an association between attrition and job dissatisfaction factors.

2. H_0: There is no association between attrition and poor work environment attributes.

<div align="center">V/s</div>

   H_1: There is an association between attrition and poor work environment attributes.

3. H_0: There is no association between attrition and compensation and reward attributes.

<div align="center">V/s</div>

   H_1: There is an association between attrition and compensation and reward attributes.

4. H_0: There is no association between attrition and "lack of Career development and Growth" attributes.

<div align="center">V/s</div>

H_1: There is an association between attrition and "lack of Career development and Growth" attributes

5. H_0: There is no association between attrition and poor Employee Relationship attributes.

<div align="center">V/s</div>

H_1: There is an association between attrition and poor Employee Relationship attributes

6. H_0: There is no association between attrition and lack of welfare programs and facilities attributes.

<div align="center">V/s</div>

H_1: There is an association between attrition and lack of welfare programs and facilities attributes

7. H_0: There is no association between attrition and physical health factors attributes.

<div align="center">V/s</div>

H_1: There is an association between attrition and physical health factors attributes.

8. H_0: There is no association between attrition and psychosocial and mental health factors attributes.

<div align="center">V/s</div>

H_1: There is an association between attrition and psychosocial and mental health factors attributes.

7.2.2 Comparisons of percentage of attrition rate/drop out at Pre-Training, Post-Training and During training as per managers and BPO Consultants

9. H_0: There is no significant difference in the attrition rate of employees by managers at the pre-training, post-training and during training.

<div align="center">V/s</div>

H_1: There is a significant difference in the attrition rate of employees by managers at the pre-training, post-training and during training.

10. H_0: There is no significant difference in the Joining to billing retention rate of employees for BPO consultants

<div align="center">V/s</div>

H_1: There is a significant difference in the Joining to billing retention rate of employees for BPO consultants

7.2.3 Association Between the retention factors and High attrition

11. H_0: There is no significant relationship between employee retention management factors and attrition rate in the BPO sector

<div align="center">V/s</div>

H_1: There is a significant relationship between employee retention management factors and attrition rate in the BPO sector

7.3 Population of the study

Target Population: The population for this study includes:

❖ **Employees from 12 BPO companies across India**. According to data published in September 2023, the total population consists of approximately 1,048,162 employees

❖ **Operations Managers from 12 BPO Companies across India** and According to data published in September 2023, the total population consists of approximately 822 operations managers

❖ Selected 50 **BPO Placement Consultants** across India

7.4 Sample of the study: The study's total sample size is 700 respondents, divided into three distinct strata to ensure comprehensive representation of different roles within the BPO industry. The sample includes 388 BPO agents, 262 operations managers, and 50 BPO consultants. This stratified sampling method allows for an in-depth analysis of each group's perspectives, providing a detailed understanding of the dynamics within the BPO sector and enhancing the reliability of the research findings.

7.5 Sampling Methods: Stratified Convenience sampling is employed to select respondents from the target population. This method, while not random, is practical for reaching a large number of respondents efficiently within the constraints of the study

7.6 Data collection Methods: Following are the methods used for Primary and secondary Data collection:

- **Primary Data Collection**: Primary data is obtained through first-hand investigation using a structured and non-disguised questionnaire. This questionnaire was distributed to employees, managers, and hiring partners of the BPO companies. The purpose and objectives of the study was clearly explained to the respondents to ensure informed consent and cooperation.
- **Secondary Data Collection**: Secondary data was gathered from various existing sources, including academic journals, industry reports, and internet sources, which provide insights into employee attrition trends and factors within the BPO sector.

7.7 Data Analysis Methods: The data collected from the survey is analysed using the following statistical methods to test the hypotheses and achieve the research objectives:

- **Chi-Square Test is** used to examine the relationship between seven critical factors and employee attrition rates, identifying statistically significant associations.
- **Percentage Ranking Method** is used to rank factors contributing to attrition by frequency and impact, highlighting the most critical issues to address.
- **Kruskal-Wallis H Test** is used to Compared attrition rates among employees at different stages (pre-training, training, and post-training) to identify significant differences.
- **Additional Methods** Include pie charts, graphs, and factor analysis, providing insights into attrition factors and retention strategy effectiveness.

7.8 Timeline: The research was conducted over a period of two to 3years, divided into the following phases:

- Introduction and Background study of the topic and Industry(6months)
- Literature Review (1 year): A comprehensive review of existing literature on employee attrition, retention strategies, and related factors in the BPO sector.
- Data Collection (6 months): Collection of primary and secondary data through surveys, questionnaires, and review of existing reports.
- Data Analysis (6 months): Statistical analysis of the collected data using Chi-Square Test, Percentage Ranking Method, and Kruskal-Wallis H Test to test the hypotheses and achieve the research objectives.

7.9 Resources and tools: The research has acquired the following resources and tools:

- Access to Academic Journals and Industry Reports: For secondary data collection and literature review.
- Statistical Software (e.g., SPSS): For data analysis and hypothesis testing.
- Online Survey Tools such as Google form For collecting primary data through questionnaires.

By following this detailed and structured methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to high employee attrition in the BPO sector in India and propose effective strategies to mitigate this issue.

8.KEY FINDINGS BASED ON OBJECTIVES

8.1. Primary Objectives:
8.1.1. To study the problem of high attrition in the BPO sector in India:

- The data reveals differing opinions on attrition levels among BPO employees, managers, and consultants. About 27.6% of employees believe their company experiences high attrition, while 41.1% of managers disagree. However, 66% of BPO consultants acknowledge high attrition within the industry. These findings indicate varied perceptions and underscore the significant challenge of attrition, particularly in the BPO sector.

8.1.2. To identify the major reasons causing attrition amongst the employees of the BPO sector:

- The data highlights several key reasons for high employee attrition in the BPO industry. Major factors include low salary, poor management support, lack of career growth opportunities, irregular working hours, and work-life imbalance. Other contributing issues are heavy workload, repetitive job nature, job insecurity, and employees pursuing further studies. These findings stress the complexity of attrition and the necessity for comprehensive strategies addressing financial and managerial aspects to improve employee satisfaction and retention.

8.1.3. To identify the impact of employee retention strategies on attrition:

- Both employees and managers recognize the effectiveness of robust employee retention strategies in decreasing attrition. A significant majority of employees (75.5%) and managers (84.4%) believe that these strategies positively impact retention rates. This consensus emphasizes the importance of implementing strong retention measures to effectively address attrition issues.

8.2. Secondary Objectives:
8.2.1. To rank the factors of attrition in order of their criticalities to target the root cause:

- The most critical factors contributing to employee attrition, according to employees, managers, and BPO consultants, are low salary, lack of career growth, and poor management support. Employees also highlight concerns like irregular working hours, process shutdowns, and work-life imbalance. Managers additionally point out issues such as pursuing higher studies and lack of motivation. BPO consultants emphasize job security, process shutdowns, and work-life balance, highlighting the need to address these key issues to reduce attrition rates.

8.2.2. To establish the relationship between 7 critical factors and attrition in the BPO industry:

- The chi-square tests reveal significant associations between seven critical attrition factors and employee turnover. These factors include job dissatisfaction, inadequate work environment, poor compensation and rewards, lack of career development, strained employee relationships, insufficient welfare programs, and physical and mental health issues. Addressing these factors by improving job satisfaction, work conditions, compensation, career development opportunities, employee relationships, welfare programs, and health support could potentially reduce attrition and enhance retention.

8.2.3. To identify and compare the attrition rate of employees at the pre-training, training, and post-training phases:

- Analysis of data from managers shows that the organization maintains low attrition rates throughout various stages, with 87.5% of employees pre-training, 88.6% post-training, and 79.8% during training experiencing low attrition (0-10%). However, a slight increase in attrition rates is observed during the training phase, with 4.2% experiencing 31% or more attrition. This indicates a need for targeted improvements during the training phase.
- Data from BPO consultants indicates that retention rates decline steadily across different phases: training initiation sees a high retention presence (30%), which declines by training completion (6% high presence, 46% moderate presence) and remains similar through the billing period. This trend underscores the necessity for enhanced retention strategies to maintain engagement throughout training and subsequent work periods.

8.2.4. To suggest innovative measures to control the attrition rate based on the findings:

- Addressing factors such as compensation, career advancement opportunities, managerial support, and work-life balance is crucial for reducing attrition rates. Enhanced retention efforts should focus on improving these areas across all phases of employment to increase overall employee satisfaction and loyalty, thereby effectively reducing attrition.
- Both employees and managers acknowledge the significant benefits of effective retention strategies in reducing attrition. Retention efforts must be uniformly strengthened across all phases of training and employment to enhance overall candidate retention and satisfaction.

9.SUGGESTIONS/RETENTION STRATEGIES

9.1 To control Pre-training attrition (drop out), the following strategies can be adopted

❖ **Professional Recruitment and Selection strategy:**
  o Implement a **rigorous recruitment process** focusing on identifying candidates with essential qualities such as relevant skills, adaptability, and alignment with the industry norms and culture.
  o Use behavioral and situational interviews to assess candidates' fit and potential for long-term commitment.

❖ **Transparent Compensation and work-related Policies:**
  o Ensure that the salary offered matches the commitment made during the hiring process.
  o Clearly communicate work-related policies, job roles, and expectations to candidates before they accept the job offer.

- o Avoid making false promises about salary hikes or job profiles to prevent future dissatisfaction.
- ❖ **Accommodation facility-**
  In order to prevent dropout and ensure a positive onboarding experience for outstation new hires, the organization should provide clean, hygienic, and secure accommodation facilities that are either free of charge or affordable. These accommodations should be proximate to the workplace or offer transportation options if necessary
- ❖ **Enhanced Onboarding Process:**
  - o Develop a comprehensive onboarding program that includes a buddy system to help new hires acclimate to the organization.
  - o Provide detailed information about career development opportunities and internal advancement paths.
  - o Foster a welcoming environment where new hires feel supported and valued from day one.
- ❖ **Emphasize the Importance of Training:**
  - o Educate new employees on how training can enhance their skills and contribute to their career growth.
  - o Encourage active participation in training programs by highlighting the long-term benefits for their professional development.
- ❖ **Motivation and Engagement:**
  - o Focus on motivating new hires by recognizing their contributions and providing regular feedback.
  - o Create a positive work environment that fosters engagement and loyalty.
  - o Offer opportunities for professional growth and recognize achievements to keep employees motivated.

By adopting these strategies, organizations can significantly reduce pre-training attrition, ensuring that new hires are well-prepared, engaged, and committed to their roles.

9.2 To control attrition during the training, the following strategies can be adopted

- **Professional and Engaging Trainers:**
  - ✓ Hire trainers who are not only knowledgeable and professional but also have a good sense of humor to make sessions enjoyable.
  - ✓ Use interactive teaching methods to keep the sessions lively and engaging.
- **Interesting and Practical Training Sessions:**
  - ✓ Design training programs that are both interesting and practical, using real-life examples and hands-on activities.
  - ✓ Incorporate multimedia elements such as videos, simulations, and interactive modules to enhance learning.
- **Inclusive Training Participation:**
  - ✓ Ensure every new hire is actively involved in the training sessions.
  - ✓ Monitor participation and provide personal assistance to those who may struggle to engage, tailoring support to individual needs.
- **Communication of Organizational Benefits:**
  - ✓ Clearly communicate the benefits of being part of the organization, including career development plans, growth opportunities, and company values.
  - ✓ Highlight success stories and career progression examples within the company to inspire new hires.
- **Tracking and Addressing Absenteeism:**
  - ✓ Track attendance during training sessions and identify patterns of absenteeism.

- ✓ Reach out to absentees to understand the reasons behind their absence and offer support or solutions to address any issues.
- **Building Confidence and Long-Term Commitment:**
  - ✓ Ensure that the training session provides a clear picture of the working environment, job expectations, and career paths within the organization.
  - ✓ Use the training period to build new hires' confidence in their roles and in the organization, emphasizing how they fit into the company's future.

  By implementing these strategies, organizations can create a positive and effective training environment that encourages new hires to stay engaged, understand their roles better, and commit to the organization for the long term.

9.3. To control attrition Post training phase (overall attrition), the following strategies can be adopted:

- **Create an Ideal Workplace:**
  - ✓ Design a work environment that aligns with employees' aspirations, offering modern facilities, flexible work arrangements, and a positive culture.
  - ✓ Encourage open communication and maintain a supportive atmosphere.
- **Skill Application and Confidence Building:**
  - ✓ Facilitate the practical application of skills learned during training, providing real-world tasks that reinforce their training.
  - ✓ Offer continuous support and mentorship until employees feel confident and fully competent in their roles.
- **Progressive Challenge and Engagement:**
  - ✓ Gradually introduce more complex and interesting tasks to keep employees engaged and motivated.
  - ✓ Ensure a balance between challenge and support to prevent overwhelm and maintain interest.
- **Healthy Work Environment:**
  - ✓ Avoid overburdening employees; instead, create a supportive and healthy work atmosphere, even in high-pressure situations.
  - ✓ Offer wellness programs, mental health support, and stress management resources.
- **Employee Well-being Initiatives:**
  - ✓ Conduct regular health checkups and offer comprehensive health benefits.
  - ✓ Ensure competitive and fair pay increments, recognizing and rewarding hard work and achievements.
  - ✓ Implement welfare programs that support employees' overall well-being.
- **Build Trust and Confidence:**
  - ✓ Demonstrate a genuine commitment to employee well-being and development.
  - ✓ Maintain transparency in communication and decision-making processes to build trust.

  By adopting these strategies, organizations can create a supportive and engaging work environment that not only retains talent but also fosters employee growth and satisfaction, ultimately reducing post-training attrition.

10.LIMITATIONS

- ❖ Although the study covers 35 cities, 18 states, and 2 union territories, it is limited to these specific locations and may not capture the complete picture of the BPO industry's attrition trends nationwide or globally.
- ❖ The study's sample includes 388 employees, 263 managers, and 50 BPO consultants from 12 BPO companies. While this provides a substantial amount of data, the findings may not be generalizable to the entire BPO industry due to the limited number of companies and specific regions covered.
- ❖ There may be biases in the responses from employees, managers, and consultants. Their perceptions and opinions might be influenced by their personal experiences and the specific organizational culture of their respective BPO companies.
- ❖ The research relies heavily on primary data collected through questionnaires. This method can be subject to response biases. and the limitations inherent in self-reported data.
- ❖ The study's conclusions are based on the perceptions of the respondents. These perceptions might not always accurately reflect actual attrition factors and trends within the industry.
- ❖ The design and framing of the questionnaire can influence the responses. Any ambiguities or leading questions could affect the validity and reliability of the data collected.
- ❖ The study captures a snapshot of the attrition situation at a particular time. Attrition trends can change over time due to various factors such as economic conditions, technological advancements, and industry policies.
- ❖ Different BPO companies may have varying practices, policies, and cultures which can influence attrition rates. The study's findings may not account for all these variations.

11.CONCLUSION

The BPO industry, characterized by rapid expansion and dynamic growth, offers significant employment opportunities but struggles with persistent attrition challenges. Despite strides in reducing turnover, employees often switch organizations for better salaries and career prospects, adversely affecting productivity and pressuring recruitment teams to fill vacancies swiftly, sometimes resulting in suboptimal hiring decisions that perpetuate the cycle of attrition. This study identifies key reasons for attrition at different stages—pre-training, during training, and post-training—highlighting the need for proactive retention strategies starting immediately after onboarding to ensure employee longevity. By incorporating insights from various stakeholders, including employees, managers, and BPO consultants, and covering a pan-India scope, the research provides a comprehensive view of attrition factors and retention strategies applicable across diverse geographical and cultural contexts. In conclusion, reducing attrition in the BPO sector requires a multifaceted approach that begins with strategic recruitment and extends throughout the employee lifecycle. By fostering a supportive and engaging work environment and implementing proactive retention strategies, BPO companies can reduce attrition rates, enhance productivity, and ensure long-term success in this competitive industry.

12.COPIES OF PAPER PUBLISHED

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1.Rashida Batterywala 2.Dr. Shakina Tabbsum Munshi	A Systematic Review of Literature on Factors Influencing Attrition in The BPO Industry	Humanities And Social Science Studies	Jan-June 2024	2319-829x	Vol 13	**1**

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