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The Role of Information Literacy in Enhancing Legal Practice: A study among advocates in Karnataka

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Abstract

The study appraises information literacy (IL) and looks at its importance in the legal profession, with a specific focus on legal practitioners in Karnataka. Information literacy, which refers to the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, and use information effectively, is a prime necessity for legal professionals as they navigate the wide assortment of legal resources, including case law, statutes, and digital databases. The study aims to assess the current IL levels among advocates, explore the challenges they face in managing legal information, and understand how IL influences legal research, case preparation, and client representation. A survey methodology has been utilised to collect data from 570 legal practitioners in Karnataka, including advocates, law interns, and research assistants, through structured questionnaires. The key findings highlight that while most legal professionals are confident, to a certain degree, in their IL skills, there remain significant gaps in steering through legal databases and assessing the credibility of legal information. The study also revealed gender differences, where female practitioners, while being more prone to relying on digital tools, also faced more challenges in interpretation of legal information. The research emphasizes the importance of continuous professional training, particularly in digital literacy and legal research techniques, that will help ensure legal professionals are able to efficiently manage information overload while improving the quality of their practice. The study concludes by advocating for greater integration of IL training in both legal education and workplace environments allowing for enhancement of the competency in general, of legal practitioners.

1. INTRODUCTION

Information Literacy is the ability to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use information as a tool for



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problem-solving and decision-making. This skill is indispensable to the legal profession where the practitioners are required to steer through vast legal information resources like case laws, statutes, regulations, and academic writings. In the present times, with the majority of the legal resources being digitized, the ability to filter and evaluate credible information becomes crucial for legal practitioners. This ability also helps them conduct legal research, prepare cases, and make effective arguments. Information Literacy enhances the efficacy of a lawyer as they stay updated with legal developments and provide sound legal reasoning. It also helps professionals to sift through information overload and access relevant data accurately. This invariably results in improved quality of both legal services and client outcomes.

This study examines the information literacy of legal practitioners in Karnataka to gain an understanding of the effective manner in which they are able to access, evaluate, and use legal information. Legal professionals rely heavily on information sources that are enormous and complex, including case laws, statutes, and legal databases. An evaluation of their information literacy, will likely reveal the gaps in their information use skills. It will also help to better understand their level of ability to conduct efficient legal research or make well-informed decisions. This study hence highlights the importance of skills development so as to keep up with the evolving legal landscape, where digital resources and information overload are arising as common challenges.

2. OBJECTIVES

- a) To assess the current information literacy level among advocates in the state of Karnataka.
- b) How are the advocates in Karnataka effectively able to access, evaluate, and utilize legal information in their practice?
- c) What are the primary challenges that advocates in Karnataka face in management and application of legal information?
- d) What is the influence of information literacy on the quality of legal research, case preparation, and client representation?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Vicki Lawal et al. in their article "Perspectives on Legal Education and the Role of Information Literacy in Improving Qualitative Legal Practice" emphasises the need to integrate information literacy into legal education, particularly in South Africa and Nigeria. It focusses on the requirement for law graduates to develop skills in finding, evaluating, and applying legal information, so as to succeed in the legal profession. Despite the progress that has been made, a gap still remains between academic knowledge and practical application. The article suggests a collaboration between legal education and the profession that will create an information literacy framework, ultimately resulting in improved legal outcomes and client representation. (Lawal et al., 2013)

The article "Three Faces of Information Literacy in Legal Studies" by Kim-Prieto and Kahvecioğlu (2015) looks at information literacy (IL) in legal education across the U.S., U.K., and Turkey. It emphasises the importance of IL for legal professionals to efficiently steer through legal information. The U.S., having developed the AALL standards, still struggles with its implementation. The U.K. has been more effective in integrating IL standards, using them in legal education. Turkey's IL infrastructure is still developing, yet shows promise as it benchmarks U.S. and U.K. systems. The study highlights varying degrees of IL implementation, with the U.K. leading and Turkey showing growth potential. (Kerem et al., n.d.)

The article "New Barristers' Information Literacy Challenges as They Transition from Education to the Workplace" by Anne Binsfeld (2019) examines the challenges in legal research faced by new barristers as they move from academia to professional practice. Apart from the foundational academic training, the fast-paced nature of legal practice requires more practical skills. Interviews with barristers and law librarians are used by the study to highlight the struggle they face in identifying reliable research sources and managing time pressures. Barristers relying on digital databases often face issues with inconsistent platforms. The study

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highlights the essential requirement for ongoing professional training and also for integrating real-world tasks into legal education. (Binsfeld, 2019)

The article "Information Literacy in Law: Starting Points for Improving Legal Research Competencies" by Blair Kauffman (2010) takes a look at what methods can be utilized to enhance legal research skills among law students, professionals, and the public. Kauffman identifies four key approaches: mandatory courses, elective courses, non-credit instruction at the point of need, and testing in bar exams. While legal research is part of the core curriculum, advanced courses reach few students, given that many students overestimate their abilities. Non-credit instruction though effective tends to be limited. Kauffman suggests prioritised legal research skills through adding legal research to bar exams, thus favouring an improvement in legal information literacy by following a multifaceted approach. (Blair Kauffman, 2010)

The article "Igniting the Conversation: Embracing Legal Literacy as the Heart of the Profession" by Laura J. Ax-Fultz (2015) stresses the importance of legal literacy in shaping the identity of law librarians. Ax-Fultz contends that legal literacy, including the ability to access and apply legal information, should be fundamental to the profession. The study finds that law librarians often play diverse roles, and are often misunderstood, resulting in their facing an identity crisis. The value of Law librarians in legal education, research, and justice can be built up by focusing on their legal literacy. The article advocates for a proactive approach to promote legal literacy and thereby redefine the future of the profession of Law Librarians. (Law & Ax-Fultz, 2015)

The article "Information Literacy-Related Practices in the Legal Workplace" by Lawal et al. (2014) studies the developing of information literacy skills by Nigerian aspirant barristers, using Kuhlthau's Information Search Process (ISP) model. The study shows that the ISP model is effective in illustrating the emotional, cognitive, and physical aspects of information seeking in legal tasks. Aspirant barristers often experience uncertainty when handling complex legal tasks, such as drafting and research, but gradually gain confidence as they progress. Practical information literacy skills mainly develop through experiential learning, with senior lawyers guiding, as also from peer interactions. The article emphasises that key competencies like legal research and problem-solving, which are crucial for the profession, are often lacking in fresh graduates. In conclusion, the article points to the necessity of integrating information literacy training into legal education and workplace environments. (Lawal et al., 2014)

In conclusion, the literature calls attention to the vital role that information literacy (IL) plays in legal education and practice, there being a unanimity on the need for integrating it across various legal systems. While South Africa, Nigeria, and Turkey show progress in incorporating IL, gaps persist between academic knowledge and practical application, particularly when there is a transition from education to professional practice. Studies stress the importance of collaborations between legal education and the profession so that comprehensive IL frameworks can be created, while also advocating for experiential learning and ongoing professional training. Across different contexts, including the U.S., U.K., and Nigeria, the focus is to ensure law graduates are well-equipped with IL skills so that they can succeed in fast-paced legal environments and also to enhance the quality of legal practice and client representation.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the extent of information literacy among legal practitioners was assessed by utilising a survey-based research methodology. The primary data collection tool was a structured questionnaire designed to target a sample of 570 legal practitioners from Karnataka, comprising 486 male and 84 female respondents. The participants included 543 practising advocates, 20 law interns, and 7 research assistants, allowing for a diverse range of legal professionals at different stages of their careers. The questionnaire had questions meant to

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evaluate key aspects of information literacy, such as the ability to identify, access, evaluate, and effectively use legal information. This method ensured a comprehensive analysis of the information literacy skills of the participants. The survey was distributed and collected both in-person and online to maximize response rates, and ensured a robust dataset for further analysis.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Frequency of use of legal databases

With the legal landscape rapidly evolving, the legal practitioner's skill set requires to have the crucial tools, namely, efficiently accessing and utilising legal databases and e-resources. The increasing reliance on digital tools for legal research, makes it necessary to assess how frequently legal professionals engage with these resources. The purpose of posing this question to the survey participants was to understand the extent to which male and female legal practitioners integrate legal databases, such as Manupatra and SCC Online, into their daily practice. This insight is vital for identifying potential gaps in information literacy, the need for further training, and understanding whether legal professionals are leveraging these resources to their full potential so as to enhance research accuracy and efficiency. The empirical data collected is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of using legal databases (e.g., Manupatra, SCC Online) and e-resources

Gender	Frequency					Total
	Daily	Several times a week	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	
Male	32	64	360	30	0	486
	7%	13%	74%	6%	0%	100%
Female	12	56	16	0	0	84
	14%	67%	19%	0%	0%	100%
Total	44	120	376	30	0	570
	8%	21%	66%	5%	0%	100%

A significant portion of female practitioners (67%) use legal databases several times a week compared to males (13%). A vast majority of male legal practitioners use legal databases only occasionally, whereas a much smaller proportion of females (19%) rely on them occasionally, implying that males are more likely to use legal databases less frequently. A small percentage of males (6%) rarely use databases, while all females report at least occasional use.

Female legal practitioners engage more frequently with legal databases as compared to their male counterparts. A significant proportion of females (67%) use databases multiple times a week, which contrasts with the majority of males (74%) who use them only occasionally. The high percentage of males who are occasional users of legal databases suggests a potential gap in necessity, access, or proficiency, which could be addressed through targeted training or resources. The results indicate that female legal practitioners may be relying more on digital legal resources than males. This might suggest higher digital literacy on their part, or a greater understanding of the value of these resources in their practice.

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5.2. Confidence in the Use of Digital Information Resources

It is relevant to find out from participants the level of confidence they possess in identifying and accessing relevant legal information by using both traditional and digital resources, in order to understand the core competency of legal practitioners in the present legal scenario. With expectations of legal professionals going through vast amounts of information from various sources, including case law, statutes, and legal databases like Manupatra and SCC Online, it is crucial for them to have that ability to efficiently locate and evaluate this information for an efficient and effective legal practice. The responses received to this question are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Confidence in identifying and accessing relevant legal information using both traditional and digital resources

Gender	Confidence levels					Total
	Very confident	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not confident	Not at all confident	
Male	34	45	350	46	11	486
	7%	9%	72%	9%	2%	100%
Female	2	15	44	17	6	84
	2%	18%	52%	20%	7%	100%
Total	36	60	394	63	17	570
	6%	11%	69%	11%	3%	100%

A significant proportion of respondents—69% overall, with 72% males and 52% females—fall into the "somewhat confident" category. This indicates that a majority of the legal professionals have a moderate confidence level for accessing and identifying legal information. Of those who are confident, females exhibit a higher percentage (18%) than males (9%). However, they also show higher levels of lack of confidence, with 27% of females (20% not confident and 7% not at all confident) feeling uncertain in their abilities, compared to 11% of males (9% not confident and 2% not at all confident). A relatively small percentage of males (7%) and females (2%) are very confident in their ability to access and identify legal information. The fact that only 6% overall feel very confident draws attention to a potential skills gap that needs to be addressed through targeted training and professional development.

The table demonstrates that most legal practitioners hold their ability to identify and access legal information at a moderate confidence level, but a significant portion, specifically the female respondents, exhibit uncertainty. This points to the need for filling the lack through stronger educational initiatives and training programs by which to build confidence and proficiency in the use of both traditional and digital legal resources.

5.3. Challenging facets in legal research

The respondents were asked a question to identify the most challenging facets of legal research and thereby gain a deeper understanding of the specific areas posing difficulties to legal practitioners. Legal research being a critical skill for professionals in the legal field, it is a prerequisite that they have the ability to effectively formulate search queries, navigate databases, find relevant case law, and interpret legal information, in order to cultivate an efficient and accurate legal practice. The responses are tabulated in Table 3.

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Table 3. The most challenging facets of legal research

Facet in legal research	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Formulating effective search queries	56	5	61
	12%	11%	11%
Navigating legal databases (e.g., Manupatra, SCC Online)	159	26	185
	33%	31%	32%
Finding relevant case law and statutes	248	45	293
	51%	54%	51%
Analysing and interpreting retrieved information	23	8	31
	5%	10%	5%
I do not find legal research challenging	486	84	570
	100%	100%	100%

The most commonly reported challenge across both genders has been finding Relevant Case Laws and Statutes. More than half of the respondents experience difficulties in finding relevant legal precedents and statutes, which is indicative of a pressing need for improving search tools and training that focusses on legal research techniques. A significant number of practitioners (32%) report navigating legal databases as a challenge. This suggests that despite digital resources being essential, many legal professionals still struggle with efficient use of these tools, due to possible reasons such as user interface issues or insufficient training in the use of advanced search functions within these databases. Although males and females experience similar challenges across most areas, females report higher difficulty in analysing and interpreting retrieved information (10% vs. 5% for males). Given that a significant proportion of respondents struggle with search formulation (11%), navigating databases (32%), and finding relevant case law (51%), it is necessary that law firms and institutions focus on providing comprehensive training related to legal research methodologies, database navigation, and legal information interpretation, thereby improving the overall efficiency and confidence of legal practitioners.

5.4 Difficulty levels in using the Digital tools

A question was asked by which to understand the difficulty levels experienced by legal practitioners while using digital legal research tools and databases. Identifying the duration that legal professionals struggle with digital tools, institutions and firms, can determine the extent of training required to improve their proficiency and comfort in handling these essential resources. Enquiring about the frequency of challenges in the survey, helps to assess how well legal professionals have adopted and integrated these digital tools into their daily practice, which is a crucial need in a digital-first legal environment. A significant portion of respondents seen as frequently or occasionally struggling with legal research tools, is a signal regarding potential gaps in the scope

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of using these tools or in accessing advanced research techniques.

Table 4. Difficulty level while using digital legal research tools and databases

Difficulty level	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Frequently, I struggle with most tools	16	3	19
	3%	3%	3%
Occasionally, I face some challenges	379	65	444
	78%	77%	78%
Rarely, I am mostly comfortable using them	56	15	71
	12%	18%	12%
Never, I am fully comfortable with all tools	35	1	36
	7%	1%	6%
I do not use digital legal research tools	0	0	0
	0%	0%	0%
Total	486	84	570
	100%	100%	100%

Both males and females experience frequent challenges at a relatively low and similar rate, indicating that while these tools can be difficult for some, frequent struggles are not widespread across the legal community. 78% of males (379 out of 486) and 77% of females (65 out of 84) face occasional challenges in using digital legal research tools. A large majority of both males and females face occasional challenges. This suggests that although most practitioners are familiar with digital legal tools, they occasionally encounter difficulties. A slightly higher percentage of females feel more comfortable with digital tools than males, suggesting that some female respondents may have become more proficient with legal research tools or have fewer issues navigating them.

The difficulty levels are relatively consistent across genders, with small variations seen in comfort levels. Both male and female practitioners face occasional challenges, and very few show frequent struggle. However, slightly more females (18%) report being mostly comfortable with these tools than males (12%), suggesting minor differences in confidence or proficiency between the genders. With 0% reporting non-usage, it is seen that digital tools are an essential and non-optional aspect of legal research across the board. This points to the serious and increasing need for legal professionals to develop robust digital literacy skills enabling them to stay competitive and efficient in the legal field.

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5.5. Areas in which training needed in legal research skills

A question seeking to identify areas where legal practitioners require more training or guidance in their legal research skills was asked given that legal research is a critical component of effective legal practice. An understanding of the particular challenges faced by professionals—such as navigating legal databases, evaluating information, or formulating search queries— will be beneficial to legal institutions and educators who then can tailor their training programs to address them. The results also help highlight potential skill gaps that may hinder research from being efficient and accurate, thereby ensuring that training resources get directed to where they are most needed. This will ultimately lead to improving the overall competency of legal practitioners. The responses received are tabulated as Table 5.

Table 5. Areas in which more training or guidance in legal research skills

Areas in which training required	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Advanced search techniques and query formulation	15 3%	6 4%	21 4%
Navigating and utilizing legal databases efficiently	393 81%	56 67%	449 79%
Evaluating the credibility and relevance of legal information	67 14%	20 24%	87 15%
Understanding and applying legal precedents	11 2%	2 2%	13 2%
I do not need further training	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
Total	486 100%	84 100%	570 100%

A relatively small proportion of males and females expressed the need for training in search techniques, indicating that most legal practitioners are comfortable with their ability to formulate effective queries related to legal research. With regard to navigating and utilising legal databases efficiently, 81% of males (393 out of 486) and 67% of females (56 out of 84) indicate they need more guidance. 79% (449 out of 570) of respondents find this area challenging. In evaluating the credibility and relevance of legal information, 14% of males (67 out of 486) and 24% of females (20 out of 84) need guidance in evaluating legal information.

A prominent area requiring training comes across as navigating and utilising legal databases, showing 79% overall, with males (81%) in majority, thus highlighting this to be a significant challenge. While both genders face challenges in evaluating the credibility and relevance of legal information, more females (24%) than males (14%) report difficulties. A small percentage (2%) of practitioners across both genders need training in

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understanding and applying legal precedents, which implies that most legal professionals are well-versed in this area.

6. CONCLUSION

The survey data, when analysed, draws attention to key areas where the legal research skills of legal practitioners face challenges, thus underlining the need for targeted interventions resulting in improved proficiency and confidence. A notable number of respondents, both male and female, were seen to struggle with navigating legal databases, thereby suggesting that enhanced digital literacy is vital for boosting research efficiency. Additionally, challenges in evaluating the credibility and relevance of legal information being more pronounced among female practitioners, pointed to a need for gender-sensitive training approaches. While only a small percentage of respondents reported difficulties in search query formulation and applying legal precedents, nevertheless these were areas that still deserved attention, thereby ensuring a possibility for all practitioners to perform legal research effectively. The insights from this analysis highlight the important role of continuous professional development in legal research skills, as a means to bridge existing gaps and equip legal professionals with the tools that will help them succeed in a legal environment which is becoming increasingly digital. The result of addressing these challenges for the legal profession will be more accurate legal outcomes and improved service delivery.

7. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF IMPROVED INFORMATION LITERACY FOR LEGAL PRACTICE

Improvement in information literacy has a profound impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of legal practice, resulting in better client outcomes, enhanced legal research, and more streamlined case management. Legal professionals possessing sound information literacy skills, can quickly access, evaluate, and apply relevant legal information, thus providing timely, accurate, and well-informed advice to their clients. This strengthens the presenting of legal arguments, and improves the overall quality of legal representation.

Enhanced information literacy in legal research, enables effective navigation of legal databases and e-resources by legal practitioners thus reducing the time spent searching for information as also increasing the accuracy of the retrieved data. This efficiency results in quicker case preparation, reduced risk of missing critical information and ensures a legal team that is fully prepared to tackle complex cases.

Furthermore, improved information literacy is crucial to structured case management. Legal practitioners with skills in organising and managing information, are better able to streamline workflows, effectively track case progress, and ensure better team coordination. As a result, there is smoother handling of cases, fewer administrative errors, and ultimately, better outcomes for clients as well as the legal professionals involved.

In conclusion, the enhancement of information literacy has benefits where legal practitioners can see an improvement in their overall efficiency, better services are delivered, and more effective case management is ensured, all of which go into contributing towards more substantial client outcomes and a successful legal practice.

8. ROLE OF LAW SCHOOLS AND BAR ASSOCIATIONS IN ENHANCING INFORMATION LITERACY

A key role is played by law schools and bar associations in shaping the information literacy skills of both future and current legal professionals. They can consolidate comprehensive training in legal research, digital tools, and information management, thereby equipping legal professionals with the skills required to wade through the sea of evolving legal progressions.

Information literacy can be integrated into the curriculum of Law Schools by way of specialised courses related to legal research methodologies, effective use of digital databases, and evaluation of the credibility of legal sources. Training in using legal research platforms such as Westlaw, LexisNexis, and Manupatra can aid

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students develop hands-on experience with the tools they will use in their practice in future. Stimulating critical thinking and analytical skills further prepares students in managing complex information in real-world scenarios.

Bar Associations can make provision for continuing legal education (CLE) programmes that will boost the information literacy of practising lawyers. These programmes can cover advanced legal research techniques, updates on digital tools, and best practices for managing huge amounts of information. They can organise workshops, webinars, and certification courses, to help current legal professionals remain proficient in information literacy, adapt to new and emerging technologies and methods.

To summarise, law schools and bar associations play a major role as instruments for the development and maintenance of high levels of information literacy within the legal profession. Through targeted training and continuing education, they make sure that legal practitioners are well-prepared in negotiating the complexities present in modern legal research and practice.

9. CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTING INFORMATION LITERACY TRAINING IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

- I. There are several challenges arising in the integration of information literacy training with the legal profession that can act as a hindrance to its widespread adoption and efficacy. These barriers arise from various aspects, including time constraints, financial limitations, resistance to change, educational standards, and the fast-paced nature of legal practice.
- II. Time Constraints: Legal professionals facing demanding schedules, tight deadlines for case preparation and client consultations, may find it challenging to make time for additional training in information literacy. The thought that time required to attend workshops or courses detracts from their immediate work, may result in a lack of engagement with such programmes.
- III. Financial Limitations: Implementing comprehensive information literacy training programs, especially those involving advanced digital tools and databases, may not prove to be cost effective for law firms and legal institutions. It would prove to be a financial burden for smaller firms and independent practitioners making it a possible struggle to invest in the necessary resources, such as access to legal databases and training programmes.
- IV. Resistance to Change: Many experienced legal professionals especially if they are accustomed to traditional research and case preparation methods, may resist adopting new technologies and information literacy training. Overcoming this resistance may possibly require cultural shifts within the profession and clear demonstrations of how these skills can improve practice efficiency and client outcomes.
- V. Technological Gaps: At times, smaller or less-resourced law firms may not have access to the latest digital tools and databases with the result that legal professionals working there face a disparity that can create a gap between those who can enhance their information literacy and those who are left behind, thereby hindering the implementation of universal training programmes.
- VI. Inconsistent Educational Standards: While the different law schools may introduce basic legal research skills, the depth and focus on information literacy lack uniformity, with the result that fresh graduates entering the profession possess differing levels of information literacy competency, making it a challenge to execute ongoing professional development with a standardized approach.
- VII. Lack of Awareness: Some legal professionals may not fully recognize the value of enhanced information literacy. This lack of clear understanding as to how these skills can improve research efficiency, case management, and decision-making, may result in no incentive to engage in training and reap its benefits.
- VIII. To address these challenges, there is a need for a concerted effort from law schools, bar associations, and legal institutions whereby information literacy is prioritised, accessible training programs are provided, and the tangible benefits of improved research and information management skills in legal practice get suitably demonstrated.

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10. AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

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13. PLAGIARISM POLICY

The authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright, and ethical matters will be handled by all authors. Journalists and editors are not liable for the aforesaid matters.

14. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared that no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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