



Consumption Patterns of South Korean Content: Cross-Cultural Acceptance of Romance and Beauty among Pakistani Youth

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Abstract

This study aims to observe the consumption patterns of Korean media content among Pakistani youth. The objective of this quantitative study was to explore the consumption patterns of Korean content among youth; to investigate whether the consumption of Korean media content is creating acceptance for its beauty standards and leading to the normalization of cross-cultural romance among youth. Using the Survey technique, data was collected by sample (N=450) — respondents aged 15-29 who watched Korean content. A pilot study 100 samples size was conducted to check the reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha value 0.812 showed satisfactory reliability. The results disclosed that Korean content is popular among Pakistani youth; furthermore, Korean beauty standards are accepted, and Korean romance is normalized among the Pakistani youth.

Keywords: Korean beauty, Korean romance, Korean content, hegemony, consumption pattern, globalization

1. Introduction

The term "mass media" encompasses all techniques of disseminating information to a mass audience. Electronic media (cinema screens, television, or computers) has a significant role in promoting a culture, as their audiences are larger, diverse, and more geographically dispersed than those served by traditional cultural showcases (Farrah et al., 2022; Vineet, 2011). Media has enabled the dissemination of information to inaccessible areas (Jin & Liu, 2022; Ejaz & Ahmad 2011; Govindaraju, 2010). People tend to be active users when it comes to choosing an entertainment medium (Jang et al., 2021). Globalization possesses the aptitude to alter the nature of the human touch (Kim, 2007). It fosters the unfettered circulation of resources, such as information, people, goods, and money (Kheeshadeh, 2012; Sharma, 2011). Several nations are disquiet that, in the name of globalization, their culture is being watered down or neglected by influential media and corporate interests, leading to allegations of cultural imperialism (Kheeshadeh, 2012; Kim, 2007).

The on-going global dominance and acceptance of K-drama and Hallyu tourism is fueled by the romantic and sexual desires of Korean males (Lee, 2020). Most of the South K-dramas revolve around romance; furthermore, K-dramas incite viewers to develop informed stance on a variety of themes, including but not limited to what defines physical attractiveness, appropriate romantic partners, and healthy relationships (Gammon, 2022; Soman & Jaggi, 2022; Seo et al., 2020). In K-dramas, the ideas of the "ideal" companion and the "perfect" romance are dominated (Cariappa, 2020; Lee, 2020). The concept of "Asian-ness" has taken the central stage and is no longer portrayed as weird and marginal (Hogarth, 2013); Pakistani viewers also find cultural proximity with culture in K- dramas (Zehra, 2018). Moreover, Mass Audience is inclined towards K-dramas over western series due to the perceived modesty of the stories and actors (Pha & Lhe, 2022). Malaysian audiences prefer k-dramas over other Asians dramas (Shim, 2006; Malik et al., 2019; Ariffin et al., 2018).

Antonio Gramsci's work on conception of hegemony has left an indelible mark on cultural studies (Cortes-Ramirez, 2015; Mattelart, 1999; Kellner, 2001). It shed light on the process in which media goods are used as methods for the reproduction of reality, but also for social change by framing culture as a battleground where the development of meanings is viewed as both dominance and resistance (Moraes, 2018); Globalization of the media sector is a form of cultural imperialism (Noor, 2022; Dubey, 2022)). When a country utilizes its media exports to oppress another, this is an instance of cultural imperialism (Jinn, 2022; Vineet, 2011).

The interest in Korean beauty has recently escalated — adherence to South Korean beauty standards relates to increased sentiments of self-worth, confidence, and general satisfaction among Asian Americans (Yoon, 2022; Fong, 2021). Not to mention, Korean celebrities frequently endorse the Korean beauty standard to foreign and domestic audiences (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021; Agustina & Lukman, 2017).

This paper aims to observe how young Pakistanis interact with Korean media on purpose. In recent years, the K-pop quintet BTS has grown to fame, shattering multiple records on worldwide music charts. Furthermore, In Pakistan, K-dramas such as *Squid Games*, *Vincenzo*, *It's Okay That's Not Okay* and *Crash Landing on You* have enjoyed immense popularity. This study examined the increasing popularity of K-pop culture in Pakistan.

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1.1. Statement of Problem

Korean media content is at rise in Pakistan; it has a considerable ascendancy on the youth. Therefore, the researcher aims to analyze watching patterns of Korean media content among youth and its impact on them.

1.2. Objectives

- To explore the consumption pattern of Korean content among youth (time, reason, recommendation and preference).
- To investigate whether the consumption of Korean content is making Korean beauty standard acceptance among youth.
- To know how exposure to Korean content is normalizing the cross-cultural romance among youth.

1.3. Research Questions

- What are the most used OTT platforms to watch Korean content?
- Why Pakistani youth prefer Korean content over other content?
- How does Pakistani youth perceive and relate to the Korean romance?
- Is Korean beauty getting accepted and causing any change among Pakistani youth?
- How much Korean content is normalizing cross-cultural romance among Pakistani youth?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Cross -Cultural Korean Content

Due to globalization, extensive cultural exchange between nations can strengthen local culture through the hybridization of local and global traditions (Lee et al. 2020; Zahir et al., 2002). Transnational media facilitated exposure of heterogeneous language and culture through their content to individuals (Malik et al., 2019; Baek, 2015; Jang et al., 2021). However, the Internet has grown into a hybrid domain where individuals can navigate the complex interaction of cultural norms and values across national borders (Zheng et al., 2022; Haejin & Youngmin, 2009).

South Korea has rapidly become one of the most important non-Western centers for the production and distribution of transnational popular culture and digital technologies — that become immediate global sensations despite its geographical isolation (Panda et al., 2022; Prasopsorn & Panmanee, 2019). Not to mention, the modesty with which K-dramas and their actors are portrayed contributes significantly to the Middle Eastern audience's preference (Yong & Hyangsoon, 2020; Akter, 2019).

In addition to fostering a larger interest in the language, clothing, and lifestyles of other countries, social media platforms have a crucial role in encouraging cultural hybridization on a global scale (Dutot & Lichy, 2022; Ju, 2018). Chinese media popularized the phrase "Korean Wave" Hallyu (Othman, 2021; Kim, 2007; Lee, 2011; Hogarth, 2013; Song, 2020) to describe the organic diffusion of South Korean popular culture abroad (Min et al., 2019; Parc & Hwys-Chang, 2013). Likewise, this is not a fad, but a thriving and enduring subsection of the entertainment industry. Since its origins can be traced back in time, it is evident that the Korean Wave is a cultural movement that has evolved (Hwang & Lee, 2022; Ju, 2018). Song (2020) identifies three generations of the Korean wave. First, there was Hallyu 1.0 from 1997 to roughly the middle of the 2000s; next, there was Hallyu 2.0 from roughly the middle of the 2000s to roughly the middle of the 2010s; and finally, there is Hallyu 3.0 from about the middle of the 2010s to the present day (Jeong & Lee, 2017; Ju, 2018; Othman, 2021). Furthermore, the eruption of the Korean wave in international media has caused a dominance effect (Kim, 2022; Lee, 2011; Kim, 2007). Akter (2019) uncovered the three factors that support cultural hybridity ('Asian identity,' 'policies emphasizing unity in ethnic diversity,' and 'local consumers' xenocentrism') and two that inhibit it ('religious conservatism,' and 'discrimination between ethnic groups').

2.2. Korean Beauty Standards

Korean celebrities endorse Korean beauty standards among their national and international viewers (Kamilia et al., 2022; Pablo et al., 2022). Nevertheless, their youthful and healthy skin is a crucial factor in their efficacy in the endorsement of Korean skincare products and skincare routines (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021; Setiani, 2022). K-beauty is characterized by three paradoxical themes: manufactured naturalness; hypersexualized cuteness; and harmonious kaleidoscope (Jung & Lee, 2009; Seo et al., 2020). There is a positive association between South Korean beauty standards and body image, self-esteem, and life satisfaction—with a focus on the perspective of Asian Americans (Fong, 2021). Gen-Z is obsessed with fashion shown on YouTube and it has a great influence on their lifestyle — about their perception of looks and appearance (Park & Chun, 2020; Agustina & Lukman, 2017).

2.3. Romance Portrayal in K- Entertainment Industry

There are two different routes to avail oneself of K-dramas: involvement with characters; involvement with the storyline. Notwithstanding, the element of genre proximity was found in action and crime but not in fantasy and adventure (Lu & Cheng, 2019). Whilst Netflix also found that viewers engaged with Korean content are identified by the substance of love themes (Noh, 2022; An, 2022; Thasneem, 2022). Likewise, the viewers showed a high degree

of emotional connection in describing romantic feelings as well as characters' interactions, and closely related their personal lives and minds to the storyline (Ju, 2020).

2.4. K-Music as New Dimension to Entertainment Industry

The rise of Korean Popular culture triggers an environment for the commodities to the interaction between nations (Oplustilova et al., 2022; Fithratullah, 2018). K-pop music video consumption is highest among countries both whose cultures are very similar to Korean culture and whose cultures are very different (Baek, 2015; Lee, 2011; Kim, 2007). K-pop considers a subculture that transforms into transcultural fandom via digital mediation (Gong, 2022; Han, 2017). K-pop has become one of the most dynamically circulated forms of pop culture in the global market through social media networks (Jung & Shim, 2014; Oh & Lee, 2013; Noh, 2015). K-Pop shows exceptional growth and sets meaningful lessons for other countries' music industries (Parc & Kim, 2020).

Messerlin and Shin (2017) explain three factors that are the reason behind the tremendous success of K-Pop. Firstly, there is a high level of competition in the Korean music industry. Secondly, low online prices in South Korea relative to CD prices produce stronger incentives to create multiple “variations” on a given title when compared to other countries. Finally, very low prices compared to other music industries attract foreign markets to K-Pop companies and their stars (Messerlin & Shin, 2017).

As the K-pop industry has expanded globally (Thasneem, 2022; Park & Chun, 2020; Agustina & Lukman, 2017) and the strength of the K-pop fan community is also getting the spotlight. K-pop fans support their band, and one of their tactics to promote their favorite band is ‘fandom collaboration’ — for the success of their favorite band fans mutually supporting bands of each other (Kang et al., 2021; Yoon, 2018). TV drama series in South Korea have become the favorite media type; consequently, Malaysian viewers are inclined toward K-dramas rather than other Asian ones (Ariffin et al., 2018).

2.5. K-Dramas Acceptance in Pakistan

The relationship between Pakistan and South Korea has ancient historical origins. PTV Home broadcasted a dubbed version of the South Korean drama *Nageen* in 2016 to strengthen cultural ties between the two nations (Hasnain, 2021). K-dramas are here to stay (Khan, et al., 2021; Soman & Joggi, 2022), as seen by the success of episodes: such as *Hell Bound*, *Squid Game*, and *All of Us Are Dead* on Netflix in Pakistan, which all rated in the top 10 most streamed episodes (The Express Tribune, 2022). It's Okay to Not Be Okay-style programs employ humor to draw attention to the serious challenges of autism and mental health (Zehra, 2020).

Amid the COVID-19 epidemic, Netflix has gained prominence as a platform for viewing Korean dramas (Zehra, 2020). In recent years, the popularity of South Korean media has exploded. BTS — the most successful boy band in the world — has gained millions of social media followers, while the film *Parasite* is nominated for numerous Oscars in 2020 (Hasnain, 2021).

2.6. Hypothesis

Based on literature review, the study draws the following hypothesis.

H1: There is an association between exposure of Korean content and acceptance of Korean beauty standards.

H2: There is an association between exposure of Korean content and normalizing Korean romance.

3. Theoretical Framework

Gramsci's concept of Hegemony provides a light to look into the popularity of Korean content in Pakistan.

3.1. Cultural Hegemony

Popular culture has emerged as the dominating cultural force — due to the inclusion of mainstream media and the social media web. Culture is no longer considered as pure concept; instead, it serves an ideological function and is inextricably intertwined with the media. Hegemony occurs when one way of thinking and behaving becomes so ubiquitous in the media that it influences people's public and private impressions of the world Gramsci (1971). Media hegemony exists when a specific political-economic structure of media organizations and related distribution-production-and-ideological practices are the norm — because they are always backed by regulators, the general public and producers. Hegemony in the media does not necessarily imply monopoly or dominance by one or a limited number of media organizations; rather, it is the process through which a specific set of media structures and practices becomes the standard — as a result of widespread choice, acceptance, and execution.

In recent years, South Korean cultural output has exploded in popularity throughout Asia. Hallyu — known as the Korean Wave — refers to the fast export of popular culture in South Korean. In addition to music and films, Korean popular culture includes television programs, cosmetics, cuisine, and other areas of Korean society (Othman, 2021; Kim, 2007; Lee, 2011; Malik et al., 2019). As stated in Gramsci Cultural hegemony, people adopt cultures willingly — and not by force — in this way different countries' cultural values added to others with consent. Therefore, the willingly acceptance of South Korean media content in Pakistan has popularized Korean culture.

4. Methodology

The quantitative nature of this study paved the way for researcher to opt the “questionnaire” tool to collect data from the target audience — through purposive sampling. The researcher surveyed 450 people aged 15 to 29. The Likert scale is used in the formation of the questions. The data was analyzed on three measurement scales — nominal, ordinal, and interval. A pilot study of 100 samples size was conducted to check the reliability of the questionnaire on the consumption Pattern of Korean content in cross-cultural acceptance of beauty and romance. The Cronbach's Alpha value of reliability was 0.812 which is good and acceptable for the questionnaire according to the scale defined by George and Mallery (2003).

Table 1: Conceptualization and Operationalization

	Conceptualization	Operationalization
Consumption Pattern	Consumption: The process of using something in a specific amount. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022) Pattern: Something is done in a particular way. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022) Consumption Pattern: The process in which people consume products in a way that meets their desires or needs. (IGI Global, 2020)	People consume Korean content in a specific way. The consumption pattern is measured through time, recommendations, preferences and reasons.
Cross cultural	Involvement of more than two different cultures and their ideas and customs. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)	The two cultures involve Korea and Pakistan and especially the influence of Korean content on the youth of Pakistan.
Acceptance	Ideas and opinions are shared and embraced willingly. (IGI Global, 2012)	Adopting the cross-cultural romance and beauty willingly.
Romance	Idealized love and devotion especially between characters interpersonally. The concept of fate and destiny is also attached in Korean dramas. (IGI Global, 2020)	The idea of perfect romance or partner idealized by individual.
Beauty	The attractive quality in a person that gives them pleasure who think about it. (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022)	The physical appearance attractiveness of Korean celebrities.
Youth	The group of people who are young and usually under the age of 30. (IGI Global, 2020)	People of Pakistan who are young and aged between above 15 and under 30.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Alternative Hypothesis: There is an association between exposure of Korean content and acceptance of Korean beauty standards.

H0: There is no association between exposure of Korean content and acceptance of Korean beauty standards.

Table 2: Test of Association Between Korean Content and Korean Beauty Standards Chi Square Test

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	473.530	238	.000
Likelihood Ratio	414.967	238	.000
N of Valid Cases	450		

This table 2 shows that the value of the Pearson chi square is 0.000 which is less than the significant value i.e., 0.5. Hence, H1: Alternative hypothesis is accepted which means that there is an association between exposure of Korean content and acceptance of Korean beauty standards.

Table 3: Test of Correlation Between Korean Content and Korean Beauty Standards Correlation Test

		Beauty	CP
Beauty	Pearson Correlation	1	.628**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	450	450
CP	Pearson Correlation	.628**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	450	450

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table no. 3 shows that the value of the Pearson correlation is .628 which lies towards +1 which show a strong linear relationship between consumption pattern and beauty standard. The Sig is .000 which is < .05 also show positive relationship. Hence, H1: Alternative hypothesis is accepted.

H2: Alternative Hypothesis: There is an association between exposure of Korean content and normalizing Korean romance.

Ho: There is an association between exposure of Korean content and normalizing Korean romance.

Table 4: Test of Association Between Korean Content and Korean Romance Chi Square Test

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	523.839	322	.000
Likelihood Ratio	428.977	322	.000
N of Valid Cases	450		

This table 4 shows that the value of the Pearson chi square is 0.000 which is less than the significant value i.e., 0.5. Hence, H2: Alternative Hypothesis is accepted which means there is an association between exposure of Korean content and normalizing Korean romance.

Table 5: Test of Correlation Between Korean Content and Korean Romance Correlation Test

		CP	Romance
CP	Pearson Correlation	1	.553**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	450	450
Romance	Pearson Correlation	.553**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	450	450

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in table no. 5 show that the value of the Pearson correlation is .533 which lies towards +1 which show a strong linear relationship between consumption pattern and Korean romance. The Sig is .000 which is < .05 also show positive relationship. Hence, H2: Alternative Hypothesis is accepted.

5. Analysis and Discussion

➤ What are the most used OTT platforms to Watch Korean content?

OTT stands for Over-The-Top — a media service that serves the viewers through Internet (Kiran & Kumar, 2019). Although technology has changed the way people consume content, OTT platforms allow them to decide their own shows in terms of time, content, location, and devices used (Jang & Baek, 2021; Ghalawat et al., 2021). With the wide dispersion of social media like YouTube and Netflix in the world, it has become much easier to access overseas media

content. Cultural products created from specific cultures are enjoyed and consumed among users of different cultures (Baek, 2015) which gave rise to the concept of hegemony.

Since the launch of OTT platforms, they have detected an upward curve in their usage and popularity — especially in the pandemic — there has been a visible increase in its popularity (Park & Chung, 2021). The main cause includes change in consumption patterns of people through various media platforms for the purpose of entertainment (Parikh, 2020).

YouTube and Netflix are the most used OTT platforms for watching Korean content by respondents. *Squid games* and *all of us are dead* were two Korean dramas listed in top ten chart of Netflix while *Vincenzo* was 13th in the list of 2021-22 according to *FlixPatrol*. According to a report in Dawn, this trend of Netflix has seen an enormous uptake because of the Covid 19 pandemic (Shahid, 2020).

➤ Why Pakistani youth prefer Korean content over other content?

People prefer Korean content mostly because of its nature, secondly, beauty and fashion trends, celebrities respectively following introducing new trends to the entertainment industry, and the romance genre.

Since the mid-1990s, the Korean entertainment industries have been drastically changed. The growing popularity of K-contents in Asian countries which was supported by Korean cultural policy has a solid impact on periphery states from the perspective of globalization and cultural hegemony and it breaks the monopoly and opens its doors for cultural diversity with consent. This type of cultural effect is hard to notice and difficult to measure in comparison to economic data but plays a significant role (Kim, 2007).

Korean celebrities follow trends of the world in their performance, presentation, and fashion, and imitate their Western compatriots. Many Korean artists make songs using English lyrics but, the big difference is that they have Asian essence in their music. Furthermore, traditional Asian values are presented in Korean dramas, which give a home feeling to Asian fans. The “Asian-ness” has taken the dominant stage and is no longer portrayed as weird and marginal in Korean content. Therefore, the Korean wave is taken as a reaction to the Western-dominated culture by Asian people. But what differentiates the Korean Wave from other phenomena, is that they encourage globalized and traditional Korean cultures (Hogarth, 2013). There are various reasons for Korean content's transnational popularity such as handsome superstars, enriched music, dramas with relatable and exciting storylines, beautiful locations, rich and glamorous lifestyles, or becoming familiar with overseas cultures or even romance and happy endings (Malik et al., 2019).

The wave of Korean dramas took Pakistani fans by storm — especially during the pandemic. Drama like *Crash Landing on you* was well-liked in the country and the reasons for this are prominently evident. Despite the Korean dominant economy, they share a lot of cultural and social resemblances with Pakistan. Korean dramas show what a Pakistani fan wants in a TV show: touching dialogue, perfect romance, quality original soundtrack, astonishing cinematography, melodrama, action, villain, and characters (Zehra, 2020). Pakistan resembles South Korean attractions goes back in time. In 2016, when a k-drama, *Nageen* was aired on PTV Home; dubbed in Urdu to strengthen cultural bonds between the two countries (Hasnain, 2021).

➤ How does Pakistani youth perceive and relate to the Korean romance?

Korean dramas show what a Pakistani fan wants in the drama that is the perfect romance (Zehra, 2020). The rising question is why Korean content is so appealing that makes Hallyu fan disparate to visit Korea? Lee (2020) points out, that the main cause behind the international popularity of K-drama and Hallyu tourism is the intimate and romantic desire for Korean men. The youth of Pakistan prefer Korean content (K-series, music, films) due to its intimate themes and unique representation of romance.

Korean dramas provide strong opinions on specific topics, especially romantic relationships, and partners. Neighboring countries underestimated the soft power of South Korea. Korean dramas also play an important role in creating awareness about ideas like “perfect” partners and the “perfect” romance (Cariappa, 2020). K-content produces awareness about the idea of a perfect partner and perfect romance in the youth of Pakistan.

It was found by OTT platform Netflix that viewers engage with Korean content majorly because of the substance of love themes. Audiences showed a high degree of emotional connection in described romantic feelings as well as characters' interactions and closely related their personal lives (Ju, 2020). Pakistani youth also feel attracted to Korean celebrities.

➤ Is Korean beauty accepted and causing any change among Pakistani youth?

Korean celebrities are found promoting Korean beauty standards among its viewers globally. They become famous for their healthy and youthful skin which helps to promote Korean skincare products and skincare routines (Halim & Kiatkawsin, 2021). Seo et al., (2020) point out that Korean beauty is characterized by three paradoxical themes: hypersexualized cuteness, manufactured naturalness, and harmonious kaleidoscope. There is a positive association between body image, self-esteem and K-beauty standards, and life satisfaction (Fong, 2021). The youth of Pakistan feel positive about their skin type and body features after exposure to Korean content.

Generation Z is greatly inspired by fashion shown on YouTube and Korean content has a notable influence on their perception of looks and appearances (Park & Chun, 2020). Currently, there is evident popularity of Korean beauty trends. Beauty influencers are promoting Korean makeup looks using *Halal*-certified cosmetics. This phenomenon is measured as the hybridity of cultures. It shows that the cultural globalization of Korean culture has affected the beauty concept and industry internationally. It certainly identifies the occurrence of cultural hegemony, as *Halal*-certified local cosmetics are used to produce K-beauty trends (Agustina & Lukman, 2017). In Pakistan, majority of youth get recommendations and recommend Korean fashion trends to and by others. People of Pakistan also willingly buy products endorsed by Korean celebrities.

➤ How much Korean content is normalizing cross-cultural romance among Pakistani youth?

Since the survey results indicated that the Korean content should be promoted in Pakistan, it shows that cross-cultural romance is normalizing among Pakistani youth. The drama series *It's Okay to Not Be Okay* highlights the topic of mental health and autism in a lighthearted romance (Zehra, 2020). Korean dramas provide strong opinions on specific topics, especially romantic relationships, and partners. Neighboring countries underestimated the **soft power** of South Korea. Korean dramas also play an important role in creating awareness about ideas like “perfect” partners and the “perfect” romance (Cariappa, 2020). K-content produces awareness about the idea of a perfect partner and perfect romance in the youth of Pakistan. The youth of Pakistan is accepting and normalizing Korean culture with consent which gives rise to the concept of cultural hegemony in South Korea as dominant.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to identify the presence of the Korean wave in Pakistani audience — particularly among youth. This study disclosed that the exposure to Korean media has a huge impact on the lives of Pakistani youth — leading them to adopt Korean culture. In the COVID-19 pandemic, Netflix and YouTube have become the key platforms for Korean drama viewership. During the pandemic, the process of globalization has blurred the lines between various cultures. In Pakistan, the rising fame of Korean dramas is undoubtedly gaining fame. Interestingly, just like Korean Dramas, Korean music has equally been viewed and appreciated by Pakistani consumers. If the increasing popularity of the Korean wave in Pakistani stays and grows more in the future, then the impact of hegemony may be obvious. Although in current years Korean wave is gaining popularity globally.

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