Influence of Self-presentation on Bridging Social Capital in SNSs: A Moderating Effect of Self-presentation

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Abstract

Social networking sites (SNSs) by and large have deeply penetrated in the daily routine of internet users, where they can articulate their social relations and manage their profiles to present themselves. SNSs users engage heavily in self-presentation strategies by keeping their profile updated regularly, which prompted this study to examine how far it impacts on bridging social capital. This paper provides an understanding that self-presentation of the owner of a profile has impact on the bridging social capital. In this connection, a self administered survey was carried out at Huanzhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China on the sample size of 199 (N=199) students. Findings of the study showed that the self-presentation have strong moderating impact on the relationship of SNSs usage and bridging social capital, suggesting that an effective self-presentation on SNSs by users does indeed help them in bridging social capital on SNSs.

Keywords: Self-presentation, bridging social capital, impression management, social networking sites, moderator.

1. Introduction

Social networking sites are multiplying in popularity and have been successful in attracting online communities by giving a great variety of opportunities to its users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). A considerable chunk of internet users are obsessed with SNSs and almost every user of internet in China, around 84% have a registered account on one of his favorite SNSs (the social skinny, 2012). China is ranked the first among the top most internet using nations in the world, having more than 500 million users by the end of 2012 (internet world stats, 2012). SNSs as being social in nature have provided lots of ways to go social online to its users where they build relations by interacting with other users by employing myriad of methods of expressing and presenting themselves.

Individuals have been successful enlarging their online social circle with the help of SNSs by maintaining and creating social capital. Social capital broadly refers to the resources accrued through the interactions and relationships among people (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2004). According to Putnam (2000), bridging and bonding social capital are the two distinct categories of social capital, former signifies "weak ties" having strangers and acquaintances in individual's social circle and may not share emotional relation but may share mutually beneficial information online, while later denotes "strong ties" connections based on family members and relatives, and close friends, sharing tightly knit ties involving emotional touch.

The study (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) carried out to establish a relationship between the intensive use of Facebook and individual's perceived bridging social capital. They found a positive relationship between the two variables. Another cross cultural study conducted by Shu-Chuan & Sejung (2010) regarding Chinese and American's similarities and differences in building social capital and self-presentation strategies. They found social bridging capital and self presentation strategies in Chinese. What are the major factors influencing users of SNSs to engage in building and maintaining social capital is lacking. According to Rosenberg and Egbert (2011) "internet users visit social networking sites and create strategic profiles to influence how others perceive them". The motivation of self-presentation has been observed common among users of mini-homepages. Bargh, MeKenna, and Fitzsimons (2002) argue that internet users are in better position to present different aspects of their true or inner selves online as compared to face to face interaction.

This study aims to explore indulgence of SNSs users in bridging social capital that how far they are into it. And how self-presentation contributes in initiating and enhancing bridging social capital? This paper discusses the whole methodology carried out and the results in the methods and findings sections respectively. Discussion, conclusion and limitations have also given been explained while going through the paper to its end.

2. Literature review

2.1 Self presentation on SNSs

Every online user/person tries to create and manage impressions that he or she makes on other person, which is called self-presentation. According to Leary it is "the process by which people conveys to others that they are a certain kind of person or possess certain characteristics" (Leary 1996: 17). Self presentation tactics are defined as "behaviors used to manage impressions to achieve foreseeable short-term interpersonal objectives or goals"

(Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett, & Tedeschi, 1999, p. 702). More specifically, self-presentation is a kind of impression management, which in fact is management of other's impressions of a social unit such as people or organizations (Leary, 1993). People come across to know each other by doing so they present themselves in a way to get approval of the self and the image to create impressions on their counterparts. Self-presentation is, either done consciously or unconsciously, quite necessary for the smooth functioning of social interactions (Leary, 1996). Most of the time self-presentation requires conscious effort of an individual to create a particular image and to convey a specific identity through verbal and nonverbal communication to others (Arkin, 1981; Goffman, 1959; Schlenker & Britt, 1999, 2001). For the purpose of this study, the terms impression management and self-presentation have been used interchangeably, as so have been done earlier (e.g., Leary & Kowalsky, 1990; Lee, et al., 1999; Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011).

Impression management has been defined as the manner in which individuals plan, adopt, and carry out the process of conveying and establishing an image of self in interaction with the communicative context to others (Arkin, 1981). Self-presentation and impression management both aiming to grasp control the selected behaviors to have a favorable impression on a certain audiences (e.g., Leary, 1996; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). Jung, Youn and McClung (2007) found that weblogs are another version of intra- and interpersonal communication where bloggers use self-presentation strategies and are motivated in ways identical to those used in real life. Similarly, the users of SNSs have also tried to make themselves prominent by engaging in different types of impression management like ingratiation, which highlights appearance, personality, or behaviors to project greater appeal to audiences (Jones and Wortman, 1973; Schlenker, 1980).

As going through the literature regarding self presentation there was dearth of a proper scale from the observer's point of view to tap behavior of observer as to how he/she assesses the self-presenter. And how does he/she consider about the self-presentation of the counterpart? As Boyd and Ellison (2008) have mentioned in his work that "as self-presentational devices (boyd & Heer, 2006) and the extent to which the attractiveness of one's Friends (as indicated by Facebook's "Wall" feature) impacts impression formation (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim & Westerman, in press)" (p. 220). Also, Tong, Heide, Langwell and Walther (2008) were of the view that socio-metric information given by the profile owner also conveys impressions "because this information may serve not only to establish how well-liked an individual is, but also to provide clues about the profile owner's social status, physical attractiveness, or credibility" (p. 534). Keeping the literature and features of SNSs in mind we have attempted to develop a scale to tease out the information regarding self-presentation from observer's point of view that how they feel about the profile owner when they come across it.

2.2 Bridging social capital on SNSs

Social capital broadly refers to resources accrued through interactions and relationships among people (Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2004). Variety of concepts is attached to social capital in different fields. According to the definition of Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) social capital is "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintances and recognition" (p. 14). These resources of social capital vary in form and function depending on relationships among individuals in different fields of life.

According to Putnam (2000) social capital in social media can be categorized in bridging and bonding social capital. The bridging social capital signifies the "weak ties" based on loose connections, where relationships can be mutually helpful by providing information or new perspectives to one another but that relationship may not have emotional touch. Whereas, the bonding social capital denotes "strong ties" which shares emotional relations among the individuals, such as blood relations and close friends. Advancing the research of Putnam (2000) on social capital Ellison et al. (2007) also identified the "maintained social capital" other than bridging and bonding social capital. Which means, keeping in touch with those individuals in social network who are physically disconnected from one another and try to maintain their relationships online.

In the recent past a few studies have also been carried out which suggest that social capital can be accumulated-both bridging and bonding- through social relations on SNSs (Donath,2007; Ellison et al., 2007; Shu-Chuan, Sejung, 2010; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). In a study conducted in Michigan State University, USA Ellison et al. (2007) established the relationship between Facebook usage and the creation and maintenance of social capital among college students. They found a positive relationship between the intensive use of Facebook and social capital, particularly bridging social capital showed strong relationship with the use of Facebook. They concluded that their findings demonstrate a robust connection between Facebook usage and indicators of social capital, especially of bridging type. This means students are more prone towards making new relationships online.

In a cross cultural study (Shu-Chuan & Sejung, 2010) examined Chinese and American students similarities and differences in building social capital and self-presentation strategies. The findings of the study reveal that a greater level was found among American students regarding bonding social capital compared to Chinese students. While, no significant difference was found among both groups of SNS users regarding bridging social

capital. However, both group were found having vast number of weak ties on SNSs as compared to strong ties, thus indicating that SNSs are more suitable for bridging social capital in both the countries.

In another study by Valenzuela et al. (2009) examined the association between Facebook and college students' life satisfaction, trust, and political/civic participation that promote social capital. They discovered that Facebook enhances the opportunities for both bonding and bridging social capital and create positive impact on attitudes and behaviors of the students which signifies greater social capital.

This study will explore and build upon the previous research carried out by Ellison et al. (2007) in which they hypothesized the positive relationship between the intensive use of Facebook (SNS) and individuals' perceived bridging social capital. While, we have assessed the moderating effect of self-presentation on the aforementioned relationship between intensity of SNS use and bridging social capital. As Shu-Chuan & Sejung (2010) have discussed that Chinese students engage heavily in self-presentation strategies and suggested that "these findings may be interpreted in relation to the results of social capital". Thus, keeping this in mind we have developed following hypotheses to check the moderating effect of self-presentation on bridging social capital in SNSs.

H1: There is a relationship between the intensive use of SNS and bridging social capital.

H2: The relationship between intensity of SNSs use and bridging social capital is moderated by self-presentation.

3. Method

3.1 Sample and procedure

A self-administered survey was carried out at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan. Initially, the questionnaire was developed in English and then translated into Chinese language to capture the real response from respondents, because respondents were Chinese students. Wuhan is the educational city in China where students hail from every corner of the country thus making the population diverse and representative one. In our survey 210 questionnaires were distributed among the students while 199 respondents filled and returned questionnaires. Students in the survey were undergraduates predominantly. University students hold the largest part of the SNS users in China, and students have been found heavy users of SNSs than any other generations (CNNIC, 2009). The predominant ratio of the respondents happens to be the undergraduate students, amongst were a few post-graduate and doctoral students in the survey.

3.2 Measures

Our questionnaire consisted of four measures e.g. demographic, usage of SNS, self-presentation, and bridging social capital. Demographic measure included some basic information about sex, age, education, and family income.

Table 1. Sample demographics (N = 199)

Gender	Mean/ Percentage	S.D
Male	44.7%(89)	
Female	55.3%(110)	
Age		
18-21 Yrs.	96.5% (192)	
22-25 Yrs.	3 % (6)	
More than 26 Years	0.5% (1)	
Education		
Holding a Bachelor Degree	96% (191)	
Holding a Master Degree	3.5 (7)	
Holding a PhD/Post-doc. Degree	0.5 (1)	
Income[1]	2.93	1.40

Notes: [1]Represents Respondents Family Income; 1 = Below 3,000 RMB, 2 = 3,000-3,999 RMB, 3 = 4,000-4,999 RMB, 4 = 5,000-5,999 RMB and 5 = 6,000 RMB or More

3.2.1 Measures of SNS usage

SNSs usage scale comprised five items to record the information about respondents' behavior regarding the use of SNSs (Shu-Chuan & Sejung, 2010). Respondents were asked about their favorite SNS which they frequently used. Then, different items were listed to capture the information regarding frequency and duration in a day to assess that how much they are connected to their favorite SNSs. Besides of these items, questions pertaining to number of friends (contacts) and personally known friends were also included to know about their online friendship circle. Personal friends item was included to know that how many unknown contacts (friends) have been added. If profile owner has no more number of personal known contacts than unknown contacts then it justifies that users are engaging more in bridging social capital.

Table 2. Summary statistics of SNS usage

	Mean	S.D
Social Networking Sites (Cronbach's alpha =0.237)	1.42	1.27
Frequently used particular SNS[2]	1.1	0.342
How many times do you use that particular site in a day?[3]	1.23	0.545
On average, how many minutes per day do you spend on Social Networking Sites?[4]	1.97	1.06
About how many friends do you have on that particular site?[5]	1.19	0.390
About how many friends do you know personally on that particular site?[6]	1.62	0.663

Notes: [2] 1 = QQ, 2 = Renren, 3 = Micro blogging, 4 = kaixin001, 5 = others.
[3] 1 = One Time, 2 = Two Times, 3 = Three Times 4= Four Times 5 = More than Four Times
[4] 1= Less than 15, 2 = 15-30, 3 = 30-60, 4 = 1-2 hours, 5 = More than 2 Hours
[5] 1 = Less than 50, 2 = 51-100, 3 = 101-200, 4 = 201-300 and 5 = More than 300
[6] 1 = 10%, 2= 20%, 3 = 30%, 4 = 40% 5 = 50% or more

3.2.2 Measures of self-presentation

The third section of the instrument included items regarding self-presentation of the profile owner to tap the behavior of the viewer. This scale aimed at to extract information that how users perceive when they invite or being invited by new friends. As we could not found the self-presentation scale from the observer's point of view, consequently we developed it on the basis of literature review and the features of SNSs. This scale consisted of six items about profile owner's self presentation. Items asked about the attractive profile, profile owners appealing picture, their style, interest and presentation according to the user's liking. Table 3 shows all the items of self-presentation.

Table 3. Summary statistics of when I connect to new people on SNSs

Individual items and Scale[7]	Mean	S.D
I connect to new people on SNSs because (Cronbach's alpha =0.675)	1.54	1.00
I find their profile attractive	1.82	0.931
Their profile picture/pictures appeal me	2.03	1.037
They have presented themselves according to my liking	1.28	0.604
Their interest is same as mine	1.13	0.460
I like their style	1.36	0.618
They look more social to me	1.66	0.831

Note: [7] Individual scales ranged from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree

3.2.3 Measures of bridging social capital

In the last section of the questionnaire, scale of bridging social capital was included to glean information out on the usage of SNSs. To examine the BSC, a 10 item Likert-type scale was adopted from Williams (2006). BSC is believed to be a great source to connect with the external assets which can be mutually beneficial in information diffusion (Putnam, 2000). So, this scale intended to examine SNSs users' behavior about new things and the things surround him in society. Table 4 reveals the purpose of people to use SNSs with certain mindset of interacting with new people, what is going on in surroundings, feeling of being member of online community and so on.

Table 4. Summary statistics of Interacting with people on the social networking site

Individual items and Scale[8]	Mean	SD
Interacting with people on the social networking site (Cronbach's alpha = 0.83)	1.41	0.95
Make me interested in things that happen outside of my town	1.31	0.589
Make me want to try new things	1.31	0.561
Make me interested in what people unlike me are thinking	1.96	1.077
Make me curious about other places in the world	1.31	0.746
Make me feel like part of larger community	1.24	0.681
Make me feel like connected to the bigger picture	1.12	0.444
Reminds me that everyone in the world is connected	1.29	0.597
Help me to spend time for supporting general community activities	1.64	0.990
Give me new people to talk to	1.18	0.490
Make me contacted with new people all the time	1.97	0.950

Note: [8] Individual scales ranged from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree

4. Findings

In this section let us present the basic descriptive findings, before examining the research questions. In our sample of 199 respondents, female accounted for 110 (55.3%) of the survey (Table 1). Table 1 shows an

overwhelming majority of undergraduates (96.5%) constituted our survey response. Interestingly, no one was the respondent who could deny that he/she had not used SNS, which interprets that every university student is somehow connected to SNSs of his/her choice.

Data shows that majority of respondents use QQ followed by Renren. The users report regarding their usage frequency of that particular SNS in a day is one time (mean = 1.23) and spend 15 to 30 minutes (mean = 1.97), which might be owing to many SNSs a user uses at the same time or the fact being that students in china have more study load from morning to late evening. Further, table 2 shows the number of friends a profile owner has garnered around him, less than 50 friends (mean = 1.19) have been reported by respondents on average. As the respondents, predominantly, were undergraduates so most probably they were comparatively new users to accumulate a substantial number of friends. Finally, other question regarding personally known friends have been asked to get the idea that how far a user has got unknown friends which he doesn't know personally, just have added them or has been added by them for some reasons. The users report that they know friends personally around 20% (mean = 1.62). This implies the fact that respondents are more inclined towards making new friends because personally they only know 20% of friends, this process support the idea of bridging social capital online on SNSs.

As table 3 suggests about the attitude of the users that why they come into contact with new and potential people by inviting them for friendship. As table 2 shows unknown friends have outnumbered the known friends on SNSs, whereas, table 3 reports about the factors that what people think prior about the person being invited for friendship. Respondents were of the view that they come into contact with new people because they like their presentation on the SNSs. Mean scores of six items regarding the elements of self-presentation which users take into account are shown in table 3. While table 4 demonstrates the bridging social capital which explains the expectations and motivations hidden behind perceptions of the users to come into contact with new people that is how they can achieve the goal of socialization.

In order to test our hypothesis 1, we conducted correlation test to check the relationship between the different variables of intensive usage of SNS and bridging social capital. The test revealed that "frequently used media" interacted with the "I am interested in what people unlike me are thinking" (p = .057). This might suggest users of SNSs most of the time remain concerned that what the people are doing and thinking as well as the society at large. Further analysis between "time duration in a day" showed the strong relationship (p = .032) with the "makes me feel connected to the bigger picture" variable of BSC, while the same also interacted with "gives me new people to talk to" (p = .06) at 90% confidence level. This suggests that time duration of using SNSs can give the user a feeling of being the part of larger community and can grab the opportunity to meet new people to talk to, as well. Further information was gleaned out by analyzing the relationship between the "number of friends" and "makes me curious about other places in the world" (p = .042), while, the "number of friends also interacted with "makes me feel connected to the bigger picture" (p = .077) with 90% confidence level. It means that the number of friends increases the curiosity of a user about the different places in the world and offers a platform where a SNSs user can talk to various users in the different parts of the world. Finally, "know friends personally" variable demonstrated very strong relationship with "I am interested in what people unlike me are thinking" (p = .000). This relationship is a unique one which suggests that if a SNSs user is engulfed with very close friends he might not be concerned about other people in surrounding and in the world but if the user have less known friends he will go for looking around and will search that what the people unlike him are thinking.

In order to test our hypotheses 2, we did approximation of our variables because the items of each variable by and large did not report the variance in the mean (as shown in table 2,3 & 4). As a result, we got accumulative of our variables i.e. Accumulative Intensive use of SNSs (AIUSNS), accumulative self-presentation (ASP) and accumulative bridging social capital (ABSC). These accumulative variables show the average of all variables (items) of the each concept under study. We used such accumulative variables on the basis of reliability and validity of dispersion, mean and standard deviation, also the data of 199 observations is good fit for such approximation to normal standard variable. This approximation was required for regression modeling in order to define moderator effect on ABSC and AIUSNS alone, as well as through interaction term IASP. For good approximation to regression model, we analyzed correlation in order to identify linear relationship factors. Factor analysis also validates our approximation.

If we focus on table 5, we can see That R square change is .036 following the interaction variable has been inserted with the predictor (Intensive usage of SNSs) and the moderator (ASP) variables (model 2).

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent variables	Regression 1		Regression 2	
	Scaled Beta	P-Value	Scaled Beta	P-Value
Intercept	0.865	0.000	-0.069	0.842
Intensive use of SNSs	-0.083	0.254	0.654	0.013
Self Presentation	0.357	0.000	1.152	0.000
Interaction between Self Presentation & Intensive use of SNSs			0.634	0.004
N=199	F = 17.495*		F= 14.98*	
	F change = 17.45*		F change = 8.608*	
	R square Change = 0.151		R square Change = 0.036	
	Adj. R2 = 0.143		Adj. R2 = 0.175	

Notes: *represents p< 0.05, confidence interval 95%, only one interaction term was entered at a time in each regression.

It means that impact of moderator is significant with F = 8.608, p = .004. This significant interaction clearly suggests that the moderator (self presentation) does moderate the relationship between the Intensive usage of SNSs and bridging social capital. Self-presentation exerts its influence between the relationship intensive use of SNSs and BSC in a way that it makes the association stronger as the self-presentation variable is included which proves our hypothesis (as shown in figure 1). One important aspect is that our R square (adjusted) predict that we can use this survey to identify more relationships from other perspectives as our survey is of diverse nature. That means we can use this data to define more variables (80%)

5. Discussion

Evidently, this work aimed at gleaning out the information based on SNSs users' experiences regarding our variables and to check how far users are involved in the process of BSC and how their perceptions are being formulated about the profile owners' self-presentation on the SNSs. In this connection, above mentioned results help us understanding the whole phenomena that what hovers in the minds of SNSs' users to accomplish. The dependent variable bridging social capital examined as to what extent users are eager to know about new things and information around them. They were willing to extend and broaden their experiences which might help enhance their social horizons and worldview. Bridging social capital is a form of resources which are based on, with the hope of, mutual benefits by sharing useful information among the SNSs friends, therefore such kind of behavior was found among respondents. Our findings suggest that people use SNSs to engage in the process of BSC by accumulating the vast number of unknown friends as compared to personally known friends. Although this form of social capital signifies the notion of "weak ties" still fairly befitting to online social software applications (Donath & Boyd, 2004) which might set the stage for them to draw the benefits from each other by sharing information concerned to them. The users of SNSs while being curious about the world to know about new things and places also seek the opportunity to communicate with the people unlike them.
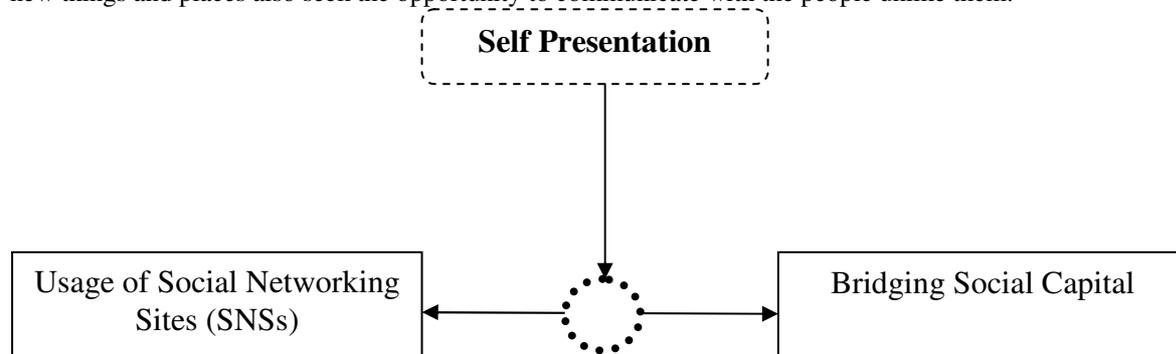

Figure 1: Model showing moderating impact of self-presentation on the relationship between the variables under study.

Undoubtedly an interesting finding of this study is that the self-presentation does moderate the relationship between the intensive use of SNSs and bridging social capital. We hypothesized this relationship due to the applications and features of the SNSs dole out the opportunity to the users to carve out their profiles where they can present themselves. This study found a strong positive impact of self-presentation on the relationship of

SNSs usage and bridging social capital, which means the higher the self-presentation by the profile owner the more user will engage in the process of BSC. The fact that SNSs have in-built function of showing up randomly the vast array of friends of friends- of friends and the process goes on and on - in multiple layers of friendship circles. Where a user is bombarded with the myriads of profiles regularly and randomly by virtue of his friends' friendship circles, where- as findings suggest- if the user find them attractive or according to his/her interest he/she will engage in the process of BSC. Consequently, it was not surprising to come up with such kind of significant relationship between the variables.

6. Conclusion and Limitations

These empirical findings conclude that self-presentation of the users of SNSs is effective in the process of bridging social capital by enlarging their friendship circle with the hope of mutual benefits. The strong association between self-presentation and bridging social capital suggests as to how SNSs create space for initiating the relationship among the users. Such relationships could act like a conduit for them in the shape of information, jobs, internships, and much more opportunities down the line. Although these connections are considered as shallow and superficial yet carry true potential, especially, for new students in the campus. In university like settings, where every student hails from every corner of the country- needs desperately such kind of ground to initiate and generate new connections to acclimatize with quite new environment.

In essence, this study undeniably contributes the literature on SNSs, BSC and self-presentation by exploring the relationship among them. And will help and instill confidence among the users about their self-presentational tactics. This is a diverse issue and such cultural perspective can be utilized by social scientists to predict future trends in different societies.

This study is not spared of limitations as we just conducted our research on very limited community of university students. Although students are supposed to go through a unique phase of learning and development of life which make them apart, yet the fact remains that they still hold major chunk of SNSs usage. Anyways, we are unable to generalize the findings to other social settings. Future research might be carried out on High School or from the Marketing perspective that how companies are involved in the self-presentation activities to lure the customers. However, another major problem this study found was the self-presentation scale from the observer's point of view (second person perspective) that how the viewer of a profile perceives and judges about the profile owner's self-presentation. Future research should focus on development of such kind of scale to assess the viewer's behavior.

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