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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### ROLE OF THE 'DIGITAL INDIA' PROGRAMME IN THE RURAL CONTEXT: A STUDY AT MAUTALA VILLAGE IN WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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#### ABSTRACT

It is a well-known fact that 'Digital India' is the outcome of many innovations and technological advancements. It has transformed the lives of people in many ways and will empower society for the better. The motive behind this program is to build participative, transparent, and responsive systems. It is the dream project of the Government of India, aimed at remodeling India into a flourishing economy and a digitally empowered society, with good governance for its citizens by bringing synchronization and coordination in public accountability, while digitally connecting and delivering government programmes and services to mobilize the capability of information technology across government departments. Hence, an attempt has been made in this paper to understand Digital India – as a campaign where technologies and connectivity have been coming together to make an impact on all aspects of governance and improve the quality of life of citizens. Technology plays an important role in the development of rural areas. Through the use of technology, rural inhabitants become aware of schemes and benefits being provided to them by the government and other organizations, resulting in growth and an increase in productivity. Increased productivity leads to economic growth. The present study was conducted at Mautala village, South 24 parganas district of West Bengal, in India. The study aimed to understand how the Digital India initiative has affected the rural landscape with a focus on a particular village. The findings of the study indicate that even though villagers of Mautala are aware of the various schemes under the Digital India initiative, only a minimal percentage of them have availed of the facilities and benefitted from them. This indicates a lack of proper infrastructure in the implementation of these schemes, something that the Government of India needs to look into.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Digital India program is a flagship program of the Government of India with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge economy. The present National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government wishes to help the country adopt newer digital initiatives. The digital world that we live in today is one where every civilian has a bright prospect of transforming their lives for the better in many ways; ways which were hard to envision just a decade ago. It is the outcome of several innovations and technological advancements. Today, every nation wants to be fully digitized, which will empower their society for the better. The 'Digital India' program, an initiative of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, will lead to progress in every sector and generate newer endeavours. The motive behind the concept is to build participative, transparent, and responsive systems. All educational institutions and government services will soon be able to provide i-ways round the clock. 'Digital India' will provide all services electronically and promote digital literacy.

Digital technologies, including cloud computing and mobile applications, have emerged as catalysts for economic growth and citizen empowerment. Companies all over the world desire to invest in 'Digital India' - the symbol of India's growth in the 21st century. Hence, an attempt has been made in this paper to understand Digital India as a campaign where technologies and connectivity will come together to make an impact on all aspects of governance and improve the quality of life of Indians. E-governance initiatives in India took a broader dimension in the mid-1990s for a wider range of applications with an emphasis on citizen-centric services. The major ICT initiatives of the government included some major projects such as railway computerization, land record computerization, etc. which focused mainly on the development of information systems. Later on, many states started ambitious individual e-governance projects aimed at providing electronic services to the common people.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methods and techniques used in the study can be categorically divided into three parts.

Firstly, the Data was collected from both primary sources and secondary ones. After selecting the study area, the household data was collected with the help of Schedules/questionnaires from the residents of the area. Random sampling method was followed in this regard. Moreover, participant observation, personal interviews, focussed group discussions, and case study approaches were used widely while collecting the data. Audiography and Videography proved quite useful during the field study. For the secondary study, various government websites were consulted for compiling the data. Several journal publications along with newspaper articles and magazines were consulted in the due course. Secondly, for the processing of the collected data MS Word, MS Excel, and SPSS 16.0 software was used. During the third and final stage of the study, the data collected from the field was analysed and the findings were documented. For analysing the quantitative data various charts and diagrams were used to pictographically represent the frequency distribution tables made from the raw data. And for analysing the qualitative data Initially, the interviews were transcribed and eventually interpreted with the help of narrative analysis, content analysis, and discourse analysis. At the end of all three stages, the findings were finalized and the report was compiled.

**Literature Review:** Sandeep Reddy (July 2017) in his paper "Digitalization of India and its impact on Indian society" has written about India as a nation as one of the most influential governments and political bodies in the world. It is giving tough competition to developed countries and global markets. Yet, are a few steps back when it comes to digitalization. So, the present government is keen on developing India and taking it to the next level. To fulfil this dream, Shri Narendra Modi has announced the Digitalization of India. Dharmesh Patel (April 2018) in the paper "The Impact of Digital Technologies on Society" wrote about Digital technologies have a huge impact on society through financial policy, employment, competition, transportation, etc. He further describes Digital technology also has a positive impact on the fundamental aspects of our culture, including health care, law enforcement, art, education, mobility, and religion. K. Manikanta (2018) in the paper "Digital India Programme and Impact of Digitalization in Improving Quality of Life of Citizens" has written about the major projects under Initiative Digital India comprises of various initiatives under a single program each targeted to prepare India for becoming a knowledge economy and for bringing good governance to citizens through synchronized and coordinated engagement of the entire Government. He described Nine projects that have been undertaken. He further wrote about the impacts of digitalization economic impact, social impact, and environmental impact. He also wrote the challenges faced by digitalization in India.

#### The Digital India program focuses on three key areas

**Digital Infrastructure as a Utility to Every Citizen:** The people of India, residing in rural as well as urban areas, should be provided with the latest digital services. Learning programs about the various services should be carried out so that people can use the wide variety of government services with ease.

**Governance and Services on Demand:** All the Government related services that are implemented for the benefit of the citizens are to be provided to the people whenever they demand.

**Digital Empowerment of Citizens:** Enables people to access better education, technology, skills, and knowledge through digital tools and digital literacy

**The Government of India aspires to target the nine pillars of the Digital India Campaign. They are given as follows**

- **Broadband Highways:** This service facilitates broadband connection for urban as well as rural areas across the country.
- **Universal Access to Mobile Connectivity:** This service promises an increase in network penetration and coverage of the maximum number of states across India.
- **Public Internet Access Program:** Each state including the rural areas of each state should have good and obstacle-free

access to the Internet. All Government services should be reached all the citizens throughout the nation.

- **e-Governance:** Reforming Government through Technology: This service entails the different Government transactions using IT (Information Technology). All information and information in the databases are to be stored in electronic databases rather than storing it manually.
- **E-Kranti-electronic delivery of services:** This e-Kranti focuses on providing information and knowledge to people regarding health, farming, rights, and financial services electronically with easy access. It includes e-education (i.e., e-schools, e-colleges, e-distance learning), e-health care, e-farming, technology for justice, and technology for security.
- **Information for all:** Enables two-way communications between the Government and the citizens of the nation, clear and easily accessible information from the online repositories. Delivering online messages to people during any special programs.
- **Electronics manufacturing:** Low-cost manufacturing of electronic devices such as smart phones, tablets, personal computers, laptops, etc. so that poor people can also take benefit from it.
- **IT for Jobs:** Giving training for IT sector jobs to people and students from small towns and villages. Giving training to the Service Delivery Agents to run feasible businesses that deliver various IT services.
- **Early harvest programs:** To develop a standardized design for the Government email template, to provide secure transfer of emails within different Governments.

#### Objectives of the Study

- To know about the major initiatives applicable to the rural areas under the Digital India initiative.
- To know about the awareness of the digital initiatives among the people in the studied area.
- To find out the acceptability and accessibility of the digital initiatives among the people of the studied area.

#### Analysis and discussion of the Findings

**Details of major initiatives:** There are a total of 114 initiatives under the Digital India initiative. During the primary data collection in every household, the researcher tried to find out their perception of Digital India initiatives. Major 19 initiatives which had some relevance in rural context are present in the questionnaire/schedules have been mentioned below.

#### Usage of Digital India initiatives by the people of the studied area:

##### Awareness of Digital India initiatives:

Digitization, which is a need of today's world, is the result of innovations and technological advances. Every country is aiming to achieve digitalization to empower society in a better way. Digital India is a flagship program launched by the Government of India to transform India into a digitally empowered and knowledgeable economy. This drive came as a dream project of the Indian government to remodel India digitally. This aim would be very difficult to achieve unless there is awareness among the people. This study strives to analyze the awareness among rural people about the Digital India initiative.

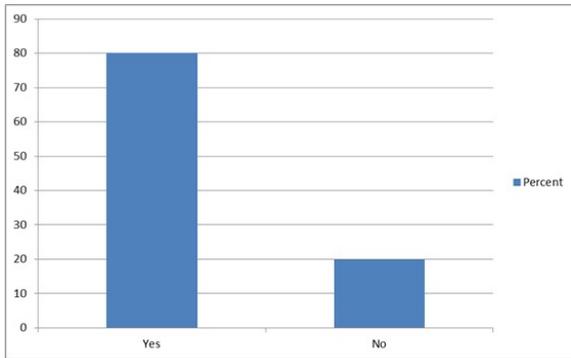
**Analysis:** From the above-mentioned table 1 it can be concluded that the initiative known as Digital India is quite a known thing among the rural settlement of Mautala. More than 80% of the people from the 272 households have heard about this flagship program launched by govt. of India in July 2015. Within five years, the program has got an identity not only in city or urban society but also in rural society.

### Descriptions of the major initiatives of Digital India initiative programme

Initiatives	Description
<i>DigiLocker</i>	DigiLocker is a Digital Wallet to empower citizens digitally. It's a secure cloud-based platform for the issuance, sharing, and verification of critical lifelong documents or certificates. It has created a new paradigm for true paperless governance by promoting the usage of digital documents. Currently, DigiLocker provides access to more than 347 crore authentic digital documents issued from over 100 issuers comprising Central & State agencies such as Transport Department, Income Tax Department, Revenue Department, State & Central Education Boards, etc.
<i>MyGov.in</i>	MyGov platform is a unique path-breaking initiative that was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi. It is a unique first-of-its-kind participatory governance initiative involving the common citizen at large. The idea of MyGov brings the government closer to the common man through the use of an online platform, creating an interface for the healthy exchange of ideas and views involving the common citizen and experts with the ultimate goal to contribute to the social and economic transformation of India.
<i>National Scholarship Portal (NSP)</i>	National Scholarship Portal (NSP) is a one-stop solution for the end-to-end scholarship process right from the submission of student application, verification, sanction, and disbursement to the end beneficiary for all the scholarships provided by the Government of India. This initiative aims at providing a Simplified, Mission-oriented, Accountable, Responsive & Transparent 'SMART' System for faster & effective dispersal of scholarship applications and delivery of funds directly into the beneficiary's account without any leakages.
<i>PAHAL</i>	The PAHAL (DBTL) aims to reduce diversion and eliminate duplicate or bogus LPG connections. The scheme was earlier launched in 2013 and was modified in 2015. Under the PaHaL scheme, LPG cylinders are sold at market rates and entitled consumers get the subsidy directly into their bank accounts. This is done either through an Aadhaar linkage or a bank account linkage.
<i>e-Sampark</i>	e-Sampark is a mechanism to connect the government directly with citizens across India by running mailers, outbound dialling, and SMS campaigns. The platform is used for sharing information and public service messages. The concept of e-Sampark has been introduced to establish proactive communication through the digitization of campaigns. The multi-faceted platform facilitates not only seamless communication between the government and citizens but also maintains a database of contacts of the nodal officers, representatives, and citizens. In addition, users can also view the previous campaigns conducted.
<i>eSign</i>	eSign is an online electronic signature service that can be integrated with service delivery applications via an open API to facilitate an Aadhaar holder to digitally sign a document. Using authentication of the Aadhaar holder through Aadhaar e-KYC service, online electronic signature service is facilitated.
<i>Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY)</i>	PMJDY is a National Mission on Financial Inclusion encompassing an integrated approach to bring about comprehensive financial inclusion of all the households in the country. The plan envisages universal access to banking facilities, at least one basic banking account in every household, financial literacy, and access to credit, insurance, and pension facility. The initiative envisages channelling all Government benefits (from Centre / State / Local Body) to the beneficiary's accounts and pushing the Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT) scheme of the Union Government.
<i>AgriMarket</i>	The mobile application has been developed to keep farmers abreast with the crop prices and discourage them from carry-out distress sales. Farmers can get information related to the prices of crops in markets within 50km of their device location using the AgriMarket Mobile App. This app automatically captures the location of the farmers using mobile GPS and fetches the market prices of crops that fall within the range of 50km. The prices of Agri commodities are sourced from the Agmarket portal. Currently, the app is available in English and Hindi languages.
<i>Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM)</i>	Bharat Interface for Money (BHIM) is an app that makes payment transactions simple, easy, and quick using a Unified Payments Interface (UPI). It enables direct bank-to-bank payments instantly and collects money using a Mobile number or Payment address. Bharat Interface for Money app is currently available on Android and it is downloadable from Google Play store, for smartphones.
<i>DeenDayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY)</i>	One of the flagship programs of the Power Ministry (MoP), DeenDayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) is designed to provide continuous power supply to entire rural India. With this scheme, the government had decided to electrify 18,452 unelectrified villages within 1000 days, by 1st May 2018. The DDUGJY can benefit rural households significantly as electricity is extremely vital for the growth and development of the country.
<i>E-hospital and OPD registration framework</i>	The e-Hospital application is a Hospital Management Information System (HMIS) for internal workflows and processes of hospitals. This one-stop solution helps in connecting patients, hospitals, and doctors on a single digital platform. The application is developed based on global healthcare standards like HL7, SNOMED-CT, ICD10, LOINC, and MetaData and Data Standards (MDDS) published by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW). e-Hospital is made available to Central Government/ State Government/ Autonomous/ Cooperative hospitals on a cloud through SaaS (Software as a Service) model.
<i>Digital Saksharta Abhiyaan</i>	The Digital Saksharta Abhiyan or National Digital Literacy Mission (NDLM) Scheme has been formulated to impart IT training to 52.5 lakh persons, including Anganwadi, ASHA workers, and authorized ration dealers in all the States/UTs across the country. The initiative aims at training non-IT literate citizens to become IT literate to enable their active and effective participation in the democratic, and developmental process, and enhance their livelihood too. PMGDISHA is a scheme to make six crore persons in rural areas, across States/UTs, digitally literate, reaching around 40% of rural households by covering one member from every eligible household by 31st March 2019. It aims to bridge the digital divide, specifically targeting the rural population including the marginalized sections of society like Scheduled Castes (SC) / Scheduled Tribes (ST), Minorities, Below Poverty Line (BPL), women, and differently-abled persons and minorities.
<i>E-Panchayat</i>	e-Panchayat is an e-Governance initiative for the rural sector providing comprehensive software solutions attempting automation of Gram Panchayat functions. It is a platform for panchayat representatives to connect with the rest of the world, which aims to bring out the local voices by empowering the local communities to showcase and share local social, cultural, and economic practices, stories, and challenges.
<i>E-Pathshala</i>	Developed by NCERT, e-Pathshala showcases and disseminates all educational e-resources including textbooks, audio, video, periodicals, and a variety of other print and non-print materials through the website and mobile app. The platform addresses the dual challenge of reaching out to a diverse clientele and bridging the digital divide (geographical, socio-cultural, and linguistic), offering comparable quality e-content. All the concerned stakeholders such as students, teachers, educators, and parents can access e-books through multiple technology platforms i.e. mobile phones (android, iOS, and Windows platforms), tablets (as e-pub), and on the web through laptops and desktops.
<i>IRCTC Connect</i>	To cater to the growing demand of passengers to make the ticketing application more user-friendly and faster, IRCTC Connect was developed. The new app with several add-on features is based on the next-generation e-ticketing system. Synchronized with the ticketing website, the app facilitates searching and booking train tickets, checking existing reservations or cancelling them, and getting upcoming journey alerts.
<i>Kisan Suvidha</i>	Kisan Suvidha is an omnibus mobile app developed to help farmers get relevant information instantly. The app provides information on various details such as weather, market prices, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, agriculture machinery, dealers, agro advisories, plant protection, IPM practices, etc. Other unique features like extreme weather alerts, market prices of commodities in nearby areas, and the maximum price in the state as well as in India have been added to empower farmers in the best possible manner.
<i>mKisan</i>	mKisan SMS Portal has been conceptualized to give a quantum leap in coverage of farmers and geographical areas in a timely, specific, holistic, and need-based knowledge dissemination among the farmers by leveraging the power of mobile telephony in such a way that all sectors use this platform to not only reach out to the farmers but also to address their concerns and queries.
<i>National Mission on Education through ICT</i>	The National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT) has been envisaged as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to leverage the potential of ICT, in the teaching and learning process for the benefit of all learners in Higher Education Institutions at any time anywhere mode. It is a landmark initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development to address all the education and learning-related needs of students, teachers, and lifelong learners.
<i>Unreserved Ticket Through Mobile Application (UTS)</i>	To promote a paperless economy, Indian Railways has launched its new UTS mobile application. This official android mobile ticketing app enables booking unreserved paperless journey tickets, and issuing/renewing season tickets, and platform tickets. The app has introduced two modes of booking mobile tickets: Paper Tickets and Paperless Tickets.

**Table 1. Table of Awareness about Digital India initiatives**

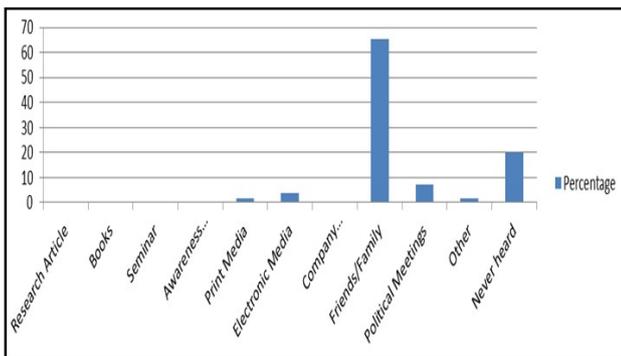
Know about the initiative	Percent
Yes	80.1
No	19.9
Total	100



**Fig.1. Awareness of Digital India Initiatives**

**Table 2. Various Media of Becoming Aware of Digital India Initiatives**

Various Media	Percentage
Research article	0.1
Books	0
Seminar	0.4
Awareness Programme	0
Newspaper and magazine	1.8
Media talk	3.6
Company notification	0
Friends/Family	65.5
Political meetings	7.2
Any other	1.5
Never heard	19.9
Total	100



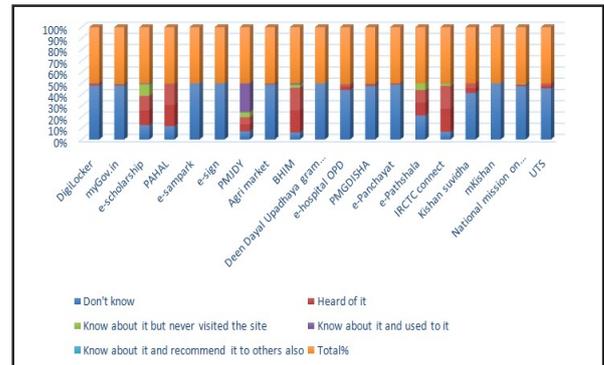
**Fig. 2. Various Media of Becoming Aware of Digital India Initiatives**

But this table does not give a clear idea about the usage of the Digital India initiatives among them.

**Awareness of Digital India initiatives**

**Analysis:** From table 2, it is clear that 19.9% of people have not heard about the Digital India initiative program, and from table and fig. 5.2 it can be shown how 80.1% of the people got to know about the initiative. It is important to know because from this data one can get a more successful advertising strategy for any initiative in a rural context. The table has shown that the majority of the village people, 65.5%, know about the initiative either from their friends or from their family members. Secondly, a satisfactory 7.2% of people get to

know about it from the political meeting. Some informative people know it from news channels and newspapers, but their percentages are only 3.6 and 1.8, respectively. Very few of them got to know about the initiative from the seminar and research article. Lastly, the table shows 1.5% of them know from some other sources apart from these mentioned options.



**Fig. 3. Usage of the Major Digital India Initiatives**

**Usage and Impact of Digital India Initiatives among the studied people:** The present study was of a descriptive and analytical nature to examine the people's perception concerning the digital India initiative for understanding digitalization's impact. The result indicates that Indian citizens are aware of the digital India campaign and the rural people are also habituating for practice in their day-to-day life for the betterment of India from the perspective of globalization. The perception and awareness of digital India campaigns have higher perception as compared to other initiatives implemented by the Government of India. Digital India is an initiative by gov. of India to help the country adopt digital initiatives. Initiatives are expected to cut dependency on bureaucratic processes, decrease corruption and help cut down time in taking public services to the citizens of the country.

**The impact of Digital India was expected to:**

- Reduce Corruption.
- Increase the speed of public sector services rendered to citizens of the country.
- Decrease documentation.
- Provide easy-to-manage online storage to store all documents.
- Provide simple and easy-to-use cloud space on the internet.

The governments for years have worked towards creating an economy that is more reliant on the internet and less on the paper-based economy. The incumbent gov. provided a single name "Digital India" to all the digitization, digitalization, and other initiatives taken by gov. to have a positive impact on our economy.

**Analysis:** The3 diagram and table show the usage of Digital India initiatives that are relevant in the rural context. From the diagram, it can be said that DDUGJY, e-Sign, mKisan, and e-Sampark initiatives which are very much relevant for social empowerment through the digital process are not in use at Mautala village, because none of them heard about these three initiatives. The popular initiative among them is PMJDY, only 24% have not heard about the PMJDY but the rest 76% are very much familiar with the initiative. The table also shows that some of the initiatives are well-known among them, those initiatives are BHIM, IRCTC connect, PAHAL, and e-Scholarship. Those initiatives mentioned here are well known and also used by the studied population of the village. Some other important initiatives which can play a vital role inthe digital empowerment of a rural village are not known by the majority of the residents of the settlement, the initiatives are the National mission on education through ICT, Kisan Suidha, e-Panchayat, Agri Market, Digi Locker, my Gov. in, and UTS. The most availed initiative by the village people is the e-Scholarship portal, by which they can apply for various scholarship schemes very easily.

**Table 3. Table of Usage of the major Digital India Initiatives (in Percentage)**

Initiatives	Don't know	Heard of it	Know about it but never used it	Know about it and used it	Know about it and recommend it to others	Total
DigiLocker	96.40	3.20	0	0.40	0	100
myGov.in	96.30	3	0.70	0	0	100
e-Scholarship	25.60	52	20.80	1.20	0.40	100
PAHAL	24	75.60	0.50	0	0	100
e-Sampark	100	0	0	0	0	100
e-Sign	100	0	0	0	0	100
PMJDY	14.60	24.80	9	52	0	100
AgriMarket	97.80	2.20	0	0	0	100
BHIM	12.40	79.80	5.40	2.40	0	100
DDUGJY	100	0	0	0	0	100
e-Hospital OPD	88.20	11	0.80	0	0	100
PMGDISHA	95.50	4	0.50	0	0	100
e-Panchayat	98	2	0	0	0	100
e-Pathshala	43	45	12	0	0	100
IRCTC Connect	13.50	82	4	0.50	0	100
KishanSuvidha	83	17	0	0	0	100
mKisan	100	0	0	0	0	100
National Mission on Education through ICT	95	3.50	1.50	0	0	100
UTS	91	9	0	0	0	100

## CONCLUSION

The Digital India initiatives had been initiated for the people of India, especially the rural populace, to be able to access government initiatives beneficial to them. However, the present study shows that there is some dearth of communication of these initiatives throughout all socioeconomic and geographic spheres of India's citizens. Some villagers are still not yet aware of any of the Digital India initiatives. There has been some failure on part of the government to publicize these initiatives properly. Further, we can see that, despite being aware of these initiatives, many people are not accessing them or they feel hesitant in accessing them. Again, this reflects that the government has been unable to lucidly explain and implement these initiatives which are meant for these people. However, despite these gaps, the majority have accessed and are well aware of Digital India and are satisfied with the extent of aid these initiatives have brought to their lives. It can be summarized that the Digital India initiative has been a success in Mautala, and it can be hoped that with time, the entire village shall be able to embrace all of the initiatives, completely, and benefit from them.

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