

Public Relations Strategy in Building Brand Awareness: A Case Study of KDS

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the public relations strategies employed by PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo (KDS), a nascent company in the food and renewable energy industry, to enhance its brand visibility. Established in late 2020, the company specializes in the production and distribution of coconut shell briquettes and banana snacks. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this research delves into the company's public relations strategies. This methodology enables an in-depth exploration of the underlying meanings and nuances within the collected data. Through direct observation and in-depth interviews, the researcher aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the company's public relations tactics. The findings of this research reveal that KDS predominantly utilizes a soft selling or indirect sales approach to foster brand awareness. Key strategies employed by the company include: 1) Press Releases: The company actively disseminates information about its products, services, and corporate activities through various media channels, including print and online publications; 2) Press Conferences: These events are convened to announce significant company developments, such as product launches or major milestones; 3) Launching Events: These events are designed to introduce new products to target consumers and media representatives. By effectively implementing these public relations strategies, KDS has successfully cultivated a positive brand image and garnered significant public attention.

INTRODUCTION

Public relations professionals are tasked with innovating and designing strategies to creatively communicate their brand through the Internet to maintain the company's presence, given the increasingly fierce competition and the impact of technological developments on communication (Ramadhan et al., 2016). The internet, widely known for its numerous advantages, continues to evolve. The availability of information and communication technology has a significant influence on individuals and groups, supporting developments such as

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information exposure, unlimited access, and social, economic, and cultural transformation (Derivanti, 2022).

To distinguish themselves from competitors, companies must be capable of offering unique services and products. According to (Januari & Widiyanto, 2022), one strategy for businesses to set their products apart from those of their competitors is to establish strong brand awareness (Chayadi et al., 2021).

In today's digital age, public relations plays a crucial role in disseminating information to stakeholders through online press releases and other company-related updates (Azzahra & Soemardjo, 2022). Utilizing social media is essential for establishing a favorable reputation and for promptly and effectively addressing any clarifications. Considering that social media is the primary source of information for public relations, it's evident that the two are closely intertwined (Setyaningsih et al., 2019).

In today's competitive business landscape, various sectors, including services, transportation, and culinary, are witnessing significant competition. The culinary industry, in particular, is experiencing rapid growth, driven by the popularity of food and beverages (Yasril et al., 2020). KDS, established in 2020, specializes in distributing coconut shell briquettes and banana snacks. The "Albana" banana snack, now under the umbrella of KDS, was initially introduced by my friend and gained widespread attention in 2019, despite its historical roots dating back to ancient times. However, the product's momentum waned in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a decline in marketing efforts and consumer interest. Subsequently, in 2022, KDS acquired the product without rebranding in an attempt to revitalize its market presence.

KDS has responded to the two-year hiatus in marketing its product by implementing innovative strategies. This includes revamping the packaging to enhance its appeal and uniqueness. The company is now targeting the "Albana" market segment, specifically focusing on social media users aged 10-35. As part of its marketing strategy, KDS is also reaching out to students who are interested in becoming resellers of "Albana" products to earn extra income. The company has opted for a soft selling approach, utilizing indirect methods such as press releases through social media, to promote "Albana" products. A 15-second product explanation video of "Albana" has been shared on the Instagram channel @salealbana.id, and the channel is consistently creating engaging content to maintain audience interest.

KDS encountered significant challenges before and after implementing its public relations strategy. Before the strategy, "Albana" enjoyed widespread popularity but experienced a substantial decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to a decrease in marketing efforts and waning consumer interest. Consequently, KDS had to rebuild brand awareness for "Albana" from the ground up and reclaim its lost market share.

Following the implementation of the PR strategy, KDS successfully increased the visibility of the "Albana" brand on social media and attracted a younger demographic. However, new challenges emerged. KDS needed to maintain this momentum and continuously innovate its content and marketing strategies to retain growing consumer interest. Additionally, KDS faced competition from numerous similar products in the market, both domestic and international. Another challenge was rebuilding consumer trust in the "Albana" brand after its previous decline in popularity. Consumers needed to be reassured of the product's quality and superiority over competing products.

When conducting and developing a study, it is often informed by the findings of previous research. For this study, three previous journal articles were used as references. Firstly, (Topan

& Wideasanty, 2022) conducted a research journal that revealed that Urban Republic communicates its public relations marketing strategy through soft-selling communication methods such as press releases, press conferences, and brand launch events. These adaptable strategies are utilized for all monitored brands, as Urban Republic oversees numerous brands as a retail brand.

In a study conducted by (Dense et al., 2022), it was found that Chiki Twist implements both offline and online public relations strategies. These strategies involve sample selection, product grouping, and education. Chiki Twist focuses on digital assets across various platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter to effectively communicate its values and positions. The company's public relations efforts aimed at increasing awareness have proven successful, as evidenced by positive consumer reception of Chiki Twist's messages.

The study conducted by (Yosephine & Diniati, 2021) found that Sinar Mas Land effectively implemented a public relations strategy that included research, idea collection, SWOT analysis, and identification of key publics during the initial research phase. The company strategically carried out promotional activities through events and corporate partnerships to establish program goals and objectives. Additionally, Sinar Mas Land proactively nurtured relationships with journalists, engaged in public outreach, monitored media content, and adapted to new media. The final stages of the process involved pre-evaluation, internal evaluation, and external evaluation during the assessment phase.

The brand "Albana" faces the challenge of re-establishing itself in the market and convincing consumers that it can once again become a popular product. As a regional brand, "Albana" must focus on increasing awareness and gaining the trust of snack enthusiasts. This research aims to examine how KDS's public relations strategy is being utilized to reintroduce the "Albana" brand as a local product and improve its brand recognition.

In order to receive favorable feedback, effective communication should be clear and comprehensible to public relations professionals (Putri & Sari, 2020). As stated by (Prilla & Lubis, 2019), Public Relations encompasses all organized forms of communication, both internal and external, between an organization and its stakeholders, aimed at achieving specific objectives through mutual understanding.

A plan and strategy are inherently linked, with strategy emerging as a product of planning. As such, planning is a pivotal aspect of the management process. The primary aim of public relations is to accomplish objectives outlined within the scope of a public relations plan (Prilla & Lubis, 2019).

The primary focus of brand awareness, as noted by (Heryana, 2018), lies in establishing a lasting impression in the minds of the audience. Brand awareness plays a crucial role in guiding consumers through the stages of considering, purchasing, and using a brand's products or services, directly impacting their buying decisions and behavior. Another perspective defines brand awareness as the capacity of potential customers to identify and remember a brand within a specific product category (Wahid & Puspita, 2017).

There are three levels of brand awareness. The lowest level is brand recognition, where consumers remember the brand with assistance (aided recognition). The next level is brand recall, where a brand can be easily remembered by consumers because it is stored in their memory (unaided recall) (Soetristiyono & Vanel, 2022).

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, we examined the public relations strategies employed by KDS to bolster brand awareness using qualitative research methods. As noted by (Nuswantoro & Tengah, 2023), qualitative research aims to comprehend behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and other phenomena by elucidating them in words based on the experiences of research subjects. When research tends to utilize a qualitative approach, it is considered descriptive. Conducting descriptive research is relatively straightforward. Aside from gathering facts and generating insights, data can take the form of oral or written communication, observable behavior, or a combination of both. To culminate this investigation, the research also employs the collective case study technique (Manafe & Ardeana, 2022). The decision to employ qualitative methods in this research is underpinned by several key considerations. *Firstly*, qualitative methods enable a more in-depth exploration of the motivations and rationale behind the specific public relations strategies adopted by KDS. This level of detail is crucial for understanding the contextual nuances that may not be readily apparent through quantitative approaches. *Secondly*, qualitative research offers greater flexibility in adapting research questions and methodologies as the study progresses. This adaptability allows researchers to delve into emerging themes and issues that may arise during the data collection phase.

Data in this research will be collected through direct observation and interviews with employees of KDS, including the company owner, three individuals from the marketing division, and one person from the design division. The data obtained from observations and interviews will be analyzed in depth through several stages, starting from interview transcription, data coding, to the formation of categories and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis will be conducted by comparing data from various sources, looking for patterns, and interpreting the meaning behind the data. Data interpretation will be carried out by comparing the findings with relevant theories, considering the organizational context, and involving data triangulation to enhance the validity of the findings. Thus, it is expected to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the PR strategies implemented by KDS.

Description of the research subjects who were successfully interviewed:

Table 1. Research Subjects

No	Initials Name	Position
1	KF	President Director
2	MZ	Marketing and Sales
3	NP	Marketing and Sales
4	GT	Marketing and Sales
5	ATR	Graphic Design

Source: processed data, 2024

Here is the list of interview questions as follows:

Table 2. List of Informant Interview Questions

No	Item	Interview Questions
1	Press Release	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Who is the intended audience for PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo's branding promotion? What type of content does PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo use on Instagram to attract an audience? What is the impact of PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo on the audience through social media communication efforts? What feedback do followers provide on PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo's content to boost brand awareness? Which social media platforms does PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo use to boost brand awareness?

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| 2 | <i>Press Conference</i> | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Why is public relations communication with the audience considered successful?2. How does PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo manage KOLs and influencers to increase brand awareness?3. What type of campaign is PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo running to boost brand awareness? |
| 3 | <i>Launching Event</i> | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To increase brand awareness, which community did PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo select?2. When considering the three elements of soft-selling communication, which one has the most significant impact on increasing brand awareness?3. If PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo meets the communication KPIs, they are considered successful. What are the performance indicators that need to be met?4. Why is marketing activity so important in business? |

Source: (Topan & Widiasanty, 2022)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Press Release

When implementing the branding of PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo, several targets have been set. This was expressed by research informants and interviews.

"For now, our company targets branding towards young people who are active on social media like Instagram." (KF, MZ, NP). "The company prefers to target all ages, from young to old." (ATR). "We prefer to target students who join UKM and want to earn extra pocket money." (GT)

PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo utilizes various types of content on Instagram social media, as reported by research informants and interviews.

"Usually, we provide attractive promotions that we often post on Instagram social media, one of which is the purchase of 7 pcs for only 100k." (KF, ATR); "For our content, we more often upload evidence from customers who have ordered our products." (NP); "Usually, we upload content about discount information and free shipping with certain purchases." (GT, MZ).

Efforts to communicate through social media have various impacts, as stated by research informants and sources.

"Communication through social media with the audience/followers has quite a good impact, namely it can increase product orders, achieve higher sales profits, and the products sold are well received by the community, thus supporting business growth." (KF, ATR, MZ, NP, GT).

PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo's brand awareness content receives diverse feedback from followers, as stated by research informants and sources.

"Until now, we have received good feedback in the form of likes and comments that seem enthusiastic about the content we upload." (KF, MZ); "Enthusiastic feedback only occurs on certain content such as discount and free shipping content, but for content regarding definitions or product introductions to consumers, there is still no enthusiastic feedback." (GT, ATR, NP).

PT Kefa Dadali Sinergindo uses multiple social media platforms to boost brand awareness, as stated by research informants and sources.

"Until now, the most active social media is Instagram because almost all groups use it, there is also Facebook and TikTok but they are not very active yet." (KF, ATR, MZ, NP, GT).

A press release is a method used by organizations and companies to communicate information to the public. Typically, press releases include details about the company's current state, upcoming events, and any product promotions. They are usually concise, typically two to three pages in length, to ensure that the public can easily grasp the information without being overwhelmed by verbosity.

The presence of a well-crafted press release can significantly enhance a company or institution's visibility and bolster its reputation in the eyes of the public. KDS is currently focused on branding across all demographics, particularly targeting adults and young individuals active on social media. The company's current focus for youth-oriented branding is on students involved in student organizations who are interested in promoting KDS's products to earn extra income. This approach aligns with the findings of the research conducted by (Topan & Widiasanty, 2022) on the branding strategies adopted by Urban Republic.

Social media platforms like Instagram offer comprehensive features that are ideal for supporting the branding needs of companies. Over time, various types of content can be utilized for branding purposes. For instance, KDS (@username_1) on Instagram employs several types of content to engage the audience. The company shares enticing promotions that appeal to potential buyers and frequently posts customer testimonials to showcase the quality of its Albana products. Additionally, the account also features content about free shipping, alleviating concerns about shipping costs for online purchases. This approach aligns with previous research by (Santoso & Toruan, 2018), which highlights strategies for enhancing brand awareness through Payfazz's Instagram account and attracting consumer interest through its content, mirroring the discussion of content used to engage the audience.

The use of social media for communication has a range of impacts, including facilitating interaction with a wide audience, breaking down barriers of distance and time, enabling free self-expression, rapid dissemination of knowledge, and cost savings. Communication through social media by KDS on Instagram @salealbana.id has similarly yielded various positive impacts. This includes an increase in product orders, leading to a significant rise in sales profits. Moreover, the public's positive reception of the marketed products has contributed to business growth. This aligns with prior research by (Arisandi & Pradana, 2018), which emphasized the substantial influence of social media on marketing tourist attractions in Batam. Consequently, discussions on the impact of communication through social media @salealbana.id can be viewed as predominantly positive.

Effective communication activities require valuable feedback as a crucial component. Feedback serves not only as a response but also as a stimulus that can offer new perspectives to the communicator. It is an indispensable element, as communication cannot thrive without clear responses. For instance, when the Instagram account @salealbana.id uploads content to attract consumer interest, it receives positive feedback from its followers in the form of likes and enthusiastic comments, particularly on promotional content and free shipping offers. The company aims to elicit similar enthusiasm for its product introduction content, as this type of content is expected to be educational for the followers. This observation aligns with the findings of previous research by (Topan & Widiasanty, 2022), which indicates that audience feedback

tends to be more abundant for certain types of content. Consequently, this supports the argument that enthusiastic feedback is more likely to be elicited by specific content.

Social media acts as a platform for online social interaction, accessible to the public for communication and engagement. KDS utilizes various social media platforms to enhance brand visibility, with Instagram being the most active, boasting 2,032 followers. The company opted for Instagram as its primary platform for product introduction and updates due to its extensive reach across all age groups, making it a quick way to attract consumers. Aside from Instagram, KDS also utilizes WhatsApp and Facebook, albeit less actively. This aligns with previous research by (Puspitarini & Nuraeni, 2019), which highlights the diverse promotional activities of Happy Go Lucky House. It can be inferred that Happy Go Lucky House effectively leverages Instagram features, similar to KDS's choice of Instagram as the main platform for product introduction and updates.

Press Conference

Communication using public relations with the audience is said to be successful based on several reasons. This statement was expressed by research informants and sources as follows:

"Because communication with the audience received positive feedback and the audience started to be interested in the advertised product." (MZ, NP, GT); "Because the communication carried out by PT Kefa has been maximized well and by the company's KPI standards." (KF, ATR).

KOL management with influencers is applied to increase brand awareness. This statement was expressed by research informants and sources as follows:

"For now, we have not implemented it because we still want to focus on digital advertising first and be active on social media for educational materials." (KF, ATR, MZ, NP, GT).

Several campaigns have been conducted to increase brand awareness. This statement was expressed by research informants and sources as follows:

"For now, we have never conducted a campaign because there is no campaign target and the type of campaign used." (ATR, MZ).

A press conference aims to enhance brand awareness for the company's products or services. Brand awareness, a marketing term, refers to the extent of customer familiarity with a brand or service. Utilizing media coverage is one method to boost brand awareness for the company's products or services.

The integration of social media and public relations can have a significant impact. Similar to public relations, social media fosters reciprocal relationships between companies and their target audience. Integrating public relations and social media efforts can enhance a company's visibility, positioning, and legitimacy. The communication between KDS and the audience can be considered successful based on the positive feedback received and the audience's growing interest in the advertised product. This success is attributed to the effective communication carried out by KDS, which met the company's Key Performance Indicator (KPI) standards. Consistent with prior research by (Topan & Widiyanto, 2022) on communication through public relations, such efforts are deemed successful for various reasons.

In addition to boosting sales and maintaining the business of KDS, the public relations team uses strategies to enhance brand recognition among the company's target market and raise awareness about its products. These strategies involve organizing community-based events, collaborating with Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), and connecting with online media. KOLs are

individuals with the ability to influence the opinions and behaviors of others. Despite the potential benefits, KDS has chosen not to implement KOL management with influencers at this time. The company prefers to concentrate on digital advertising and social media for educational purposes. Additionally, KDS has concerns about the high cost of collaborating with KOLs and their complete control over content published on their social media platforms. It's worth noting that previous research conducted by (Baharsyam & Wahyuti, 2022) outlines a six-stage KOL usage strategy that closely aligns with KDS's considerations for KOL management.

By leveraging all available social media features to execute planned tactics for campaigns and product promotions, a comprehensive public relations marketing strategy is being implemented. The success of the campaign, which aims to boost brand recognition on Instagram, is significantly affected by the careful selection of brand ambassadors. However, KDS has not previously utilized any type of campaign during its business operations because various preparations are necessary to launch a social media campaign. Social media campaigns differ from regular social media content uploads in that they are highly measurable. Target audience, campaign focus, techniques, timing, and all other relevant indicators are clearly and meticulously defined. All aspects of the posted content must align with the campaign objectives. Before launching a campaign, the brand team typically conducts thorough research. Based on the research findings, the theme, objectives, and other strategies to be employed during the campaign period are determined. Consistent with a previous study by (Sultana et al., 2022), which suggests that persuasive communication conducted through campaigns has a similar impact on brand awareness as the success of campaigns aimed at increasing brand recognition on Instagram, positively influenced by the selection of the best brand ambassadors.

Launching Event

In building brand awareness, the role of the community is very important. The statement was revealed by the research informant and source as follows:

"This was once entrusted to one of the pesantren cooperatives, but it did not yield results." So for now, we want to enter the student community by creating a program for students who want to earn extra pocket money by becoming resellers of our products. (KF, ATR, MZ, NP, GT).

In increasing brand awareness, there is one element that has the greatest impact on soft selling communication. The statement was expressed by research and interview informants as follows:

"Press release because our goal in posting on Instagram is to try to introduce the audience to the products we market." (KF, GT); "Press release, the most impactful posts are about promotions and discounts because the audience is indeed most interested in these two types of content." (ATR, MZ, NP).

If the communication KPIs implemented by KDS are met, it is considered successful or effective. However, several performance indicators must be met. The statement was expressed by research informants and interview respondents as follows:

"Yes, for KPI indicators, the standard is only the KPI itself, and of course, all companies also apply examples such as Work Quality, Quantity, Timeliness, Effectiveness, Independence, and Work Commitment so that the achieved goals are clear." (KF, ATR, MZ, NP, GT).

Marketing is an important aspect of business activities. The statement was expressed by research informants and interview respondents as follows:

"Because the goal of marketing is to advertise brands, products, and services so that businesses can grow effectively and generate the highest possible profits." (ATR, NP); "Because introducing products to potential clients or engaging in promotional activities is the core of marketing to achieve specific goals." (KF, GT). "Because the company's marketing is very important because business goals can be achieved with effective marketing initiatives." (MZ)

Businesses often organize events to introduce new products or create marketing strategies for existing ones. These promotional activities aim to generate public interest in the event. The ultimate goal is to attract attendees to the event, whether through ticket sales or general participation. Event marketing plays a crucial role in familiarizing the public with a product and fostering emotional and intellectual connections between customers and the product. This allows customers to interact directly with the products, engaging their senses and perceptions. This is in stark contrast to simply viewing advertisements on social media.

Creating a strong and loyal community is a crucial strategy for online sellers in Indonesia. A vibrant community fosters a deep connection between the brand and its customers, ultimately helping the company expand its reach, enhance its business reputation, and stand out in a competitive market. This community serves as the cornerstone for the company's long-term success. Initially, KDS aimed to build brand awareness by placing its products in pesantren, but this approach did not yield the desired results. Consequently, the company plans to shift its community focus to students, aiming to engage with student communities and offering programs for students to earn extra income by becoming resellers of KDS's products. This approach aligns with previous research by (Trismia Indriyani et al., 2022), which emphasizes the significant role of communication within the Lombok Influencer community in enhancing brand awareness for Hindu SMEs, mirroring the impact of a strong and active community in fostering a close relationship between the brand and its customers.

The public relations department at KDS employs soft-selling communication, such as press releases, press conferences, and product launch events. Among these communication methods, press releases have the greatest impact on increasing brand awareness. KDS uses press releases on its Instagram account to introduce and educate followers about its products. However, promotional and discount content still has the most significant impact, as followers of the Instagram account @salealbana.id are particularly interested in content related to price reductions. This approach is in line with the findings of (Topan & Wideasanty, 2022), which indicate that Urban Republic also utilizes soft-selling communication, including press releases, press conferences, and brand launch events, to communicate its public relations marketing strategy. This parallels KDS's use of soft-selling communication to engage with potential consumers.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are instrumental in determining the necessary steps to achieve business goals. The KPI design process is challenging, often only involving a small group of employees within the company. A good KPI relies on collected data and serves as a guide for businesses to monitor success during operations. The communication KPI implemented by KDS is deemed successful and effective. Performance indicators that must be met include Work Quality, Quantity, Timeliness, Effectiveness, Independence, and Work Commitment. This has the impact of making it easy to categorize and evaluate the performance of each employee or department, with only two outcomes: achieving the goal or failing to do so. Without specific KPIs, the organization would simply be a group of employees running daily

operations without a clear understanding of what they aim to achieve. This is in line with previous research conducted by (Topan & Widiyanty, 2022) regarding the successful implementation of communication Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) by KDS.

Marketing plays a crucial role in driving profitability for a company. Understanding the needs and wants of the market to create products and deliver value is a key aspect of the marketing process, which is carried out by individuals or teams. Given its significance, KDS places great emphasis on marketing. Effective marketing initiatives enable companies to reach their objectives. KDS's marketing goal is to maximize revenue by promoting its brand, products, and services. Marketing is central to activities related to introducing or promoting products to potential buyers. This aligns with a study by (Adrian et al., 2021), which suggests that brand awareness in online stores is influenced by marketing through social media.

CONCLUSION

In the research on the Public Relations Strategy of KDS in Building Brand Awareness, it can be concluded that KDS utilizes communication in the form of soft selling or indirect selling. This is accomplished through press releases, press conferences, and product launch events to engage with potential consumers. Among the three communication elements, it is evident that communication through press releases has the most significant impact on increasing brand awareness. This conclusion is drawn from the primary objective of KDS, which leverages press releases on its Instagram platform to introduce and educate about the products being marketed. The shared content includes compelling promotions available to buyers, and the Instagram account @salealbana.id regularly features testimonials from customers who have purchased Albana products. Additionally, the Instagram account @salealbana.id offers content regarding free shipping.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To further elevate KDS's public relations strategy and amplify brand recognition, a comprehensive approach is recommended. Building upon the successful implementation of press releases on Instagram, KDS should expand its digital presence through the creation of more frequent and engaging content that highlights promotions and customer testimonials. Incorporating interactive elements such as polls and live Q&A sessions can foster deeper connections with potential customers. Collaborating with influencers who align with the brand's values and target audience can significantly enhance visibility and credibility. Additionally, developing a content calendar can ensure consistent and relevant messaging across all channels. By diversifying communication channels and enhancing consumer interaction, KDS can solidify its brand position and effectively reach a wider audience. This research highlights the significance of a holistic public relations strategy that leverages both traditional and digital channels. The findings suggest that companies in similar sectors can benefit from a data-driven approach to public relations, focusing on creating valuable content, building authentic relationships with their audience, and adapting to the ever-evolving digital landscape. By implementing these strategies, KDS can not only enhance brand awareness but also cultivate customer loyalty and drive business growth.

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