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ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAVIOUR AND BUSINESS SUCCESS OF SMALL SCALE ORGANIC VEGETABLE FARMERS

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ABSTRACT

The importance of sustainable agriculture has been widely recognized by the researchers and professionals all over the world. Organic Agriculture per se is not merely a new concept to Sri Lanka. However, the rate of expansion of Organic Agriculture production in commercial scale is not adequate enough to cater the escalating market demand. There are number of reasons for the slow growth rate of Organic Agriculture production in the country. Entrepreneurship and economic success are important parameters to be monitored to promote Organic agriculture. Hence, the present study aimed at investigating the entrepreneurial behavior and Business Success of the micro and small scale organic vegetable farmers in a selected district of Sri Lanka. Since the EB cannot be measured directly, ten constructs were deployed to measure it and those constructs were selected based on the previous research works. The other main variable of the study; Business Success, was determined measuring both financial and non-financial indicators. The study revealed that there are three main agribusiness models namely, Independent Organic Farmer Model, Member Farmers of Organic Association Model and Contract Organic Farming Model. Further, the ANOVA tests revealed that Entrepreneurial Behavior and the Business Success are significantly different each other. The Contract Farmers possessed the highest Business Success and member farmers of Organic Organizations exhibited the highest Entrepreneurial Behaviour. As ascertained through the regression analysis, in overall, the Business Success of micro and small scale organic vegetable farmers was significantly affected by the entrepreneurial behavior, market assurance, total family income, number of organic product they produced, land extent and level of education.

KEYWORDS

Entrepreneurial Behavior, Business Success, organic agribusiness models.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of sustainable agriculture has been widely recognized by the researchers and professionals all over the world with the experience of tragic aftermaths of non-sustainable agricultural production systems. Among major sustainable agricultural systems in use, Organic Agriculture (OA) has gained an extraordinary attention and popularity all over the world. In addition to the definite ecological benefits, social and economic benefits of organic farming are certainly exciting. Accordingly, Organic Agriculture has become a very vibrant, specialized and organized agribusiness activity. Demand for organic produce is driven by beliefs that organic produce are safe, nutritious, tasty, and environmentally friendly than the conventional products. According to Willer and Kilcher (2012), there are about 37.2 million hectares of organic agricultural lands in the world and the total value of organic food and beverage market has been some 44.5 billion euros or 59.1 billion US dollars by year 2010. At present, commercial certified Organic Agriculture has spread to over 130 countries worldwide. This trend has created an undisputed economic opportunity to the farmers, specifically micro and small scale farmers, to get benefited from Organic Agriculture and it could be a viable alternative to the resource poor micro and medium scale farmers to integrate into the main stream economic activities and thereby to improve their income levels and the quality of life.

Organic Agriculture per se is not merely a new concept to Sri Lanka. It has been there for centuries and the ancestor farmers had been able to make the country self-sufficient in rice by practicing Organic Agriculture and even the surpluses had been exported as reported in the historical documents. According to the survey conducted by the Sri Lanka Nature Forum in 2008, total occupied lands under the Organic Agriculture was about 25,335.03 hectares and it is approximately 1.08% of the total cultivated lands. Sri Lanka is famous in the international market for its organic teas and spices where number of companies has been engaged in the organic business and the organic market of the country has been described as a "niche market". At the same time, the local organic produce market is being expanding gradually as the awareness and preference of local consumers have been shifting towards more healthy and safe food. At present, number of organic products such as tea, spices, fruits and vegetables are increasingly being sold in some major local supermarkets and in some dedicated sales outlets.

However, the rate of expansion of Organic Agriculture production in commercial scale is not adequate enough at all to cater the escalating demand in both local and international market. There are number of reasons for the slow growth rate of Organic Agriculture production in the country. Ambiguity about the demand, what marketing channels to be used, the economic viability of organic farming and lack of technological innovations could be considered as the main reasons that prevent the farmers largely from Organic Agriculture. In this context, if it is to overcome the above contemporary challengers and to promote the organic agricultural business among micro and small scale farmers, or in other words to drive the farmers to seize the growing opportunities in the organic agribusiness sector, it is utmost important to develop the entrepreneurial skills of organic farmers. However, majority of research and other efforts, both in local and global context, have been greatly focused towards sustainability and technical aspects of organic farming. Hence, the available information and understanding about the entrepreneurial, managerial and economic aspects of organic farming are not adequate and comprehensive enough to make effective interventions in order to motivate and support the current and prospective organic farmers to best capture the growing opportunities in the organic agribusiness. Admitting the complexity of the issue to be investigated, the present study is specifically aimed at investigating the entrepreneurial behavior and its' impact on Business Success of the micro and small scale organic vegetable farmers in a selected district of Sri Lanka. The Badulla district of Sri Lanka was purposefully selected for the present study considering the high level of organic activities taken place in the district.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. ORGANIC AGRICULTURE SECTOR OF SRI LANKA

Organic Agriculture is not a new concept to Sri Lankan Agriculture. Since ancient time it was practice in default. Ancient farmers use highly sophisticated traditional agricultural system, such as Kakulama in rice cultivation and Chena cultivation for field crops and crop rotation system, agro-forestry system etc. In Sri Lanka, organic farming practices with proper standards were initiated in 1979 by a non-government organization, namely, "Gami Seva Sevana" (Jayakody, 2001). UNESCAP (2006) report says, Sri Lanka is at leading positions among major organic food producers and organic tea is primary. According to Willer and Kilcher (2012), there are about 43, 664 hectares of land under organic management in Sri Lanka, with a share of total agricultural land of 1.7 %. The Organic Directory published in 2005 states that the number of registered exporters had since raised to 30, non-governmental and farmer organizations number 34, the number of certified estates number 21 and there are 177 independent growers who come under the umbrella of the Department of Export Agriculture. Most of these organic products are exported to Europe, Japan and Australia.

2.2. CHALLENGERS FACED BY ORGANIC AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Despite the generally positive outlook, the organic agriculture sector faces number of hurdles as it expands globally. Kristiansen, et al, (2006) highlighted that major challenge for Organic Agriculture is maintaining sustainability in the global economy: balancing organic principles with commercial imperatives. Through the studies carried out in Austria, Vogl, Hass and Kummer (2005) highlighted some fundamental questions that should be answered to promote Organic Agriculture such as is organic farming compatible with neo-liberal economy and globalization or does it need an alternative economic approach? What should

this alternative approach look like, if needed? Which steps need to be undertaken to ensure the further expansion of organic farming? Can they be supported better by forces of the market or do they need political and public financial support? Does an expansion of organic farming need institutional diversity, "multi-voice" and individual approaches or a single strategy of all members of the movement? Accordingly, economic aspects of organic farming have been a central concern by today.

2.3. ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN AGRICULTURE

The agriculture sector of the world has experienced profound changes in recent years. Policy reforms have reduced the scale of support in Agriculture, while demand side changes, in the form of increasing retailer concentration and complex patterns of consumer preference, have required the development of sophisticated market driven strategies (Alsos et al., 2011). Shucksmith and Herrman (2002) also stressed that profound changes experienced by the agriculture sector as consequence of policy liberalization and changes in the demand side and, in particular, the recognition of farmers' uneven propensity to adjust and adapt have shown attention to the need of better understand in variation in individual attitude and farm strategies. In this backdrop, the necessity of an entrepreneurial culture in agricultural land has been recognized and highlighted in many forums. Anderson (1995) defines entrepreneurial activity as "the creation and extraction of value from an environment", which is particularly relevant in this context because in the farming environment, value does not have to be measured in economic terms: farmers are motivated by things other than financial reward. However, in the midst of all these discussions, the extent to which farmers are entrepreneurial is contested. In essence, for Carter (1998), farmers have traditionally been entrepreneurial. Furthermore, according to Carter and Rosa (1998), farmers are primarily business owner-managers, and farms therefore can be characterized as businesses.

2.4. MEASURING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There have been numerous research activities taken place all around the world to assess the entrepreneurial characteristics, entrepreneurial behaviour and entrepreneurial orientation of the farmers operates in different scales. A large stream of research has examined the concept of entrepreneurial orientation (EO). Entrepreneurial orientation (EO) has been suggested as an essential attribute of high performing firms (Covin and Slevin 1989; Lumpkin and Dess 1996; Dess et al., 1997). Previous studies indicate that entrepreneurial orientation is the key resources for new ventures to obtain sustained competitive advantages, and there is a positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and new venture performance (Covin & Slevin, 1991; Lado & Wilson, 1994; Lee, Lee & Pennings, 2001; Lumplin & Dess, 1996; Zahra & Garvis, 2000; Zahra, Nielsen & Bogner, 1999). More than 100 studies of EO have been conducted, which has led to wide recognition and acceptance of the conceptual meaning and relevance of the concept. EO refers to the strategy making processes that provide organizations with a basis for entrepreneurial decisions and actions (e.g., Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003). The Entrepreneurial Orientation Questionnaire (Covin & Slevin, 1989) is the most widely utilized instrument for measuring this orientation and it is the commonly used measure in entrepreneurship literature. It was developed by Covin and Slevin (1989), referring on the previous studies of Khandwalla (1976/1977) and Miller and Friesen (1982). As reported in the literature, several researchers have agreed that entrepreneurial orientation could be explained by innovation, proactiveness, and risk taking (Wiklund, 1999). Based on Miller's (1983) conceptualization, three dimensions of EO have been identified and used consistently in the literature: Innovativeness, risk taking, and proactiveness. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) suggested that two additional dimensions were salient to entrepreneurial orientation and they identified competitive aggressiveness and autonomy as additional components of the EO construct.

2.5. MEASURING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL IMPACT

Measuring the performance or level of success of organic firms and finding its relationship with entrepreneurial behavior is the main task of the present study. The empirical literature reports a high diversity of performance indicators a common distinction is between financial and non-financial measures. Non-financial measures include goals such as satisfaction and global success ratings made by owners or business managers; financial measures include assessments of factors such as sales growth and ROI. As highlighted by Lumpkin & Dess (1996), performance is a multidimensional concept and the relationship between EO and performance may depend upon the indicators used to assess performance. Thus, conceptual arguments suggest that EO leads to higher performance. However, Ireland, Hitt, & Sirmon, (2003) suggest that the magnitude of the relationship seems to vary across studies. While some studies have found that businesses that adopt a strong entrepreneurial orientation perform much better than firms that do not adopt an entrepreneurial orientation (e.g., Covin & Slevin, 1986; Lee, Lee & Pennings, 2001; Wiklund & Shepherd 2003).

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study is aimed at investigating how the Entrepreneurial Behaviour (EB) of micro, and small scale organic vegetable farmers does impact on their Business Success. The study population was the micro, small and medium scale organic vegetable farmers of the Badulla district and the study covered Badulla, Moneragala and Mahiyangana area. The research followed both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies where the key informant interviews and questionnaire survey method were adopted. The study was conducted during February 2012 to February 2013 where the data collection was completed during October 2012 and January 2013.

Entrepreneurial behavior and business success are the key variables concerned in this study. Since the EB cannot be measured directly, ten constructs were deployed to measure it and those constructs were selected based on the previous research works. (e.g. Covin & Miles, (1999); Lado & Wilson, (1994); Lee, Lee & Pennings, (2001); Lumplin & Dess, (1996); Zahra & Garvis, (2000)). Accordingly, the variables measured in this study to gauge the EB were Personal Objective (PO), Self-confidence (SC), Knowledge Accumulation (KA), Risk Orientation (RO), Management Competencies (MC), Innovativeness (INO), Autonomy (AU), Networking (NT), Profit Orientation (PO) and Proactiveness (PA). Questions pertaining to each constructs were framed based on the previous research works recorded in the literature (E.g. Covin & Miles, (1999); Lado & Wilson, (1994); Lee, Lee & Pennings, (2001); Lumplin & Dess, (1996); Zahra & Garvis, (2000); Mappigau and Msi, (2012); Chaudhari et al., (2007); Kabiri and Mokshapathy, (2012)) and five point Likert scale was used get the responses. The response to each Likert question ranges from "1" – strongly disagrees to "5" – strongly agree. A total of fifty Likert questions were evaluated in which 5 questions for Personal Objective, 5 questions for Self-confidence, 5 questions items for Knowledge Accumulation, 6 questions for Risk Orientation, 5 questions for Management Competencies, 5 questions for Innovativeness, 4 questions for Autonomy, 5 questions for Networking, 6 questions for Profit Orientation and 4 questions for Proactiveness. To minimize the acquiescence bias inherited with the Likert scale, every possible effort was taken to include both negative and positive statements in the questionnaire. Indices were calculated for each construct using the method proposed by Mappigau and Msi (2012) and by summing the ten indices, Entrepreneurial Behavioral Index (EBI) was calculated. Chaudhari et al (2007) has proposed and used the Entrepreneurial Behavior Index in assessing the relationship between entrepreneurial behavior and Business Success. Monthly organic income was measured as the financial indicator and percentage growth in farmland extent during last two years was measured as a growth indicator. Owner's satisfaction towards present business status and his or her self-success rating were measured as non-financial indicators. Further, market assurance, number of organic products produced, cultivated land extent, other income, education, training and gender were evaluated as the other independent variable that could have an impact on the business success of the organic farmers.

To collect the primary data, a structured questionnaire was developed in which the questions were organized in two parts; part one was dedicated to the questions pertaining to the variable measurements (independent and dependent) and the part two was to reveal the demographic information of the respondents. The questionnaire was pretested with 15 randomly selected respondents and according to their feedback, a couple of minor adjustments were done and the questionnaire was finalized. According to the previous works of Perera and Mahindaratne (2012), there are about 850 small and medium scale organic farmers who have been producing organic fruit and vegetables in the Badulla District, out of which approximately 15% of them are Independent Organic Farmers, 50% are Member Farmers of Organic Associations and about 35% are contract farmers of some private companies. Hence, stratified random sampling technique was deployed to draw the sample where the strata were Independent Organic Farmers, Member Farmers of Organic Associations and Contract Farmers. In this study, in order to be qualified to participate in the survey, a respondent should be engaged in the Organic Agriculture at least for two years and he or she should produce organic vegetable for sale.

The collected data were coded using Microsoft Excel so it was in a suitable format to feed into the statistical software package (SPSS) used in the study. Then, several techniques were used to analyze the data collected in the study. Demographic and other related data collected through the farmers' survey was

analyzed descriptively to illustrate the characteristics of sample population. Cronbach’s alpha test was performed to check the reliability of the Likert items used in the Likert Scales. Further, the normality and multicollinearity of the data set were tested to assure the suitability of application of parametric statistics. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine whether there is any significant difference with respect to the Business Success and with respective Entrepreneurial Behaviour among the three agribusiness models. Subsequently, LSD mean separation technique was deployed to compare the means quantitatively. The Multiple Regression Analysis was performed to determine influence of entrepreneurial behavior and other factors that would affect on the Business Success of organic farmers.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the study, 231 farmers were interviewed and the overall gender distribution in the survey sample was recorded as 73% of female and 27% of male but it was remarkably different when it comes to the individual agribusiness models; 79% female in independent farmers model, 92% of female in Organic association members and only 45% of female when it comes to contract organic farming. In overall, about 62 percent of farmers have less than 20 perches as organic cultivation and only about 14 percent of farmers owned half to one acre of organic cultivation. Extent of organic cultivation found to be very low among the Independent Farmers and about 88% do their farming in an area less than 20 perches. A vast majority of Association Member Farmers owned (80 percent) organic extent of about 20- 40 perches. Among the Contract Farmers, about 50 percent of them cultivate about 20 – 80 perches and the balance owned more than 80 perches up to 3 acres. According to the survey finding, organic farming activities played an important role in household economy where, in overall, 38% of the respondents have indicated that the organic farming activity as one of their main household income generating activities while 62% indicated it as a supportive income activity. However the economic importance of organic farming activity has been deviated from the overall trend when it comes to the Independent Organic Farming Model and Contract Farming where only 21% of the Independent Organic Farmers have indicated it as one of main income activity while 45% of Contract Farmers stated the same. As revealed in the study, none of the Independent Organic Farmers or Member Farmers of Organic Associations held organic certification and that may has not been an issue for them because they exclusively catering for local market where the organic certification is not mandatory or demanded by the consumers. The study further revealed that, in overall, about 82% of the respondents have participated in some form of organic training session and only 18% have not undergone in any training. When compares the training experience of the farmers of three organic agribusiness models, lowest training exposure has shown by the Contract Farmers (68%) followed by Independent Organic Farmers (79%) and Member Farmers of Organic Associations (87%). Various types of programs have been conducted by the organic Farmer Associations to promote the organic farming so that their members are frequently exposed to those programs.

Cronbach’s Alpha test was performed to check the internal consistency of Likert items used in the Questionnaire. The Cronbach’s Alpha was reported as 0.867 and it implies that the items used in the scale have an internal consistency to an acceptable level. The normality test revealed that the Entrepreneurial Behavioral index does not follow a normal distribution, however according to the Central Limit Theorem if the sample size is larger, the sample expected to be behaved approximately normal. Further, there were not multiple peaks, outliers and sever skewness observed in the data set. Therefore, in this study, it was assumed that sample is normally distributed. Multicollinearity was tested and it was not a threat as all correlation coefficient between variables were below 0.70.

TABLE 4.1: RESULTS OF ANOVA FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.598	2	0.299	29.020	0.000*
Within Groups	2.349	228	0.010		
Total	2.947	230			

*Alpha level is at the 0.05 levels

TABLE 4.2: RESULTS OF MEAN SEPARATION (LSD) - BUSINESS SUCCESS

Dependent Variable	(I) BIZMODEL	(J) BIZMODEL	Mean Differ. (I-J)	Sig.
Business performance	Independent	Members	-0.0796*	0.000
		Contract	-0.1524*	0.000
	Members	Independent	0.0796*	0.000
		Contract	-0.0728*	0.000
	Contract	Independent	0.1524*	0.000
		Members	0.0728*	0.000

*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

ANOVA test (Table 4.1) revealed that the Business Success of three Organic Business Models adopted by the organic farmers was significantly different. Then the mean separation test (LSD) (Table 4.2) further revealed that the Contract Farmers possessed the highest Business Success followed by the Association Member Farmers and then the independent Farmers.

Further, the ANOVA test conducted to compare the Entrepreneurial Behaviour showed (table 4.3) that the Entrepreneurial Behaviour exhibited by the organic farmers fitted into three business models was significantly different to each other. Further, according to the results of LSD analysis (Table 4.4.), member farmers of Organic Organizations exhibited the highest Entrepreneurial Behaviour. Contract Farmers and Independent Farmers expressed medium and low Entrepreneurial Behaviour respectively. Exceptional Entrepreneurial Behaviour exhibited by the Organizational Member Farmers may be due to their relatively high exposure to the training and education programs than that of other two groups, but the practical application of that entrepreneurial spirit by them may be questionable because their Business Success does not rationally reflect their entrepreneurial behavior. Independent Farmers showed lowest Entrepreneurial Behaviour and it may be due to lack of opportunity to acquire the knowledge and their backward attitudes towards entrepreneurship and business.

TABLE 4.3: RESULTS OF ANOVA FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAVIOUR

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.346	2	0.173	35.506	0.000*
Within Groups	1.110	228	0.005		
Total	1.456	230			

*Alpha level is at the 0.05 levels

TABLE 4.4: RESULTS OF MEAN SEPARATION (LSD) FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL BEHAVIOUR

Dependent Variable	(I) BIZMODEL	(J) BIZMODEL	Mean Diffe.(I-J)	Sig.
Entrepreneurial Behaviour	Independent	Members	-0.1149 [*]	0.000
		Contract	-0.0779 [*]	0.000
	Members	Independent	0.1149 [*]	0.000
		Contract	0.0371 [*]	0.000
	Contract	Independent	0.0779 [*]	0.000
		Members	-0.0371 [*]	0.000

The relationship between Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Business Success of small and medium scale organic farmers was ascertained by regression analysis and the results are given in the Table 4.5. The recorded "P" value for the regression model was 0.000, so that the fitted model is statistically significant. Adjusted "R Square" value of the regression analysis was reported as 0.6, which implies that the model adopted is quite capable of explaining the factors affecting the Business Success of small and medium scale organic farmers to about percent. As shown in the table 4.5, regression analysis revealed that Entrepreneurial Behaviour, Market Assurance, Number of Organic Products Produced, Cultivated Land Extent and Education of the Farmer are significantly and positively affected on the Business Success of small and medium scale organic vegetable farmers whereas the Total Monthly Household Income is significant but negatively affected on the Business Success. Significant and positive relationship between the Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Business Success is obvious and this has been revealed in many number of previous research studies. Kabiri and Mokshapathy (2012) also reported that there is a strong association between innovativeness of EO and performance of farmers in the study of Entrepreneurial Orientation and Farmers Performance. Also the finds of the present study is consistence with the previous studies of Wilklund (1999). Further, this relationship indicates that if the Entrepreneurial Behaviour of the farmers is shaped and improved, the level of Business Success would also be improved.

TABLE 4.5: RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS – FACTORS AFFECTING THE BUSINESS SUCCESS OF ORGANIC FARMERS

Parameter	Beta	Sig.
Entrepreneurial Behavior	0.588	0.000*
Market Assurance	0.169	0.002*
No: of Organic Products	0.193	0.000*
Total monthly household income	-0.127	0.009*
Land Extent	0.310	0.000*
Experience	0.039	0.4140
Education	0.152	0.001*
Training	0.026	0.5860
Gender	0.075	0.1610

*Significant at the Alpha level of 0.05

Marketing of agricultural produce is one of very critical factors and there have been lots of gaps and inefficiencies in agricultural produce marketing. As revealed in the regression analysis, without an exception, Market Assurance is one of very critical factors that determine the Business Success in organic agriculture context. If the Market Assurance can be established, the producer farmers tend to display some encouragement and motivation to continue the farming activities. This is very important specifically in organic agriculture in the present context because, the local organic market is not developed yet; it is being developing and expanding slowly. As depicted in the above table, regression analysis has further revealed that there is a significant, positive relationship between Number of Organic Products Produced by the farmers and the Business Success, suggesting that higher is the number of produce, higher the Business Success. It may be inferred that when a farmer produces variety of produces, there might be a higher probability to get good demand and good price at least for some products that helps to improve the profit status of the farmers. Further, Total Family Income indicated a significant relationship with the Business Success and it was found to be negative. This may be due to the fact that when the total family income is high, or in other word the relative importance of the income generated from organic farming is low, farmers are likely to give lower attention towards the organic farming activity resulting a lower Business Success in organic farming. Organic land extent has also shown a significant relationship with the Business Success and it is simply straightforward that when the extent of cultivation is high, the farmer does have the ability to produce more and a variety of crops. Further, in the case of organic farming, having diversity is one very fundamental requirement and to have the diversity, it is necessary to a sufficiently large land extent. The other variables like gender, experience and training exposure were reported to be not significant.

5. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that there are three main agribusiness models namely, Independent Organic Farmer Model, Member Farmers of Organic Association Model and Contract Organic Farming Model. The Business Success of the three Business Models found to be significantly different each other and the Contract Farmers possessed the highest Business Success followed by the Association Member Farmers and then the independent Farmers. Then, the Entrepreneurial Behaviour of the framers fit in to three Business Models also found to be significantly different each other and member farmers of Organic Organizations exhibited the highest Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Contract Farmers and Independent Farmers expressed medium and low Entrepreneurial Behaviour respectively. In overall, the Business Success of micro and small scale organic vegetable farmers was significantly affected by the entrepreneurial behavior, market assurance, total family income, number of organic product they produced, land extent and level of education. Summing up the findings of the research, it can be said that member farmers of organic association model and contract organic farming model can be recognized as viable options to promote organic agribusiness whilst independent organic farming seems to be quite challenging under the present context.

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