

Customer Satisfaction on Starbucks Malaysia Post-Covid 19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Due to the burgeoning competition in the retail coffee industry, standing out among numerous coffeehouse brand chains is crucial for Starbucks. Customers have more options to choose from, and obtaining customer satisfaction is essential for Starbucks to stay in a winning position in the market. The COVID-19 pandemic, on the other hand, has altered everything, including how retailers serve their customers. This research examines whether service quality, perceived convenience, product, and promotion influence customer satisfaction post-Covid 19 Pandemic. A total of 185 participants participated in the online survey via Google Forms, and all data were analyzed using SPSS. The results show that service quality, perceived convenience, product, and promotion positively impact customer satisfaction. These findings can provide meaningful insights, and a few recommendations are suggested to Starbucks.

Keywords: COVID-19, Customer Satisfaction, Perceived Convenience, Product, Promotion, Service Quality, Starbucks.

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1971, Starbucks Corporation was established. Starbucks is the world's largest coffee shop chain and a worldwide coffee shop franchise in the United States. Starbucks also serves tea, snacks, sandwiches, and pastries in addition to coffee. Initially, it simply sold coffee beans, but after switching to the present business model, it gradually expanded its outlets and became a symbol of American life. In addition, some shops have created partnerships with other sectors, such as supermarkets and booksellers in order to function as composite stores.

Starbucks was operated and owned by Berjaya Starbucks Coffee Company Sdn Bhd in Malaysia. Starting on 17 December 1988, Starbucks had its first outlet in Kuala Lumpur and expanded its outlets to 11 states and all three federal territories until now. Nowadays, Starbucks operates 320 outlets in Malaysia. It has also established more than 58 Drive-Thru stores and 10 Reserve™ stores. In addition, Starbucks operates branches in 75 countries and regions worldwide, according to the company's 2018 annual report.

After over two decades, Starbucks has become one of the Malaysians' preferred coffee shops and a valuable part of the national community. The remarkable training and development programs at Starbucks Malaysia have been acknowledged with prizes such as 'Investing in People' at the Asia Responsible Enterprise Awards 2018 and Asia's Best Companies to Work for in Asia Corporate Excellence and 2017 Sustainability Award.

Besides, Starbucks Reserve™ stores have offered customized shopping experiences to their customers. The concept of this idea was aimed to invite its customers to discover and experience the world's rarest and most extraordinary small-batch coffees in an immersive space. Furthermore, Starbucks Malaysia inaugurated the world's first Starbucks Sign Language store in Bangsar Village II in 2016, intending to foster an empowering culture for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. This action shows that Starbucks always cares about the community and is not just a profit-oriented retail coffee shop. Through the concept of Starbucks Signature Stores, confidence, self-esteem, and self-reliance can be developed by the deaf and hard-of-hearing partners. As a result, they will feel a sense of pride and fulfillment in their lives.

In 2009, a new drive-thru concept store was launched by Starbucks Malaysia in order to adapt to the fast-moving world. Customers could now choose to consume their favorite coffee on the go or in-store in a flexible option. The drive-thru concept has been gradually expanded in more than 10 Malaysian states and federal territories.

Starbucks is focused on offering the best premium coffee whilst enriching the Malaysians' standard one cup at a time. Since its inception, Starbucks has been focusing on refinement, positioned as a "specialty coffee store". It is aimed at the market group of white-collar workers with higher spending levels by offering premium quality, freshly brewed coffee and related mechanism collection, including coffee beans, bottles, and other matching pastries. Starbucks also provided excellent service with the aim of "the greatest quality coffee to generate a distinct humanistic attitude that allows consumers to experience the scent of coffee and spiritual freedom". In contrast to the office and the third space of the family, Starbucks prioritized the establishment of a leisure-oriented atmosphere in which customers will feel elegant and comfortable.

Regarding product taste and quality, Starbucks adheres to making high-quality coffee with freshly roasted original coffee beans to make it a place in the coffee market.

Starbucks has a diversified product line, such as Frappuccino, cakes, bread, and coffee and will launch limited products related to seasons or festivals to attract the public to buy. Starbucks will also launch many related products, such as accompanying cups, which are exquisite in workmanship and have a specific collection value. In addition, in terms of promotion, Starbucks' primary measure is to sell accompanying cards, which are prepaid stored-value cards that can be registered on the website to check consumption records and available amounts. Starbucks had customized preferential reward programs in different styles to attract everyone to buy. By integrating the above factors, Starbucks' products and services have occupied a place in people's hearts.

Nevertheless, Starbucks has been impacted significantly financially and economically due to the Covid-19 pandemic starting in 2020. Many foods and beverage industry was hit by this crisis, including the famous retail coffee shop brand Starbucks (Ali, Dogan, Amin, Hussain, & Ryu, 2020). A massive negative influence related to the economy, supply chain, and consumer behavior due to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak has been faced by Starbucks (Sinha et al., 2021). Therefore, Starbucks needs to retain customer satisfaction to survive in the market due to the burgeoning competition in the retail coffee industry since the beginning of the pandemic.

Past studies have examined Starbucks in the area of customer loyalty (Pérez-Morón et al., 2022), marketing (Nair et al., 2021), business performance during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kee et al., 2021a; Sinha et al., 2021), purchase intention (Dilip et al., 2021), brand image (Pandey et al., 2021; Azriuddin et al., 2020), organizational success (Kee et al., 2021b) and organizational culture (Goh et al., 2020). In this paper, we aim to investigate consumer satisfaction by assessing Starbucks' service quality, convenience, products, and promotions in Malaysia post-Covid 19. From the level of consumer satisfaction, we can see whether Starbucks' adjustment is effective while maintaining overall customer satisfaction. We also aim to figure out the aspect of Starbucks' adjustment that has been sacrificed and strengthened the consumers' pleasure with various indicators. In this way, we will discuss how effectively Starbucks adjusted in the face of the dilemma of the epidemic in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality

Service quality is one of the key attributes associated with customer satisfaction. Customers always consider the quality of service when deciding if a business, restaurant, or corporation is excellent or terrible. Kotler & Keller (1987) defines service as any intangible action or service offered by one party to another that does not result in the transfer of ownership. Moreover, service is provided in exchange for pleasure or convenience by one party to another. Today, competition among enterprises is becoming increasingly fierce, especially because of the pandemic-covid-19 that makes them face more difficulties. Anderson and Zeithmal (1984) and Phillips, Chang, and Buzzell (1983) asserted that quality influences client purchasing decisions and determines market share and return on investment. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) point out that customers' perceptions of various qualities of service, such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, are reflected in service quality. Therefore, companies need to consider the above aspects more and maintain a high level of service quality to satisfy customers and gain competitive advantages.

H1: Service quality is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Perceived Convenience

Customers view the time consumed and effort utilized in purchasing or using a service, which is perceived as convenience in a service economy (Berry, Seiders, & Grewal, 2002). Convenience can be referred to as the capability to minimize non-monetary expenditures such as time, energy, and effort when acquiring or utilizing goods and services (Berry et al., 2002, Farquhar and Rowley, 2009, Seiders et al., 2007). This factor also plays a vital role in influencing customer satisfaction. If a customer receives greater perceived convenience, they will feel more satisfied. For example, if customers can receive their products in a short time or lower their efforts to get this good under the situation of covid-19, customer satisfaction will increase. Due to the pandemic outbreak, Starbucks has successfully responded to this situation by utilizing its digital touchpoints and contactless pick-up and drive-thru services (Musonera, 2021). Our questions on this aspect are designed to evaluate the customer satisfaction of Starbucks Malaysia post-covid 19.

H2: Perceived convenience is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Product

For Starbucks, there are various products for customers to choose from based on their tastes. The product can be anything offered in the market to fulfill a customer's desire and needs (Kotler, Armstrong, Brown, & Adam, 2006). More products mean more choices for individuals, which may help raise customer satisfaction because they can choose what they want. After obtaining the goal level of customer benefit, price appropriateness may boost customer satisfaction to encourage sustained loyalty in repeat customer purchases (Friani, Iqir, & Tampi, 2018). A product's price can refer to the money used or paid off to obtain a service or goods (Bei & Chiao, 2001). Price can also be an amount of the value exchanged to enjoy a product or service by purchasers, also known as the cost of paying it (Kumavat, 2012). The product's price influences consumer satisfaction because a customer always considers the price when buying something. Nobody wants to buy goods at a price that is not reasonable. To be more explicit, people may believe this good does not merit this price, influencing their perceptions and judgments. Under the pandemic, the cost can still be the vital element that affects individuals' behaviors whether they buy the products from Starbucks or not.

H3: Product is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Promotion

Promotion is defined as communication through which the product information aims to reach prospective customers. It is a fundamental consumer marketing technique that serves as a temporary monetary incentive to influence consumers' purchase decision-making (Shaddy & Lee, 2020). It can affect the purchase decision-making of a consumer, either making the purchase now or more than usual to boost sales. When the promotion is effective, it can immediately create brand loyalty among them to retain the profitable relationship (Kee et al., 2021). Promotion strategies and store ambiance help in inculcating impulse buying behavior in customers. Starbucks has reached out to consumers worldwide using digital platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to enhance consumer interaction with the Starbucks brand (Silalahi, 2018). Starbucks believes in utilizing new media instead of traditional marketing to engage with customers, especially millennials. This is because the youth in this era is connected through social media and spends more time on it. Hence, the public expects an appealing sales promotions strategy while keeping a comfortable store environment to boost the purchase desire through Starbucks outlets (Ratih, 2020). In maximizing the potential opportunity in the near-post Covid-19 market situation, Starbucks must utilize this to reevaluate its distribution and promotion initiatives. It can adjust its existing strategy in

customer relationship management to adapt to the current status. For instance, a well-developed customer loyalty program offering discounts and incentives has been customized to customers in the market post-Covid 19 (Lombardi, 2021).

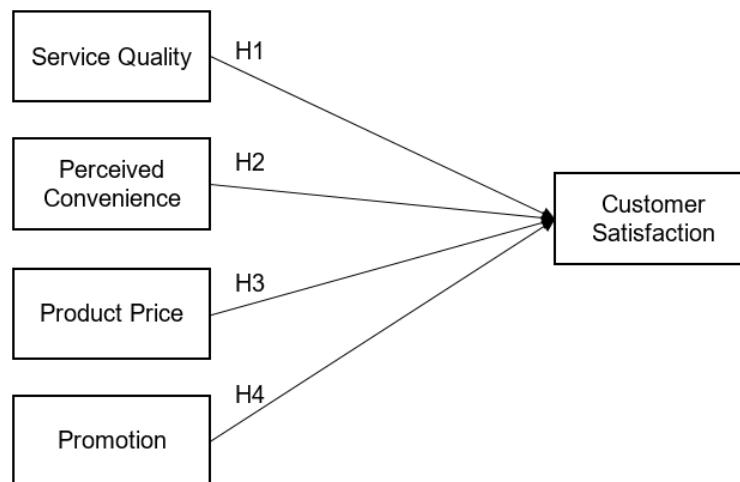
H4: Promotion is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Customer Satisfaction

Satisfaction from the customer is essential for customer retention and business growth. Once the customer is satisfied, he wishes to visit the store again. Also, through satisfied customers, the brand earns marketing. Therefore, retaining customers for better market standing and profitability in this competitive market is necessary. This is because brand loyalty positively corresponds to customer satisfaction (Susanty, 2015). When a brand equips with professional corporate service personnel, it can fulfill its customers' needs and desires. The brand would be able to earn a reputation from the consumers as it brings a symbolic value to them, such as social emotions, aesthetics, and prestige (Ge, Yuan, Wang, & Park, 2021). Customer satisfaction can also create long-term customer loyalty and happiness, increasing the brand's market share and growth through cost-effectiveness (Pandey et al., 2021). For example, Starbucks' strong brand recognition has been sustained through its superior product quality, empathetic, responsive customer service, and gorgeous coffee shop atmosphere (Aryani et al., 2021). Thus, it can successfully generate consumer loyalty as a competitive advantage over its competitors in surviving in the market (Tu & Chang, 2012). As a result, firms must concentrate on these parameters to develop a long-term and mutually beneficial engagement with a consumer.

Figure 1 represents our research framework. A total of four hypotheses were formulated based on the past literature review.

Figure 1. Research Framework



RESEARCH METHOD

Sample and Procedures

The questionnaire survey via Google Forms was conducted and distributed to the public to collect relevant information about Starbucks' customer satisfaction in Malaysia post-covid 19. In addition, the online survey has been sent out through WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, and other social media to reach the public. Concerning the privacy issues, all respondents who answered have been informed that the data collection is merely for research purposes and that the confidential information will not be disclosed to outsiders. Overall, all the questions in the survey are associated with customer satisfaction with Starbucks in Malaysia post-Covid 19. As a result, we are able to obtain 185 respondents in the survey.

Measurements

The questionnaire comprises six sections: respondent demographics, service quality (H1), perceived convenience (H2), product (H3), promotion (H4), and customer satisfaction. The IBM SPSS Statistics Software Version 26 was utilized to evaluate the data collected from the survey. A 5-point Likert scale with a degree ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) was employed in all measures.

Respondents' Demographics

The demographics of the respondents were collected using single-statement items, which included gender, age, ethnicity, highest education level, occupation, level of income, and visit habits.

Table 1. Variables and Measurement Items

Variables	Items
Service Quality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Starbucks' service is said to be prompt and friendly. 2. Professional, savvy, and always prepared for customers' requests at any time. 3. The baristas always greet the customers with a smile. 4. Starbucks staff always attend to every customer need. 5. Attitude of staff in dealing with customers' complaints is polite. 6. Starbucks continuously collects customers' reviews or feedback on service and improvement.
Perceived Convenience	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The duration usually spends on order and pick up is short. 2. Digital transformation in the order process is very convenient (e.g. digital touchpoint). 3. I can order through the Starbucks app or other delivery app platforms. 4. The delivery mode in a drive-thru or pick-up only is very convenient. 5. The packaging of Starbucks is very convenient to use and take away. 6. Starbucks provides various payment methods.

Product	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The food and drinks are of good quality and delicious. 2. The food and drinks are offered in various choices. 3. Starbucks always comes out with seasonal beverages and drinks. 4. The product meets expectations and values for money. 5. The food and drinks are appealing because of their visually attractive design. 6. Starbucks always introduces attractive co-branding and collection of merchandise.
Promotion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I can visit the official social media of Starbucks to check out the latest promotion news. 2. I can join the Starbucks Rewards program with award points to be collected (e.g. Starbucks membership cards). 3. I can enjoy a cash rebate on Starbucks food and drinks using the e-wallet (e.g. Touch n go and Shopee pay). 4. Various loyalty programs and promotional campaigns are held often. 5. The promotional and discount vouchers are very attractive. 6. Promotional cooperation between e-commerce platforms is very attractive. (e.g. Shopee, Lazada).
Customer Satisfaction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In general, I am satisfied with Starbucks. 2. I will continue to visit Starbucks in the future. 3. I am happy to recommend Starbucks to others. 4. I am not likely to switch to other competitors.

RESULTS

Table 2. Demographic's descriptive analysis of respondents (N=185)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	118	63.8
Female	67	36.2
Age		
20 years old and below	22	11.9
21-30 years old	112	60.5
31-40 years old	23	12.4
41-50 years old	23	12.4
51 years old and above	5	2.7
Ethnicity		

Malay	40	21.6
Chinese	95	51.4
Indian	49	26.5
Others	1	0.5
Highest education level		
High school or equivalent	12	6.5
Diploma	27	14.6
Bachelor's Degree	119	64.3
Master's Degree	21	11.4
Ph.D. Degree	6	3.2
Occupation		
Self-employed	18	9.7
Employed	28	15.1
Unemployed	12	6.5
Student	117	63.2
Retired	10	5.4
Level of income		
Below RM1,500	76	41.1
RM1,500 - RM2,499	47	25.4
RM2,500 - RM3,999	41	22.2
RM4,000 and above	21	11.4
How often do you visit Starbucks		
Almost everyday	14	7.6
Few times a week	41	22.2
Once a week	46	24.9
Once or twice a month	48	25.9
Rarely (as a treat)	36	19.5

According to Table 1, 185 persons responded to the questionnaire. The majority of the respondents are male, representing 63.8%. 60.5% of the respondents are 21-30 years old, Chinese represented 51.4%, Bachelor's degree charted 64.3%, and 63.2% currently a student. 25.4% of them have an income range between RM1,500 to RM2,499. At the same time, 24.9% of 185 respondents indicated that they had visited Starbucks once a week.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients, and Zero-order correlations of variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Service Quality	0.801				
Perceived Convenience	0.687**	0.806			
Product	0.755**	0.777**	0.841		
Promotion	0.555**	0.641**	0.645**	0.770	
Customer Satisfaction	0.442**	0.540**	0.510**	0.747**	0.678
Mean	4.1468	4.1827	4.2198	4.2243	4.2270
Standard Deviation	0.56028	0.59282	0.56174	0.50058	0.52694
No. of Items	6	6	6	6	4

*Note: N = 150; *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Diagonal entries indicate Cronbach's coefficients alpha.*

Cronbach's alpha, also known as coefficient alpha, was developed by Lee Cronbach in 1951 to examine the reliability (internal consistency) that could explain how closely a group of variables is associated. Based on the generally accepted rule of thumb, a value between 0.6 to 0.7 denotes a reasonable degree of reliability, while 0.8 and above implies a great degree. Nevertheless, a value exceeding 0.95 may imply redundancy and are not always desirable (Hulin, Netemeyer, & Cudeck, 2001). According to Table 2, the survey presented five variables consisting of several items on a 5-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha for service quality (α equal to 0.801), perceived convenience (α equal to 0.806), product (α equal to 0.841), promotion (α equal to 0.770) and customer satisfaction (α equal to 0.678). All variables had reliability ranging from 0.678 to 0.841.

Table 4. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis

Variables	Customer Satisfaction
Service Quality	0.166
Perceived Convenience	0.364**
Product	-0.149
Promotion	0.375*
R ²	0.567
F Value	73.98
Durbin-Watson Statistic	1.747

*Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.*

This study used multiple regression analysis to evaluate our hypothesis (H1-H4), as demonstrated in Table 5. Service quality (H1), perceived convenience (H2), product (H3), and promotion (H4) is the independent variables, whereas the dependent variable is customer satisfaction in our study. The findings indicate that perceived convenience and promotion positively relate to the satisfaction of the customers with beta (β) values of 0.364 and 0.375. Therefore, H2 and H4 were supported. Besides, the value of R² (0.567) revealed that 56.7% of the variation in customer satisfaction is explained by perceived convenience and promotion. We also found that perceived convenience with the beta (β) values of 0.364 is the most important element with a significant predictor of $p < 0.01$, followed by the promotion with a significant predictor $p < 0.05$ that contributed to customer satisfaction in Starbucks Malaysia post-Covid 19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the service quality and product did not significantly impact customer satisfaction. Hence, H1 and H3 were not supported.

DISCUSSION

The interrelation between service quality, perceived convenience, product, and promotion with the customers' satisfaction with the brand chain coffee shop Starbucks in Malaysia is evaluated through this research. The survey objects comprise visiting Starbucks customers in Malaysia. By using Starbucks visitors in Malaysia as survey objects, the researchers investigate the connections between service quality, perceived convenience, product, and promotion of the brand chain coffee shop. The study revealed the factors influencing Malaysian coffee buyers to visit Starbucks Cafe. This research will be insightful to Starbucks in assisting them in their marketing strategy in Malaysia especially post-Covid-19, to increase coffee-brand retention.

The applicability of current measurement frameworks and assessment methods of perceived service quality must be reviewed in countries that are not coffee addicts, like Malaysia. According to the findings, service quality has no significant influence on customer satisfaction. Although service quality may guarantee customer responsiveness, it is not necessary to determine customer satisfaction with the brand. As a result, in developing and non-traditional coffee-drinking countries, further adaptive discussions are required for current service quality and perceived-value frameworks. For instance, from Starbucks' standpoint, this study delivers management and marketing insights for service-oriented company managers regarding practical and managerial repercussions (Ge, Yuan, Wang, & Park, 2021).

Firstly, Starbucks stores have a high overall meal preparation efficiency from perceived convenience, but some customers report longer order times. Starbucks can reduce customer wait times by recruiting part-time employees and optimizing the preparation process with more coffee machines. In Starbucks' digital application (APP) and take-out services, more than 20% of consumers reported that the perceived convenience is not high enough (Sneader, & Singhal, 2020). Starbucks could move into more local takeaway platforms, offer discounts, optimize the operation of the APP to improve the ease of use and efficiency for consumers and improve the digitalization process of Starbucks Malaysia with a richer user interface (UI) and more efficient ordering system. Most consumers gave good ratings to the payment methods provided by Starbucks (Chuang, 2019).

Next, Starbucks needs to consider improving its promotion tools. Promotion can make a difference, and a good advertisement can generate massive revenue for Starbucks. Therefore, it is vital to strengthen the marketing promotion campaign. In terms of marketing, Starbucks shows a strong relevance in promotion skills. Most consumers accept Starbucks' marketing promotion tools as positive and practical. Starbucks' rewards program has brought good repeat business to Starbucks. Social media dynamics allow consumers to get the latest news on events and e-commerce platforms. The partnerships and platform offers are also well-received by consumers.

Finally, Starbucks must emphasize its services and products. The ultimate goal of emphasizing service quality is to increase customer satisfaction and purchase intention to ensure brand loyalty. When Starbucks was able to earn positive customer satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior, it was said to be successful in achieving a sustainable cycle in service production and consumption (MacKenzie, Meyer, & Noble, 2020).

The findings in this research can enrich the insight, especially regarding the customer satisfaction of Starbucks in Malaysia post-Covid 19. The results indicate that perceived convenience and promotion correspond to customer satisfaction, whereas the product and service quality reveals a negative effect. This study may be utilized as a foundation for further theoretical research to examine customer satisfaction post-Covid 19 which is still rarely investigated.

Due to the rivalry in the retail coffee industry, it is critical for all retailers to maintain good relationships and reputations with their customers. Hence, they need to establish a properly functioning ordering system (such as on-time delivery) because most customer dissatisfaction will result from the delivery delay. The lack of a sophisticated delivery system must be tackled to ensure a smooth operation flow. Promotion through the Internet is a must since online information substantially impacts the buyers' purchase

decisions (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). However, the Internet's impact on word-of-mouth marketing is more significant than the traditional marketing strategy nowadays (Tanimoto & Fuji, 2003). Therefore, it is vital to recognize the variables that may cause a substantial change in customers' satisfaction towards building long-term customer profitability relationships.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our data analysis indicates that perceived convenience and promotion hypotheses are related to customer satisfaction with Starbucks in Malaysia post-Covid 19. Nevertheless, as the hypothesis in this research, product and service quality is not supported by our data analysis findings. It can be concluded that customers visit Starbucks for the convenient buying process, and the promotion strategy of Starbucks stimulates customers to visit and initiate a sale.

Furthermore, Starbucks should improve its product and service quality. Starbucks is suggested to receive customer feedback to improve its product and service quality. Starbucks can also introduce more products based on customer preferences received through input and at an affordable price to retain the current customer base. This would also help acquire new customers as customer satisfaction improves, and the brand can earn marketing. Therefore, the Covid-19 pandemic is seen as a transformation point for every retail coffee shop, including Starbucks, to transform its operation mode to attain the customers' long-term profitability relationships in the market.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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