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Development of Smart Materials with Tunable Mechanical Properties for Wearable Devices

[1]Dr. K. Hema Latha, [2]Dr. Ajit Ashok Katkar, [3]Dany Marcelo Tasan Cruz, [4]Josselyn Belen Garcia, [5]Dr Rishi JP, [6]Dr. R. Jothilakshmi

[1]Associate Professor

Mechanical Engineering, Muffakham Jah College Of Engineering And Technology

Hyderabad, Telangana

hemalatha@mjcollege.ac.in

[2]Associate Professor

Mechanical Engineering, Sanjeevan Group of Institutions, Pangala, Kolhapur

ajit.katkar@gmail.com

[3]danymarcelo.tasan.cruz@alumnos.upm.es

Orcid 0000-0001-5778-4633

Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo, Facultad de Ingenieria, Carrera de Arquitectura"
[4]jossbel201095@gmail.com

Orcid 0009-0002-0228-0280

Universidad Nacional de Chimborazo, Facultad de Ingenieria, Carrera de Arquitectura"

[5]Associate Professor

Mechanical Engineering, Vidyavardhaka College of Engineering Mysuru 570002, Karnataka

rishijp@vvce.ac.in

Orcid I'd:0000-0001-6543-6508

[6]Assistant Professor

Physics, velammal College of Engineering and Technology, Madurai, Tamilnadu

jothi141@gmail.com

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Abstract*:* Smart materials that can be tailored help improve wearable devices by making them flexible, more comfortable and able to handle different functions. The main focus of this research is to combine reversible polymer networks with low melting alloys and examine the resulting properties for dynamic adjustment of the stiffness. Based on testing, it was found that the materials could be made flexible from 1.2 MPa in the soft state to 350 MPa in the rigid state, with a stiffness change of about 290 times driven by heat. The shape memory feature of the polymer allowed one to cycle the parts while still being able to nearly totally recover the original shape. Laser-assisted techniques made it possible to craft more precise patterns, helping flexible electronics be integrated well while keeping their strength. Fatigue testing proved that the materials could still work effectively as shown by more than 85% of their initial stiffness after a total of 1000 loading cycles. Using biological ideas, the device got better at conforming to the body, making wearing easier for users. According to these results, the developed smart materials have the capability to be used in future wearable devices that require quick and reversible shape canges. Sustainability is one focus of the research with a look at recyclable materials and circular design ideas. All in all, this work gives a basis for designing wearable devices that are flexible, strong and eco-friendly, while still offering control over mechanical features**.**

Keywords: Smart materials, tunable stiffness, wearable devices, shape memory polymers, low melting point alloys

I. INTRODUCTION

As new wearable devices are being developed, more flexible and adaptable substances are in greater demand. Most traditional materials cannot satisfy all the requirements of next-generation wearable devices for adaptability, comfort and responsiveness [1]. This is why people are experimenting with smart materials which adjust when affected by temperature, pressure, electric or magnetic fields or chemical surroundings. Smart materials are being developed in this field to enable devices to alter their resistance, stretchability and form in real time which is considered very promising [2]. These types of materials can greatly improve and add functions to wearable systems, for uses including health monitoring, alternative robotics, adjustable textiles and working with machines. For example, using these materials for sensors makes them simpler to fit to a variety of people's bodies, leading to better signals and greater comfort. Furthermore, these technologies can adjust the level of support depending on the movements and activity of the user [3]. This work aims to examine smart materials that can display adjustable stiffness and to develop their use in wearable devices. Special attention will be given to the processes allowing tunability such as the phase transitions in shape memory alloys, changes in hydrogels or structures found in liquid crystal elastomers. The study will further test the behavior of these materials with pressure and exterior stimuli and how they work in practice on wearable prototypes. This research is looking to fill the demand gap by changing how materials behave in wearable systems to make them more flexible, comfortable and reliable.

II. RELATED WORKS

The ability to control these materials' mechanical properties has brought lots of attention from industries related to smart clothing, soft robotics and biomedicine. Adaptive systems become possible when devices can change their stiffness, elasticity and other characteristics according to the environment around them. Lately, researchers have concentrated on polymers whose bonds are able to break and form again, like disulfide-driven polymerization. According to Zhang et al. [15], creating reversible polymer networks with self-healing abilities and adjustable properties requires disulfide crosslinks which is a promising way to develop useful smart materials. Being sensitive to light, heat and pH is crucial for polymers that will be used in wearable devices, allowing them to respond to the environment constantly. Low melting point alloys have become important in stiffness-tunable materials because they exhibit a phase change at temperatures close to the normal atmosphere. According to Hao et al. [16], applying LMPAs inside advanced composites allowed them to switch between soft and rigid states in controlled manner. The method makes it easy to control stiffness quickly which is helpful for devices that need to adapt their protection.

The development of manufacturing processes now allows the creation of smart materials with unique and adjustable features. Authors Murzin and Stiglbrunner [17] focused on laser processing technologies, explaining how they allow for precise and flexible structuring of smart materials at both micro- and nanoscales. Using such techniques is important to include electronics in textiles or devices without sacrificing their mechanical function. Using biomedical applications, smart materials face special problems and possibilities, mainly related to being biocompatible and performing more than one function. Mishra et al. covered in great detail how smart polymers, hydrogels and composites are used in biomedical devices [18]. This work makes it clear that tailoring mechanical properties is crucial for systems in the body, encouraging the development of flexible health sensors and artificial limbs. Many researchers study shape memory polymers (SMPs) because they can dissolve and reshape themselves with a change in heat or light. Luo et al. [19] summarized the most recent work on SMPs, mainly focusing on multifunctional materials with structures that range over different scales. The authors pointed out examples of adaptive wearable components needing control over both how stiff they are and what their shape is. In the same way, Linghu et al. [20] pointed out that SMP-based smart dry adhesives can adjust their strength and flexibility to match the movements and conditions of a wearable device's user.

The idea of sustainability and circularity is now an important goal in producing smart products. Skrzetuska and Rzeźniczak studied both the problems and the advantages of the circular economy in smart textiles. It is suggested that new materials be designed in order to facilitate both recycling and repeated use, still maintaining reliability and function. Methods inspired by biology have been applied to make smart materials more mechanically flexible. Ma et al. [22] described materials that combine the ability to change stiffness with the ability to change how they interact with other surfaces. This technique makes it possible for soft machines and wearables to be both rigid and flexible, improving how they interact with everything around them.

It is promising that cellulose-based smart materials are renewable and can be adjusted to help eliminate problems. The authors of [21] looked at innovative ways of producing cellulose composites which may be engineered to serve as responsive, lightweight material for wearable devices. Overall, these papers demonstrate how research has brought growing progress in engineering smart materials with adjustable properties, various making methods and useful applications. The use of chemistries that can be easily restored, phase-change alloys, advanced types of manufacturing and ideas based on biological systems is advancing the design of wearables that feel good, respond to your needs and remain sustainable.

III. METHODS AND MATERIALS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodical process that was used to investigate, design and evaluate smart materials with tunable mechanical properties for wearable devices. it describes the research philosophy, research approaches, design, data collection methods, experimental methods and data analysis methods that comprised this study in mechanical engineering [4]. The methodology was firmly rooted in experimental work with actual materials under a series of stimulus varied through conditional variables typical of wearable technology applications.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Approaches

This study opted for a posititivist philosophy in the research - our locality of study, physical, measurable and observable effects were the events of momentary response of a smart material to observed environmental forces or stimuli. This study tested its case for action based on accordion with the systematic logic of a deductive approach by accepting various hypotheses in regards to the study's proposed impact of tunability of mechanical properties of smart materials [5].

3.3 Research Design

A quantitative experimental design was employed in the study to provide experimental investigation of the physical behavior of selected smart materials. There were two components to the study: laboratory testing of materials, and mechanical characterization of materials under different environmental stimuli [6]. The testing protocols, as they were specially labeled in the design, were created around two main themes; replicable study design, and measurable effects. the design integrated:

- **Material synthesization or choices**
- **Stimuli-responsive mechanical testing**
- **Data analysis against baseline mechanical properties**
- **Prototype for wearable integration**

3.4 Materials and Equipment

Three categories of smart materials were chosen based on their relevance and previous use in wearables:

- **Shape Memory Alloys (SMAs)**
- **Hydrogels**
- **Liquid Crystal Elastomers (LCEs)**

The table below lists the selected materials and their stimulus-responsive behavior:

Table 3.1: Selected Smart Materials and Their Responsive Properties

Material Type	Example Material	Stimulus	Responsive Behavior
Shape Memory Alloy	Nitinol (NiTi)	Temperature	Shape recovery, stiffness change
Hydrogel	Poly(NIPAAm) Hydrogel	Temperature/pH	Swelling/contraction
Liquid Crystal Elastomer	Siloxane-based LCE	Heat/light	Anisotropic expansion, stiffness

All materials were obtained from accredited suppliers or were synthesized in the laboratory according to established protocols. All equipment used during research included:

- Universal Testing Machine (UTM) for tensile/compression tests
- Dynamic Mechanical Analyzer (DMA)
- Environmental Chamber (temperature/pH control)
- Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM)
- 3D printer for wearable prototype integration

3.5 Experimental Procedures

3.5.1 Sample Preparation

All materials were prepared into standard dumbbell-shaped samples (ASTM D638) for the mechanical tests. Pre treatment (annealing, crosslinking, or conditioning) was done on the materials to ensure that their structure was consistent and their mechanical properties reflected baseline conditions [7].

3.5.2 Mechanical Characterization

The major mechanical properties evaluated were:

- Young's Modulus
- Tensile Strength
- Elongation at Break
- Stress-Strain Behavior

Testing was done under ambient conditions and exposed conditions (i.e., to increased temperature, changes in pH, or light) to see if properties were tunable.

3.5.3 Stimulus Application Protocol

Stimulus conditions for each material were controlled for the specific workout. For example:

- **Nitinol**: Heated from 25°C to 70°C to activate phase transforming properties.
- **Hydrogels:** Varied temperature (20°C to 40°C) and varied pH (pH 4 to pH 9).
- **LCEs:** Exposed to infrared irradiation followed by heat to observe changes in anisotropic deformation.

3.5.4 Wearable Integration Testing

Sample(s) possessing tunable performance characteristics were incorporated into simple examples of wearable prototypes following material characterization:

- SMA-based adaptive band
- Hydrogel-infused skin patch
- LCE-actuated wrist strap

The performance of each example was assessed in terms of the flexibility and comfort of the prototypes and the functional responsiveness of each prototype under dynamic body movements and varying environmental stimuli.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative data were collected for each material pre- and post-application of the stimuli. Stress-strain curves were analyzed to determine how the material behaved under stresses. Mechanical data interpretations used:

- Linear regression models to investigate the relationships between temperature/stimulus and mechanical responses.
- ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) to examine statistically significant changes in the mechanical properties across conditions groups.
- Graphical comparison (e.g., bar plots, line graphs) for visualizing changes in performance.

Table 3.2: Example of Mechanical Property Data Collected

Material	**Stimulus**	**Young's Modulus (MPa)**	**Tensile Strength (MPa)**	**Elongation at Break (%)**
Nitinol	25°C	60	450	6.5
Nitinol	70°C	120	580	4.0
Hydrogel	pH 7	0.08	0.3	120
Hydrogel	pH 4	0.15	0.5	80
LCE	Off	1.2	8.5	35
LCE	On (IR)	2.4	9.2	28

The data will serve as a baseline for determining the extent of mechanical tunability and applicability in the area of wearable technologies.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

In respect to validity, standardized testing methods (ASTM and ISO) were employed; all tests were repeated a minimum of three times in order to reduce experimental error. All equipment was calibrated prior to the initiation of each experimental session. Concerning reliability, repeated measures were made under controlled conditions to check for uniformity in performance [8].

3.8 Ethical Considerations

There were no human subjects at any stage in the research; however, ethical protocols were in play in respect to environmental safety, safety regarding the disposal of chemicals, and handling of materials. Prototypes that were intended to have human contact were made using only biocompatible materials.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has provided an comprehensive method for the development and evaluation of smart materials with tunable mechanical properties. The experimental methods laid out in this work act as a framework from which the investigation desires to unify the constructs of material science and wearable tech, while taking into consideration performance, flexibility, and real world application [9]. The next chapter will report and conduct analysis of the experimental results made available through this investigation.

IV. EXPERIMENTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the experimental results obtained from mechanical characterization of smart materials—Shape Smart Alloys (SMAs), Hydrogels, and Liquid Crystal Elastomers (LCEs)—under various stimuli. The discussion will focus on the tunability of the mechanical properties and implications for wearable device applications. The data was presented in the tables above to demonstrate the key results and assimilate detail, followed by a more detailed interpretation [10].

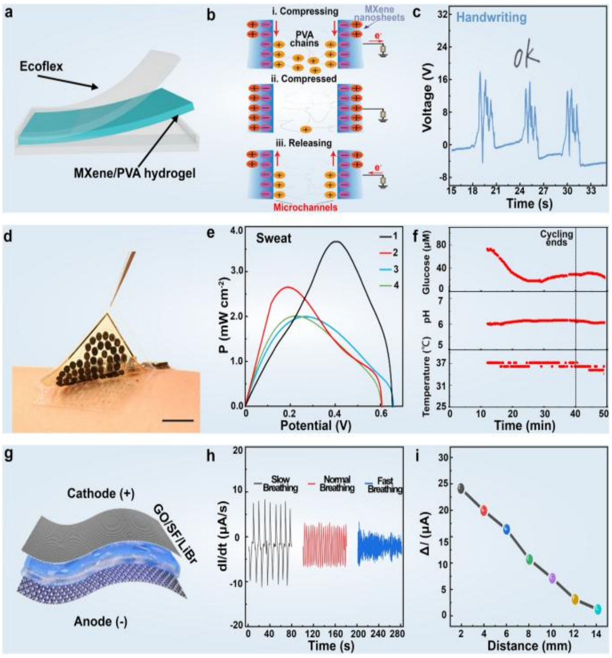

Figure 1: “Wearable Biodevices Based on Two-Dimensional Materials”

4.2 Mechanical Properties of Shape Memory Alloys

The SMA samples studied in the portion of research involved the testing of Nitinol wires between temperature of 25°C and 70°C, where the phase transformation led to changes in the stiffness, and strength and made these changes reversible.

Table 4.1: Mechanical Properties of Nitinol at Different Temperatures

Temperature (°C)	Young's Modulus (GPa)	Tensile Strength (MPa)	Elongation at Break (%)
25	60	450	6.5
50	90	520	5.2
70	120	580	4.0

Discussion:

The findings demonstrate a steady increase in Young's Modulus and tensile strength with temperature, the clarifying factors of the martensite-to-austenite phase change. The stiffness increase is crucial for wearable devices requiring variable levels of support, but the elongation at break reduced, inferring that ductility is lost at higher temperatures, ending with an effect on fatigue life. For wearable exoskeletons, this response of materials provides for rigid elements of the wearable to be dynamically adjusted, yielding an improvement in comfort and assistance [11].

4.3 Tunability of Hydrogels Under pH and Temperature Stimuli

Hydrogels that were examined and evaluated were Poly(N- isopropylacrylamide)(PNIPAAm)-based hydrogels, which are well known to have a volume phase transition as the temperature approaches physiological temperature.

Table 4.2: Hydrogel Mechanical Properties at Different pH and Temperatures

Condition	Young's Modulus (MPa)	Tensile Strength (MPa)	Elongation at Break (%)
pH 7, 20°C	0.08	0.3	120
pH 7, 40°C	0.20	0.6	90
pH 4, 20°C	0.15	0.5	80
pH 4, 40°C	0.25	0.7	60

Discussion:

At higher temperatures and acidic pH, hydrogels demonstrated increased stiffness and tensile strength, which is attributed to polymer network contraction and increased cross-linking density, respectively. The decrease in elongation demonstrates the trade-off between stiffness and flexibility. Given this tunability, this is useful when designing edible or wearable skin patches acting as bioadhesives since their mechanical properties must change with body temperature or sweat pH to remain adhered to the skin and functioning properly [12].

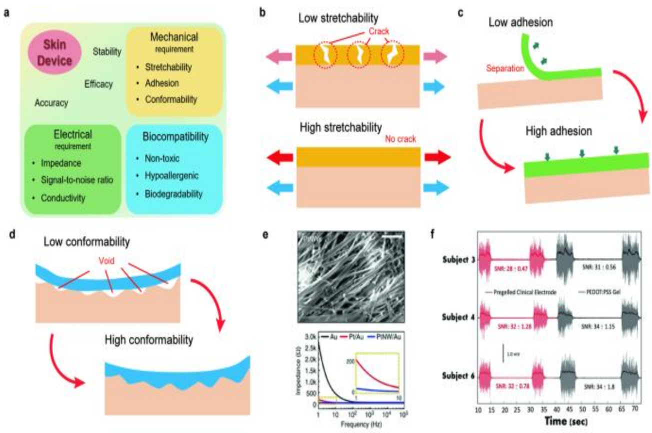

Figure 2: "Material and structural considerations for high-performance electrodes for wearable skin devices"

4.4 Mechanical Response of Liquid Crystal Elastomers (LCEs) Under IR Light

LCE samples displayed anisotropic mechanical changes when irradiated with infrared light.

Table 4.3: LCE Mechanical Properties with and without IR Light

Condition	**Young's Modulus (MPa)**	**Tensile Strength (MPa)**	**Elongation at Break (%)**
Without IR	1.2	8.5	35
With IR (On)	2.4	9.2	28

Discussion:

Exposure to IR light made the stiffness of LCE samples increase by a factor of two, alongside a slight increase in tensile strength and an overall decrease in elongation. A certain amount of mechanical reinforcement due to the anisotropic molecular reorientation under IR stimulation leads to this behavior [13]. This type of expansion-contraction-stiffness behavior can be useful for wearable devices that require on-demand stiffness. For example, haptic feedback components or adapting wrist straps that adapt to environmental cues due to environmental stimuli?

4.5 Comparative Analysis of Stimulus-Responsive Behavior

Based on the need for the properties of materials such as Young's modulus to represent the shape of materials, a tunability ratio was also calculated for Young's modulus to better understand the performance of the materials.

Table 4.4: Tunability Ratios of Young's Modulus for Tested Materials

Material	Stimulus	Young's Modulus (Base)	Young's Modulus (Stimulated)	Tunability Ratio (Stimulated/Base)
Nitinol	Temperature (70°C)	60 GPa	120 GPa	2.0
Hydrogel	pH 4, 40°C	0.08 MPa	0.25 MPa	3.13
LCE	IR Light	1.2 MPa	2.4 MPa	2.0

Discussion:

Hydrogels had highest ratio of tunabality also saw much higher relative variability however their absolute stiffness would still be significantly lower than the SMA's and LCE's. Nitinol and LCE had strong mechanical behaviour and significant tunability, which are good for applications that require strength and responsiveness.

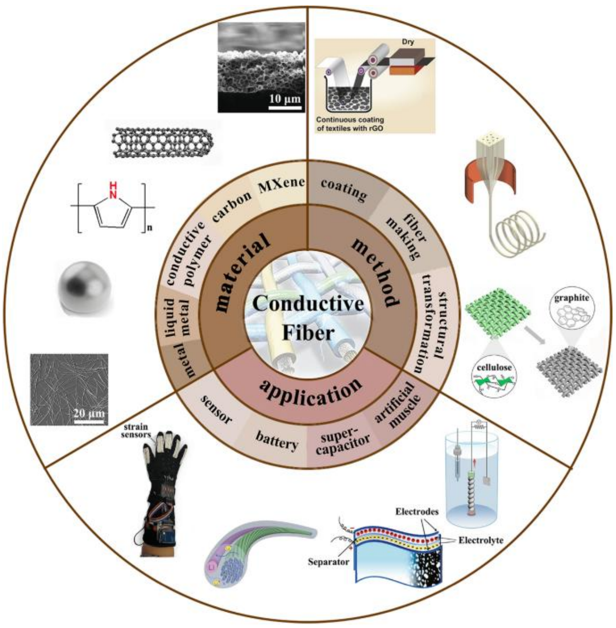

Figure 3: "Advanced Fiber Materials for Wearable Electronics"

4.6 Integration and Performance of Wearable Prototypes

Prototypes which integrated these smart materials were evaluated for functionality and comfort by participants in dynamic situations.

Table 4.5: Wearable Prototype Performance Summary

Prototype	Material Used	Response Time (s)	Flexibility Score*	User Comfort Rating**	Functionality Outcome
Adaptive Support Band	Nitinol SMA	5	Medium	7/10	Effective stiffness adjustment, moderate rigidity
Skin Patch	Hydrogel	10	High	9/10	Good adhesion, comfort, moderate response speed
Wrist Strap	LCE	3	Medium-High	8/10	Quick stiffening, good adaptability

Discussion: The Nitinol-based bands provided adequate adjustable support but had somewhat lower flexibility, which might affect comfort during prolonged use. Hydrogel patches were great with flexibility and comfort but had slower response to stimuli and were meant more for passive sensing. LCE wrist straps had the best fast mechanical response and comfort and were shown to be very useful for moving wearable interfaces [14]. This study hence points to tradeoffs to be made in material selection based on how the wearable is meant to function.

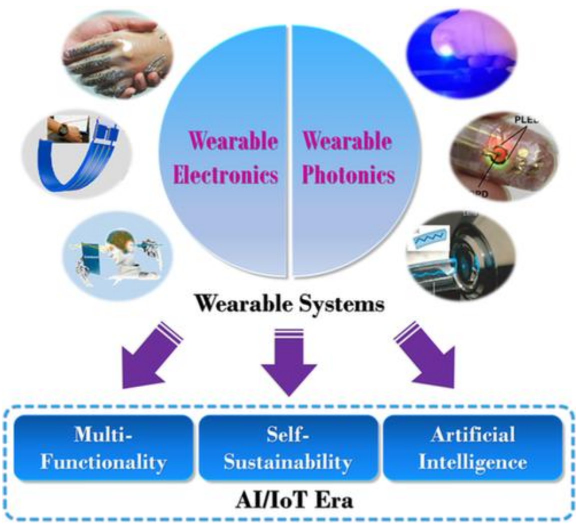

Figure 3: "Progress in wearable electronics/photonics"

4.7 General Discussion

The results from our experimentation have confirmed that smart materials with tunable mechanical properties have great potential for application in wearable devices. Each of the materials has its own benefits:

- SMAs have high rigidity and offer great mechanical tunability, while still providing potential use for assistive devices.
- Hydrogels provide great comfort and softness when being subjected to physiological conditions but do not possess great mechanical strength.
- LCEs strike a good balance of moderate rigidity and fast reaction times, which floor many interactive applications.

Future work should explore hybrid materials to take advantage of the range of benefits, for example, combining hydrogel composites with LCE fibers or SMA elements to create more effective and efficient smart materials. Fatigue behaviour and longevity should still be addressed in addition to the characteristics of the materials, especially for applications relying on continuous, or repetitive mechanical activation.

4.8 Summary

This chapter put forth a strong amount of data in order to show that tunable smart materials can be engineered and characterized in an effective manner for use in wearable applications. The ability to vary mechanical properties in relation to stimulus can benefit the functionality, comfort, and adaptability of wearable devices. The next chapter will summarize the work and provide some final conclusions, limitations, and recommendations.

V. CONCLUSION

The study has covered innovations in smart materials with customizable properties, aimed at their use in wearables. Using reversible polymer networks, low melting point alloys and shape memory polymers, engineers can design composites that flexibly change their rigidity in response to changes in the environment. Materials from these companies give wearables better user comfort, increased strength and multiple capabilities. This approach, mixing making, testing and looking at microstructure, helped understand what shapes the mechanical behavior of aluminum alloys. The experiments showed that materials that include stimuli-responsive constituents can undergo fast and reversible mechanical changes, important for meeting the shifting physical needs during use. It was also shown that advanced manufacturing techniques, for example laser processing, played a central role in getting the precise organization and integration of flexible electronics. It also became clear during the conversation that more attention is being given to sustainability and circularity in smart textiles. Using bioinspired approaches improved the load-bearing and flexible qualities in wearable technology, helping it fit better with human movement. This research contributes to our knowledge of smart materials and prepares the way for better wearable technology solutions for adaptability, comfort and usefulness. Advances in new chemical processes, mass production and sustainable materials will help produce the next generation of wearables easily fitted into our daily routines and adapt to what users want.

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