

Research on the Influence of KOL Traits on the Impulsive Purchasing Behaviour of Generation Z under the Perspective of Self-Construction—An Empirical Analysis Based on Live E-commerce Scenarios

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Abstract. In recent years, live e-commerce has become an important channel of consumption for Generation Z. As the core force influencing consumer decision-making, how the traits of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) inspire impulsive purchasing behaviours of consumers needs to be explored in depth. In this paper, we introduce social influence theory and self-construction theory, construct a three-dimensional model of “trait-psychology-behaviour”, explore the role of KOL’s professionalism and interactivity on the impulsive purchasing intention of Generation Z, and analyse the moderating roles of the independent and dependent ego in the process. The role of independent and dependent ego is also analysed. Based on 536 valid questionnaires, this paper uses multiple linear regression and interaction term analysis to conduct empirical tests. The results show that: (1) KOL’s professionalism and interactive activity both significantly and positively affect Generation Z’s impulsive purchase intention, and the influence of interactive activity is stronger; (2) independent ego strengthens the positive effect of professionalism on purchase intention, while dependent ego strengthens the marginal effect of interactive activity; (3) the influence of KOL’s traits on consumers’ behaviours varies across different psychological structures, and the influence of KOL traits on consumer behaviours varies across different psychological structures. Path. This study expands the boundary of self-construction theory in emerging digital scenarios, enriches the explanatory mechanism of KOL marketing effects, and provides theoretical support and practical insights for brands and platforms to formulate “psychologically adapted” KOL strategies.

Keywords: Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), generation Z, impulse buying, self-construction, live e-commerce

1. Introduction

In recent years, the rapid development of live e-commerce has reshaped the global retail industry. According to statistics, China's live streaming e-commerce market is expected to exceed RMB 4.9

trillion in 2023 [1], and as the core driver of this ecosystem, Key Opinion Leader (KOL) has become a key medium for brands to reach consumers [2]. Especially among Generation Z (born in 1995-2009), more than 70% of consumers make their shopping decisions via live streaming [3]. However, there is a significant paradox in practice: some KOLs known for their professionalism (e.g., technology review bloggers) have low conversion rates, while highly interactive KOLs can trigger "phenomenal orders" in a short period of time. This contrast suggests that the mechanism of KOL traits on purchase intention may be deeply modulated by consumers' psychological traits, and existing strategies have not yet effectively revealed its internal logic [4].

Currently, brands generally rely on the principle of "traffic first" to select KOLs, ignoring the suitability of the psychological characteristics of the target group [5]. For example, a beauty brand invites technical bloggers to promote its products, but it has a lukewarm response among young consumers who pay attention to community affiliation; on the other hand, an FMCG product activates the fan economy through highly interactive KOLs, but it is difficult to attract rational users who pursue professional authority. The failure of this strategy highlights the limitations of existing research: existing literature has confirmed the direct impact of KOL professionalism and interactivity on purchase intention, but most studies treat consumers as homogeneous groups, ignoring the individual differences emphasised by Self-Construct Theory [6]. Specifically, independent self-constructors (individual goal-oriented) and dependent self-constructors (dependent on social identity) may have very different responses to KOL traits. In addition, there is a dearth of research on Generation Z, a group of digital natives whose consumption behaviours are characterized by both social media immersion and "circle differentiation" (e.g., "ingredient party" vs. "vibe party"), and existing models have failed to address this issue. "Existing models fail to adequately explain the psychological driving mechanisms [7].

This study aims to fill the aforementioned gap between theory and practice. Based on Social Impact Theory [8], it proposes a theoretical framework that integrates KOL traits (professionalism, interactivity) and self-constructed types (independent, interdependent) and focuses on Generation Z consumers. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions: (1) How do KOL's professionalism and interactive activity differentially affect Gen Z's purchase intention? (2) Whether and how self-construct types moderate the above relationships? (3) How to optimise KOL strategies for live e-commerce based on the principle of psychological fit?

In summary, this study introduces the self-construction theory into the scenario of live e-commerce and KOL traits for the first time, revealing the boundary conditions of consumers' psychological traits in KOL marketing, and providing a contextualised extension of social influence theory. The findings of the study can provide brands with a "precise fit" strategy: strengthening the KOL's professional and authoritative persona for independent consumers, and designing highly interactive and community-affiliated content for dependent consumers. By analysing the segmentation of Gen Z, this study provides a data-driven basis for marketing practices in emerging markets.

2. Research hypothesis

2.1. Main effects hypothesis

According to existing research, KOL expertise reduces consumers' perceived risk through information credibility and perceived authority [9], thus promoting unplanned decision-making. Specifically, expertise is reflected in the in-depth interpretation of product technical parameters, ingredient efficacy, or industry standards (e.g., a beauty KOL explains the impact of hyaluronic acid

molecular weight on penetration rate). "The impact of hyaluronic acid molecular weight on penetration rate"), this type of content significantly strengthens Gen Z's trust threshold by enhancing information transparency and decision-making controllability. For example, in the live broadcast of 3C products, KOL's horizontal evaluation of smartphone chip performance (e.g., "Snapdragon 8 Gen2 vs. Tenguet 9200") can quickly activate Generation Z's "strong admiration" (i.e., the tendency to worship professional authority), which prompts them to "trust" Generation Z in the absence of sufficient rational assessment. They will complete their purchases without sufficient rational assessment [10]. In addition, as Digital Natives, the information processing mode of Generation Z is highly adaptable and fragmented, and the real-time nature of live broadcasting scenarios (e.g., KOL instantly answering technical questions) further strengthens the persuasive efficiency of professional information, forming the conduction chain of "sense of knowledge acquisition→emotional awakening→impulsive behaviours" and "knowledge acquisition → emotional arousal→impulsive behaviours". " conduction chain [11].

Interactive activation drives impulsive buying through social presence and group normative pressure [12]. According to the theory of social presence, real-time interactions in live broadcasting (e.g., instant replies to pop-ups, countdown to limited-time benefits) can simulate face-to-face social situations and shorten the psychological distance between consumers and KOLs. For example, when KOL launches the activity of "the first 100 people to place an order for a limited gift box", the message of "all gone" on the pop-up screen triggers the scarcity perception and competition anxiety of Generation Z, thus accelerating the decision-making process [13]. It is worth noting that Gen Z's need to belong to a circle (e.g., "fan group ranking", "community identity") makes interaction more targeted: KOLs construct "mimetic intimacy" through high-frequency interactions (e.g., naming fans to ask questions, displaying user-generated content). "mimetic intimacy", leading consumers to lower their rational defences in an emotional connection. For example, a fashion KOL invited fans to co-design co-branded apparel in a live broadcast, and the participants felt a strong sense of belonging due to the "co-creation experience", which then triggered unplanned purchases [14]. Based on the above analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: KOL traits significantly and positively influence Gen Z's impulsive buying behaviour in live e-commerce scenarios.

H1a: KOL's expertise significantly and positively influences Generation Z's impulsive buying behaviour.

H1b: KOL's interactive activity significantly and positively influences Gen Z's impulsive buying behaviour.

2.2. Moderating effect assumptions

Independent Self-Construal individuals are intrinsically goal-oriented, and their decision-making relies on self-congruity and cognitively-dominant information processing [15]. KOL's professional content (e.g., technical evaluation, data visualisation) meets the psychological needs of independent consumers for a "rational decision-making agent" by providing objective and verifiable information. consumers' psychological need for "rational decision-making agents". For example, when KOLs compare the frequency response curves and noise reduction parameters of different models of headphones in a digital live broadcast, independent consumers may quickly complete their purchases due to the superimposed effect of "technical credibility" and "sense of decision control". This process is in line with the Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT), which suggests that specialised information weakens rational deliberation by increasing perceived control and stimulating positive emotions (e.g., a sense of achievement) [16]. Interdependent Self-Construal individuals use group

harmony and social acceptance as an anchor for decision-making, and their behaviour is driven by Normative Social Influence [17]. The high interactivity of live broadcasting (e.g., pop-up screen "bought +1", collective slogans of fan groups) amplifies the tendency to follow the crowd through the Group Polarisation effect [18]. For example, when a beauty KOL launches a "fan-exclusive colour code poll", the intensive "choose A colour" suggestions in the pop-up screen will strengthen the Belonging Anxiety of dependent consumers, prompting them to imitate the behaviour to obtain community identity [19]. This mechanism can be explained by social identity theory [19]. This mechanism can be explained by Social Identity Theory (SIT): interactivity activates In-group Identity Salience, which allows consumers to reconfigure their purchasing behaviour as an "obligation of group membership". "group membership obligations", thus rationalising impulsive decisions [20]. Based on the above analysis, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: Consumers' self-construal type significantly moderates the effect of KOL traits on impulsive buying behaviour.

H2a: Independent self-construal enhances the positive effect of KOL expertise on impulsive buying behaviour.

H2b: Dependent self-construction enhances the positive effect of KOL interaction activity on impulsive buying behaviour.

3. Empirical analysis

3.1. Data collection

In order to test the hypotheses proposed in this paper, this study uses a structured electronic questionnaire to conduct an empirical survey of Generation Z e-commerce live streaming consumers. Given that the research subjects are mainly active on online platforms, we relied on "Questionnaire Star" (www.wjx.cn) to distribute the questionnaire online, and embedded a screening logic at the distribution end to ensure that the respondents meet the following conditions: first, they were born in the period of 1995-2009 in the Gen Z; second, they have at least two or more shopping experiences in live Firstly, they were born between 1995 and 2009; secondly, they have at least two or more shopping experiences in the live e-commerce environment; and thirdly, they have a basic knowledge of live e-commerce and KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders). The questionnaire was distributed and collected over a period of one month, during which a total of 638 valid submissions were received. After eliminating invalid questionnaires such as answering too fast (less than 2 min), choosing the same option continuously and obviously contradictory answers, the final valid questionnaires were 536, with a validity rate of 84.01%.

The main body of the questionnaire consisted of four parts: demographic information, KOL trait scale, self-construal scale, and willingness to purchase scale. KOL traits were divided into two dimensions: "professionalism" (2 questions, based on Xiao and Lei [21]) and "interactive activity" (3 questions, same as above). (3 questions, *ibid.*) two dimensions, the self-construction is divided according to "independent type" (5 questions) and "dependent type" (4 questions), the content of the scale is based on Chen Ye et al. and combined with the live broadcasting scenarios to complete the contextualised revision; Purchase intention (3 questions) refers to Liu et al.'s maturity scale, which measures consumers' consideration of KOL-recommended products and their actual propensity to purchase them, as shown in Table 1. All the question items are on a seven-point Likert scale [22] (1 = "Strongly Disagree", 5 = "Strongly Agree"), and the clarity and feasibility of the formulation was tested by a small pre-survey of 30 Gen Z respondents before the formal research. The pre-survey data were analysed by Cronbach's α reliability in SPSS, and the α values of all dimensions were

higher than 0.70. Subsequently, a preliminary validation factor analysis was conducted by AMOS, and the results showed that the questionnaire had good structural validity, which was in line with the requirements of empirical analysis.

Table 1. Generation Z e-commerce live streaming consumer questionnaire

variant	subject
expertise	Q1 The live webcam has expertise in the product category Q2 The live webcam has extensive buying experience Q3 The live webcam has experience with the product
Interactive activity	Q4 The live webcam can respond positively to viewers' questions Q5 The live webcaster was enthusiastic and responsible in responding to questions Q6 The live webcaster will communicate regularly with members of the group
willingness to buy	Q7 You are highly likely to consider purchasing a product recommended by this live webcaster Q8 Would you like to buy the products recommended by this live webcam? Q9 Would you recommend the products recommended by this live webcaster to others
Independent Self	Q10 Personality traits that are independent of others are important to me Q11 In that live room, I like to communicate with others in a straightforward manner Q12 I am happy to express my views in that live room Q13 I am happy to be different in many ways
the interdependent self	Q14 It is important for me to have a good relationship with others Q15 I will avoid arguing even if I disagree with others in that live room Q16 I would be happy to see others happy in that live room Q17 In that live room, I am concerned about what others think of me

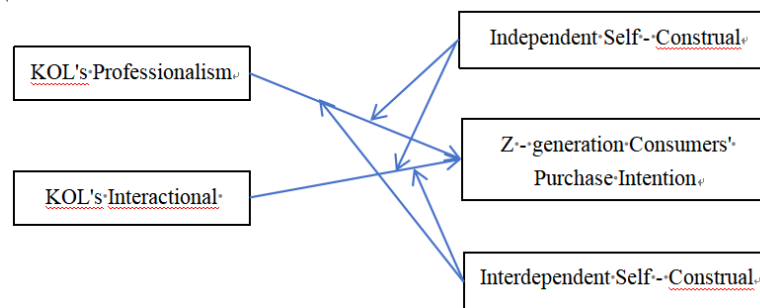


Figure 1. Data analysis process

3.2. Data analysis

3.2.1. Descriptive statistics

The total number of survey samples was 536. Of these, 266 (49.6%) were in the male group and 270 (50.4%) were in the female group. In terms of gender distribution, males and females accounted for almost the same proportion of the sample, and the difference in numbers between the two was extremely small, which suggests that the sample was well balanced along gender dimensions, with no over- or under-representation of one gender.

The largest number of persons with a bachelor's degree was 319, accounting for 59.5 per cent of the total sample. The number of people with high school/secondary education is 37, accounting for 6.9 per cent. The number of people with university degree is 117, accounting for 21.8 per cent. The number of people with education junior high school and below is 34, accounting for 6.3 per cent.

The number of people with academic qualifications postgraduate and above is 29, accounting for 5.4 per cent. The distribution of academic qualifications in the sample shows obvious differences, see Table 3. Nearly 60% of the sample are undergraduates, which is the main part of the sample, indicating that there is a higher concentration of people with this level of qualification in the sample. The proportion of other educational levels is relatively small, from junior high school and below to postgraduate and above, the number of people accounted for a relatively low proportion and more dispersed, reflecting the relatively small number of people with high education in this sample, and the overall distribution of academic qualifications presents the characteristics of a particular level of academic qualifications as the main level, and the distribution of other levels of academic qualifications is relatively uniform and accounts for a relatively small proportion.

3.2.2. Normal distribution test

For the Kolmogorov-Sminov test, the significance (p-value) of all the variables was 0.000, which indicates that at the given level of significance (usually assumed to be 0.05), the original hypothesis (which assumes that the data follow a normal distribution) is rejected, i.e. the data for these variables do not follow a normal distribution. For the Shapiro-Wilk test, the significance (p-value) for all the variables was also 0.000, again rejecting the original hypothesis, further indicating that the data for these variables do not follow a normal distribution.

Overall, the results of these tests indicate that the studied data on variables such as KOL (Key Opinion Leader) related characteristics as well as some attitudes and behaviours of the viewers in the live streams do not satisfy the conditions of normal distribution.

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is an important measure of the reliability (dependability) of a scale or test [23]. In general, the higher the coefficient, the stronger the correlation between the items that make up the scale or test, which means the better the internal consistency of the scale and the more reliable the measure. The Professionalism Cronbach Alpha coefficient is 0.732, and the number of items is 2. The Interactive Activity coefficient is 0.811, and the number of items is 3. The Willingness to Purchase Cronbach Alpha coefficient reaches 0.840, and the number of items is 3. The Independence Ego coefficient is 0.736, and the number of items is 5, and the Dependent Ego Cronbach Alpha coefficient is 0.798, and the number of items is 4.

In summary, the Cronbach Alpha coefficients for each variable show varying degrees of reliability. Among them, the reliability of the measures of willingness to buy and interactive activity is relatively high, and the measures of professionalism, independent self and dependent self also have some reliability.

3.2.3. Statistical tests of goodness of fit

In all three models, the goodness-of-fit statistics showed an improving trend. Model 1, with only "professionalism" and "interactivity" as predictor variables, had an R-value of 0.903, an R^2 of 0.816, and an adjusted R^2 of 0.815. With the inclusion of variables such as "dependent self" and "independent self" in Model 2, and the inclusion of an interaction term between self-type and the original predictor variables in Model 3, the goodness-of-fit statistics showed a trend of improvement. Dependent Self" and "Independent Self" variables were added to Model 2, and the interaction term between the type of self and the original predictor variables was included in Model 3. The R-value and the R^2 value increased, which indicates that the model is fitting the data better and better. This improvement is further supported by the decrease in estimated standard errors from

0.536 in Model 1 to 0.456 in Model 3. The Durbin-Watson statistic in Model 3 is 2.108, which implies that there is no significant autocorrelation in the residuals see Table 2.

Table 2. Statistical test of goodness of fit

modelling	R	R-square	Adjusted R-square	Errors in standard estimates	Durbin Watson.
1	0.903a	0.816	0.815	0.536264523445178	
2	0.931b	0.867	0.866	0.457112121838554	
3	0.932c	0.868	0.866	0.455853988592098	2.108

3.2.4. Analysis of moderating effects

Main effect, in Model 1, “interactive activity” ($\beta = 0.820$, $t = 27.934$, $p < 0.000$) and “professionalism” ($\beta = 0.105$, $t = 3.561$, $p < 0.000$) have significant positive main effects on the purchase intention all have significant positive main effects. However, the significance of “professionalism” was weakened by adding “dependent self” and “independent self” to Model 2 ($\beta = 0.024$, $t = 0.949$, $P = 0.343$), while “professionalism” ($\beta = 0.105$, $t = 3.561$, $P < 0.000$) had a positive main effect on purchase intention. 0.343), while “Interactive Activity” remained highly significant ($\beta = 0.779$, $t = 30.215$, $p < 0.000$). The “dependent self” had a negative effect on purchase intention ($\beta = -0.051$, $t = -2.733$, $P = 0.006$), while the “independent self” had a positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.272$, $t = 14.153$, $P < 0.000$). $P < 0.000$).

The moderating effect was observed in Model 3, which included an interaction term between the two self-types (“dependent self” and “independent self”) and “professionalism” and “interactive activity”. In Model 3, the interaction terms between the two types of self (“Attached Self” and “Independent Self”) and “Professionalism” and “Interactive Activity” were included, from which moderating effects were observed.

For the interaction term related to “independent self”: “independent self*professionalism” has a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.350$, $t = 2.116$, $p = 0.035$), which indicates that the relationship between “professionalism” and “willingness to buy” is moderated by “independent self”. This indicates that the relationship between “professionalism” and “willingness to buy” is moderated by “independent self”. The positive effect of “professionalism” on “willingness to buy” increases when consumers have a higher level of “independent self”. “Independent self*interactive activity” has a negative effect ($\beta = -0.190$, $t = -1.069$, $p = 0.285$), but it is not significant at conventional levels.

For the interaction term related to “dependent self”, “dependent self*professionalism” has a negative effect ($\beta = -0.334$, $t = -2.004$, $p = 0.046$), which indicates that the positive effect of “professionalism” on “purchase intention” will be weakened when the consumer’s level of “dependent self” is high. This indicates that the positive effect of “professionalism” on “purchase intention” will be weakened when the level of “dependent self” is high. The positive effect of “dependent self*interaction activity” ($\beta = 0.308$, $t = 1.849$, $P = 0.065$) is borderline significant. This implies that the positive effect of “Interaction activity” on “Purchase intention” may be stronger for consumers with higher levels of “Dependent self”.

In summary, the two moderating variables, “dependent self” and “independent self”, do play a moderating role in the relationship between “professionalism”, “interactive activity” and “purchase intention”. The two moderating variables, “dependent self” and “independent self”, did play a moderating role in the relationship between “professionalism”, “interactivity” and “willingness to buy”. The nature of these moderating effects varies, with some interactions being significant and

others less so, providing valuable insights into how different consumer self-concepts influence the impact of marketing-related factors on purchase decisions.

4. Conclusion

Based on the self-construction theory and focusing on the “e-commerce + live broadcast” scenario, this study explores the influence mechanism of KOL traits on the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers, and introduces independent and dependent egos as moderating variables to construct a three-dimensional pathway model of “trait-psychology-behaviour”, with the following conclusions. The three-dimensional path model of “trait-behaviour” is constructed, and the findings are as follows:

Firstly, KOL traits have a significant positive impact on the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers. In the live e-commerce environment, KOL establishes contact with consumers through professional explanation, real-time interaction, user co-creation, etc., to strengthen the efficiency and emotional value of product information delivery. KOL’s interactive activity shows a more stable and direct influence, which can effectively shorten the psychological distance between consumers, enhance the immersion and participation in the live broadcasting situation, and thus stimulate immediate decision-making motivation. KOL’s professionalism, based on the emphasis on authority and credibility of the information, can also enhance the level of consumer’s perceptual control and trust, but its role is more dependent on the suitability of the individual’s psychological structure.

Second, self-constructed type plays a moderating role between KOL characteristics and purchase intention. Specifically, independent consumers tend to make decisions based on rational information, and are more likely to be motivated by KOL’s professional content; while dependent consumers attach more importance to community interaction and emotional belonging, and are more sensitive to KOL’s interactive behaviour. During the live broadcasting process, dependent individuals are easily influenced by the pop-up atmosphere, fans’ behaviour and anchors’ responses, forming the psychological path of “group identity-emotional resonance-purchase behaviour”.

Finally, the results of the study show that the influence of KOL traits on consumers’ purchasing behaviour is not universally applicable, but is profoundly regulated by individual psychological characteristics, and that the purchasing behaviour of Generation Z, as a digital aborigine with high media literacy and multicultural identity, is influenced by both rational judgment and emotional drive, showing significant psychological differentiation and stratification characteristics. Therefore, in the live e-commerce scene, KOL influence should be combined with the psychological structure and circle attributes of the users to achieve the precise adaptation of the strategy.

This study deepens the theoretical knowledge of the relationship between KOL traits and consumer behaviours, expands the boundaries of the application of self-construction theory in the emerging digital consumption arena, and provides a personalised marketing reference path for live streaming e-commerce platforms and brands for Generation Z.

5. Practical implications

From the perspective of the interaction between KOL traits and consumer self-construction, this study deeply analyses the purchasing psychology and behavioural patterns of Generation Z in live e-commerce, and the findings are of strong practical significance for live broadcasting platforms, brands and KOL operators:

First of all, when developing KOL marketing strategies, enterprises should take “psychological fit” as the core guide to achieve an accurate match between users and KOL characteristics. KOLs are

not more "professional" or "passionate", but their influence depends on whether they fit the psychological needs of the target users. For independent consumers who prefer independent judgement, it is recommended to use "knowledge output" KOLs, emphasising content authority and logical clarity; while for dependent consumers who value social interaction and emotional belonging, "interactive" KOLs should be used. For consumers who value social interaction and emotional belonging, "interactive" and "companion" KOLs should be used, emphasising community atmosphere and fan relationship building.

Secondly, the live content should be dynamically balanced between "professionalism" and "interactivity" to enhance the audience's sense of immersion and participation. The traditional "product explanation" based live broadcast mode is gradually giving way to the dual-track narrative logic of "scene interaction + emotional resonance". Brands should encourage KOLs to use storytelling, gamification, real-time Q&A and other means to improve the quality of interaction, while maintaining the clarity and credibility of the information content to avoid damaging the foundation of trust due to excessive entertainment.

6. Research limitations and perspectives

Although this study has achieved certain results in terms of theoretical construction and empirical testing, there are still several limitations in the following aspects, which need to be further deepened and improved in subsequent studies:

First, the sample source has certain limitations. This study collects data through online platforms, and although the sample size is sufficient and the screening conditions of Generation Z and live streaming consumption experience are strictly set, the sample mainly focuses on some college students and young urban groups, which may have deviations in terms of geography, occupation and consumption frequency, etc. The generalisability of the study's conclusions still needs to be verified in a wider range of samples.

Second, the data collection method relies mainly on self-reported questionnaires, with the possibility of subjective bias. Although the questionnaire design process follows a standardised process and the measurement quality is guaranteed by the reliability and validity test, the psychological characteristics and behavioural judgments of the respondents may be affected by factors such as social expectation effects and recall bias. In the future, multiple data sources, such as live broadcasting behavioural records, pop-up sentiment analysis, eye tracking and other objective behavioural indicators can be introduced to enhance the ecological validity of the results.

In summary, future research can further expand the sample structure, diversify the measurement tools, improve the complexity of the model and deepen the mechanism of user segmentation, so as to promote the research on the psychological mechanism of live e-commerce to the deep development, and to provide more accurate and operable theoretical support for the practice of personalised marketing.

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