CONSUMER'S CHOICES IN CRITICAL CONDITIONS: HOW IMPULSIVE BUYING TENDENCY MAKES CONSUMERS SEEK FOREIGN PRODUCTS

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic brought the attention of researches to impulsive buying behaviors and the purchasing of local products, as they are fundamental for the economic recovery of the countries. However, research has yet to be developed regarding the impulsive buying behavior and the purchasing of foreign products. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to identify how the consumer's impulsive buying tendencies influence their choices for foreign products. We applied the Impulsive Buying Tendency Scale and the X-Scale of Xenocentrism to 300 young and adults. To analyze the data, we conducted a PLS-SEM analysis to test five hypotheses. Our results from the path analysis indicate that the affective aspects of impulsive buying tendency decrease the cognitive IBT (β= -0.345), and increases the foreign admiration (β= 0,265) and domestic rejection (β= 0,226). Moreover, the cognitive aspect of IBT can also increase domestic rejection (β= 0,196). Our results follow the theory regarding xenocentrism, as consumers cognitively will consider foreign products as superior, thus rejecting the domestic ones. Furthermore, affective has also a significant impact on domestic rejection, which indicates that consumers may disregard local products because of individual frustrations. Overall, businesses need to take into account that to conquer those impulsive buyers, they need to show that they are more global and reinforce the product features. Research on the seek for foreign products and impulsive behavior will be fundamental as this purchasing can help the countries in the economic recovery after the COVID-19 crisis.

Keywords: Impulsive Consumption; Local and Foreign Products Consumption;

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was firstly declared in March 2020 and caught the researcher's attention that sought to investigate the challenges that this health crisis brought to consumption. The decision-making process in this scenario can be more irrational (He & Harris, 2020). Therefore, consumers adopt impulsive buying behaviors in this crisis and thus started to buy more products without planning in fear of them being scarce soon (Kirk & Rifkin, 2020).

This increase in the consumption of basic products, the changes in the production process, and the isolation policies brought a disruption of the global supply chain that can impact a specific subject of consumer ethical decision, the purchase of domestic or foreign products (He & Harris, 2020). The consumers were encouraged to buy local-manufactured products and the pandemic lead to some geopolitical tensions regarding distribution (He & Harris, 2020), especially concerning health equipment. However, research investigating impulsive purchasing and buying of foreign products is scarce.

The concern of buying local products is especially relevant because of the economic problems brought by this crisis, thus encouraging the purchase of local products is fundamental for the survival of the small business and overall economic recovery. Therefore, there is a need to investigate how does the seek for foreign products will be affected by the impulsive consumption behaviors that consumers adopted.

The discussion on the consumption of a foreign country was explored by the literature of ethnocentrism in consumer behavior (cf. Ma, Abdeljelil & Hu, 2019). As opposite to consumer ethnocentrism, there are discussions of xenocentrism as a phenomenon where "consumers' devaluing of native cultural aspects and overrating of foreign cultural values"

(Rojas-Méndez & Chapa, 2019, p. 355).

The result of xenocentrism is people seeking foreign products even if they are more expensive and with lower quality (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016). Xenocentrism can be seen more frequently in underdeveloped nations, thus, the economic, social, political, and cultural aspects can shape the way consumers see the foreign brands (Rojas-Méndez & Chapa, 2019).

Studies on consumer xenocentrism have been overlooking its concept (eg. Varela, Gaur, Bathula & Diaz, 2015), measurement possibilities (eg. Rojas-Méndez & Chapa, 2019), and why consumers seek foreign products (eg. Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016). However, little attention has been put into how other consumer concepts increase this xenocentric behavior. For instance, Karunaratne & Wanninayake (2019) found that ethnocentric consumers buy with a pre-planned purchasing decision, thus reducing impulsive buying tendency. However, there is still a need to understand if xenocentric consumers, as opposed to ethnocentric, have a tendency to impulsive buying. The literature has yet to address those issues.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increase in panic behavior and impulsive buying as consumers were seeking basic products scared of they becoming scarce (Kirk & Rifkin, 2020), and also consumers came across the decisions of buying national or foreign products. In light of this, the purpose of this paper is to identify how the consumer's impulsive buying tendencies influence their choices for foreign products. To achieve this goal, we conducted a quantitative study with 300 youth and adults using the Impulsive Buying Tendency (Mittal, Chawla & Sondhi, 2016) to measure consumer's tendency of impulse buying and the X-Scale (Rojas-Méndez & Chapa, 2019) to measure consumer xenocentrism. To analyze the data and test our hypotheses, we used Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), a useful analysis when theory is less established, thus important in this exploratory research.

Impulsive Buying Tendency

As much as economic reasons are important for making purchases, they are not the only one, since consumers purchase goods or services for various reasons, such as "fun, fantasy, and social or emotional gratification" (Hausman, 2000, p. 413). Also, impulse buying can elevate the customer's emotional well-being, since, when entering a store, "they may become emotionally uplifted and spend more than intended" (Park, Kim, & Forney, 2006, p. 442).

Furthermore, impulse buying is the result of the relationship between "various internal and external stimuli" (Muruganantham & Bhakat, 2013). Mohan, Sivakumaran, and Sharma (2013) stated that impulse buying can be generated according to the environment, that is, an external stimulus can cause a consumer to increase his desire to purchase a good or service.

Regarding the power of influence in the context of impulse buying, Kacen and Lee (2002) argued that culture is capable of affecting the impulsiveness of buying and consumer buying behavior. In addition to the culture, the visibility of the product can influence the acquisition of the good or service, especially when there are signs of promotional prices (Mehta & Chugan, 2013). Besides that, interaction with sellers is very important to motivate impulse buying behavior (Park & Lennon, 2006). Thus, it is clear that the influences around the consumer can stimulate impulsive buying behavior.

Impulse buying is defined goes beyond an acquisition without planning, being conceptualized as a sudden and immediate purchase, with no intention of pre-purchase and with little reflection on the rational consequences of the long-term purchase (Beatty & Ferrel, 1998). The literature of impulsive buying has focused on the antecedents that lead consumers to buy without planning, they are the product features, situational factors, cultural factors, and individual factors (cf. Rook, 1987; Dias, Santos, Martins & Isabella, 2014). The discussions led to an understanding of impulsive buying tendency as a personality trait and that have a great

influence on consumer impulsive buying behavior (Mittal, Chawla, & Shandi, 2016). To measure this personality trait, the authors developed a scale to measure two dimensions: affective and cognitive.

Xenocentrism

Consumer behavior has adopted the discussions of sociology and anthropology regarding ethnocentrism to understand how this phenomenon affects consumer choices and thus impacts their behavior (Hsu & Nien, 2008). However, an "opposite" concept has also been discussed in the literature, the consumer xenocentrism. The term xenocentrism was first discussed in 1951 by Kent & Burnight and refers to "consumers' devaluing of native cultural aspects and overrating of foreign cultural values" (Rojas-Méndez & Chapa, 2019, p. 355).

The xenocentrism describes people that are centered in foreign groups and can have high dislikes for their own culture (Kent & Burnight, 1951). It needs to be reinforced that the xenocentrism phenomenon has a subjective nature and implies a biased view (Kent & Burnight, 1951). The relevance of studying xenocentrism is especially important for national enterprises that need to investigate why consumers seek foreign products and this information is even more relevant for developing countries (Camacho, Salazar-Concha & Ramírez-Correa., 2020).

Xenocentrism is the opposite of Ethnocentrism, those who see fault in their society and those who see their society as superior to the others (Kent & Burnight, 1951). The authors also reinforce that they found that young people could show more xenocentric tendencies, as especially the college students, have greater contact with other cultures. With globalization, this contact with other cultures was increased even further. In a more recent perspective, Mueller, Wang, Liu & Cui (2015) found that xenocentrism was very common in China, and consumers have sought more western products, especially the new emerging wealthy class, young consumers, and the local elite. When there are too many xenocentric people, the national esteem is at risk, thus increasing the chance of ethnocentric behavior (Mueller et al., 2015), therefore, it should be kept at a minimum (Kent & Burnight, 1951).

People can show xenocentric behavior for a lot of reasons, mainly individual frustration and inferior social position (Kent & Burnight, 1951). People with personal frustration can project it to their society as a whole and individuals in an inferior social position can think the people in better positions as superior (Kent & Burnight, 1951). Furthermore, the authors also reinforce how people can negate their culture merely for doing so, without having a preference for another culture.

New research has found that xenocentrism can have a positive direct effect to purchase intention, perceived product quality, and product attitudes (Camacho et al., 2020). The authors used the X-Scale by Rojas-Méndez e Chapa (2019) and they assessed how reliable this instrument is to measure consumer xenocentrism.

Hypothesis

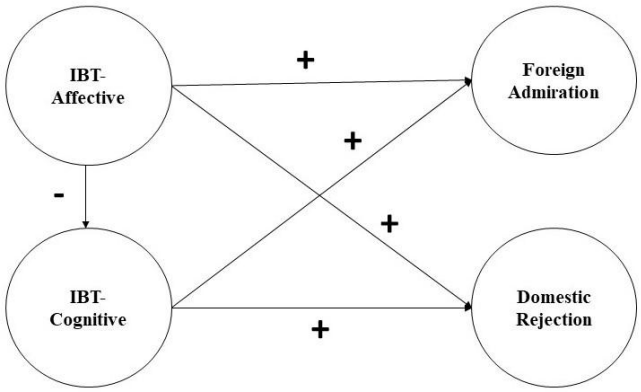
Based on the available literature and in this paper aims to identify how the consumer's impulsive buying tendencies influence their choices for foreign products we developed five hypotheses to be tested by the structural model.

Firstly, the affective dimension of consumers' impulsive buy tendency (IBT) is connected to emotions, being those negative or positive (Mittal, Chawla, & Shandi, 2016) and the cognitive dimension refers to reflect and analyze the benefits of the purchase. Therefore, we propose the first hypothesis that ***H1: Affective IBT decreases Cognitive IBT***. An increase in the affective domain of impulsive buying tendency will decrease the cognitive aspect regarding the reflections that the consumers do when buying.

Xenocentrism implies a biased view and can be caused by individual frustration (Kent & Burnight, 1951), thus, is highly impacted by the affective domain. Therefore, we present the following hypothesis: ***H2: Affective IBT increases Foreign Admiration***, and ***H3: Affective IBT increases Domestic Rejection***.

Consumers with xenocentric behavior believe their culture is faulty and the other is superior (Kent & Burnight, 1951). The authors also reinforce how young people are more likely to show this behavior because they were more exposed to other cultures. Furthermore, Camacho et all. (2020) found that the product attitudes as the evaluation of the good or bad nature of the product can be a mediator of the purchase intentions in the context of xenocentrism. Thus, cognition and the learning of other cultures is an important predictor of consumer xenocentrism. Therefore, the last hypothesis is ***H4: Cognitive IBT increases Foreign Admiration***, and ***H5: Cognitive IBT increases Domestic Rejection***. The structural model and a summarization of the hypothesis that is going to be investigated are presented in figure 1.

Figure 1.
Hypothesis and Structural Model



Method

Aiming to identify how the consumer's impulsive buying tendencies influence their choices for foreign products, we conducted a quantitative research using partial least square – structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to identify the relationships in the model and to assess our hypothesis. The choice of PLS-SEM over CB-SME (Covariance – Based – Structural Equation Modeling) was due to weak development of the literature about impulsive buying tendency and xenocentrism, and our sample size is small (Hair et al., 2016).

To measure the domain of consumer's impulsive buying tendency and consumer xenocentrism, we chose the Impulsive Buying Tendency (Mittal, Chawla, & Sondhi, 2016) to measure consumer's tendency of impulse buying and the X-Scale (Rojas-Méndez & Chapa, 2019) to measure consumer xenocentrism. The impulsive buying scale is divided into two dimensions (Affective – IBT, and Cognitive- IBT) and xenocentrism is also divided into two dimensions (Foreign Admiration and Domestic Rejection).

The first step in the application of the scale was the translation of the items to Portuguese. This was initially made by each of the researches of this paper and after that, we all confer to compare the translations and improve the items to the application in Brazil.

After the translation of the instrument, we proceed to an analysis of specialists in the field of consumer research. The reviewers had access to all the items and they would indicate which dimension they believe the item was from and how appropriate the writing was. This step helps us to refine the scale and see if some items had any problem regarding comprehension and therefore, we could assess construct validity and face validity.

Finally, after the translation and the evaluation of specialists, we developed the questionnaire. The questionnaire had the scale questions in the format of a Likert 10-point scale and they were mixed to avoid response bias and also sociodemographic questions to analyze the profile of our sample. At the beginning of the questionnaire, the consumer could read a message indicating the purpose of the study, the author's contact, and questions to assure them that the answers were anonymous and answers would be used only for academic purposes and they could, in the end, indicate if would like to comply or not with the survey.

Data Collection and Sample

Our sampling process was non-statistical, which is useful for exploratory research. The data was collected through an online survey applied from April to May 2020. The online address of the survey was shared in the WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Telegram by the authors to increase our reach.

A total of 314 questionnaires were applied. However, after cleaning procedures to identify the existence of missing values and outliers with missing value levels above 5% and the exclusion of respondents under 18 years of age. 14 questionnaires were excluded, leaving a total of 300 responses. We did not identify missing values during the exploratory data analysis process. Of all the consumers that answered the questionnaire, 23,3% (N=97) were cis male, 63% (N=189) cis female, and 2,7% (N=8) nonbinary. Six answers were invalid. Regarding the age, the age mean of the respondents was 25,99 years old. With the median of 22 years and 21 was the most common age of the respondents.

They live mostly on Ceará (78%, N=234) and Pernambuco (5,7%, N=17). Concerning the marital status, 78,3% (N=235) were single, 18,3% married (N=55) and 3,3% (N=10), divorced. Finally, with regards to education, they have mostly completed high school (37,3%, N=112), 33% (N=99) went to college and 16,7% (N=50) have a Master's or Ph.D. degree.

Data Analysis

The purpose of the analysis was to identify the path coefficients on how impulsive buying tendency impacts the choice of foreign products (xenocentrism), therefore, the use of PLS is more appropriated since our interest resides in the causal relationships. All the procedures were performed on the free software SmartPLS 3 and were carried out with the support of specialized literature (Bejamin & Gaskin, 2014; Ringle et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2014; Hair, 2016;).

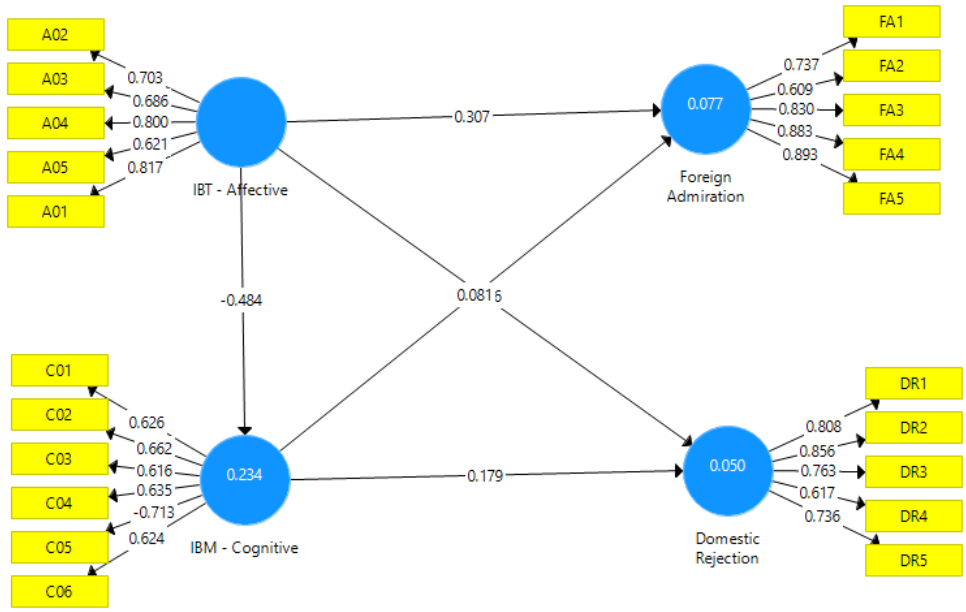
Results

Descriptive Data Analysis

To assess the structural model, we followed the steps recommended by Hair et al. (2016). The first stage was the assessment of reflective measurement models (Internal Consistency, Convergent Validity, and Discriminant Validity). Since we had no formative measurement model, we proceed to the evaluation of the structural model (Coefficients of Determination, Predictive Relevance, Size and Significance of Path Coefficients, f^2 effect sizes, and q^2 effect sizes). Figure 1 shows our first measurement model.

Figure 1.

Initial Structural Model



Analyzing the factor loadings, we notice quickly that items 5 (C05) and 6 (C06) were causing problems and reducing the overall convergent validity of the model. To correct this issue, we exclude the two items and proceed to analyze the convergent validity. Table 1 presents the results.

Table 1.
Convergent Validity

Construct	Items	AVE	CR	CA	R^2
IBT- Affective	A01 A02 A03 A04 A05	.532	.848	0.777	-
IBT- Cognitive	C01 C02 C03 C04	.561	.835	0.735	0.119
Foreign Admiration	FA1 FA2 FA3 FA4 FA5	.635	.896	0.851	0.070

Domestic Rejection	DR1	.579	.872	0.579	0.059
	DR2				
	DR3				
	DR4				
	DR5				

As shown in Table 2, we achieve discriminant validity and thus proceed to the analysis of the structural model.

Table 2.
Discriminant Validity

	D.R	**F.A**	**IBT-C**	**IBT-A**
D.R	**.761**			
F.A	.698	**.797**		
IBT-C	.119	.022	**.749**	
IBT-A	.158	.263	-.345	**.730**

After the assessment of validity and reliability, we furthered the data analysis process by bootstrapping the model to identify whether the t-values were significant to test the hypotheses. The subsamples of the bootstrapping were 500 and the correlation is significant at a t-value level of >1.96. Table 3 summarizes the results of the bootstrapping.

Table 3.
Bootstrapping

Hypothesis	**Std. Error**	**T-Value**	**P-Value**
H1	0.052	6.684	0.000
H2	0.061	5.003	0.000
H3	0.062	3.633	0.000
H4	0.071	1.808	0.071
H5	0.061	3.227	0.001

The next step to assess the adequacy of the model was to identify the predicted validity (Q^2) and effect size (f^2). Predictive validity refers to how the construct behaves how it is expected from it and effect size is how each construct is useful to the model (Ringle et al., 2014). Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4.
Predictive Validly and Effect Size

	CV RED (Q^2)	**CV COM (f^2)**
Affective IBI		0.374
Cognitive IBI	0.062	0.275
Foreign Admiration	0.040	0.446

Domestic Rejection	0.028	0.374

The results indicate a good predictive Validly and effect Size as the Q^2 should be >0 and f^2 values of 0,02, 0,15, and 0,35 are considered, respectively small, medium, and large (Hair et al., 2014). After the assessment of the quality of the structural model, we proceed to the analysis of the path coefficients (table 5).

Table 5.
Path Coefficients

Causal Relationship	Path Coefficients
H1: Affective IBT decreases Cognitive IBT.	-0,345
H2: Affective IBT increase Foreign Admiration	0,264
H3: Affective IBT increases Domestic Rejection.	0,226
H5: Cognitive IBT increases Domestic Rejection	0,196

Discussions and Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was to identify how the consumer's impulsive buying tendencies influence their choices for foreign products. We conducted PLS-SEM to analyze the five proposed hypotheses based on the literature to expand the body of knowledge we have available reading consumer xenocentrism and impulsive buying tendency.

We confirmed that affective impulsive buying tendency will decrease cognitive impulsive buying tendency (Path Coefficient = - 0,345). Consumers that buy in impulse are buying for an emotional aspect (Mittal, Chawla, & Shandi, 2016), thus reducing the reflections of the purchase, such as if it is necessary or if the product it is worth. Future research needs to investigate how consumer's that plan the purchases and think previously about the product still end up impulsive buying. Research in consumer psychology using neurologic methods would further this phenomenon comprehension.

The relationship between the affective IBT dimension and the foreign admiration and domestic rejection was also confirmed (Path Coefficient = 0,264 and 0,226 respectively). Xenocentric people believe the other culture and products are good and theirs are faulty (Kent & Burnight, 1951; Rojas-Méndez & Chapa, 2019). Furthermore, this phenomenon can be caused by individual frustration and interior position (Kent & Burnight, 1951), thus the affective dimension has a significant impact on xenocentrism and can increase the seek for foreign products. It is interesting to note that even though the inferior position has been pointed out as a cause for xenocentric behavior (Kent & Burnight, 1951), in China, Mueller et al., (2015) found that the local elite and a new emerging wealthy class sought more foreign products. Therefore, there is a need to investigate further the role of wealth in xenocentrism. As people with more money have more opportunity to buy impulsively, they could also demonstrate a bigger level of xenocentrism. However, further research needs to address these issues.

Finally, *H4: Cognitive IBT increases Foreign Admiration* was rejected, as the T-value and p-value were insignificant. This result could indicate that when it comes to the role of cognition, people do not admire foreign products. This could be explained by a belief that national products and culture are better or even the same as the foreign. Future research needs to address if consumers feel ashamed to admire other cultures or if their notion of patriotism does not include admiring the outside culture. Also, the research could investigate how is the purchase process of the consumers that plan before buying, and if in this process, the role of the nationality of this product is considered.

Interestingly, we could confirm the hypothesis that cognitive IBT increases domestic rejection (Path Coefficient = 0,196). Even though consumers might not admire foreign products, there is still an increase in domestic rejection when you consider the cognitive

dimension of impulsive buying. This could be explained by Kent & Burnight (1951) who argue that people could dislike their culture just for the sake of doing so, without preferring a foreign one. This implies some interesting issues that need to be further addressed. Future studies could investigate why people would hate their culture just for doing so. The discussions of status consumption and symbolic consumption could investigate the implications that lays with this behavior and how are the consumers seen in society. Brazil is a very applicable field to discuss those issues, as there is the famous expression "*Complexo de Vira-Lata*" which refers to Brazilians lack of self-esteem and seeks a foreign culture.

This paper brings some significant implications that need to be addressed both academically and in the business sphere. Firstly, this paper presents a contribution regarding the analysis of impulsive buying tendency and xenocentrism. To the extent of our knowledge, no other study has done so. Previous research has investigated ethnocentrism and impulsive consumption (see. Karunaratne & Wanninayake, 2019), but not xenocentrism. Despite our limitations regarding the size of our sample and the fact that the respondents are mainly from Ceará and Pernambuco, our structural model indicates some interesting results in analyzing the causal relationships among these dimensions.

Nonetheless, the fact that the research took place mainly in those states can even be relevant as they are often marginalized in the media, thus could increase xenocentrism. What we saw, in reality, was the mean of Foreign Admiration and Domestic Rejection, which can also be explained by some response bias, as consumers will seek to respond in the way that they believe is more socially accessible, however, we believe the online survey reduce this bias as consumers would respond alone without the interference of the research.

Furthermore, those implications are also very important to businesses. Companies need to understand that emotional aspects will increase consumer xenocentrism, thus negative feelings could increase even further. Advertising should emphasize a happy approach and make the consumer happy to be a part of the culture. Impulsive buyers have a tendency to seek foreign products, therefore, having a significant impact on local businesses. Those businesses need to reinforce where they are from to maintain their identity but also to show some "globalness" to attract consumers. Notwithstanding, these local businesses that are built upon local culture could explore further their product's features and how it is good to conquer these customers, as product attitudes are fundamental to purchase intentions (Camacho et al., 2020).

Finally, we are living in a different context and consumer behavior is changing quickly and we need to investigate even more. With the COVID-19 pandemic, people are more concerned with how the brand is responding to the crisis and concerned with corporate social responsibility policies (He & Harris, 2020). Thus, consumers are looking more to how foreign and national companies are acting and since they are consuming local products to help these local businesses, our understating of xenocentrism shortly can be different and the reasons for it could challenge our concepts well-established in the literature.

However, people's xenocentric behavior can also be increased in the COVID-19 pandemic. The main reason could be individual frustration (Kent & Burnight, 1951) that one may have with the country's actions towards this health crisis. People may believe other countries are better because they deal better with the pandemic. Therefore, the relationship between public policies and consumer behavior is even more important today. These are challenging times but an existing opportunity for consumer researchers to investigate new consumption patterns and to help in developing theory and policies to improve consumer's wellbeing.

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