


Does Musical Preference of University Students Affect Respect for Differences? A Causal Perspective

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: May 03, 2023

Accepted: July 10, 2023

Published: July 31, 2023

Volume: 11 Issue: 3

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the effect of musical genres preferred by university students on respect for differences. The study data was collected from 1082 students attending various faculties of one of the universities in western black sea region in Turkey. The Information Form compiled by the researcher and the *Respect for Differences Scale (RfDS)* developed by Öksüz and Güven were used in data collection. Participants of the research were asked to write their most favorite music genre on the information form and to mark most appropriate statement on the *RfDS*. According to the results of the data analysis, the musical genre preferred by the students affected the *RfDS* scores, the majority of the participants mostly preferred to listen to popular music styles and although arabesque was the least preferred musical genre, the listeners of arabesque music had a lower mean *RfDS* score in comparison to the students who preferred other musical genres. On the basis of the findings, it can be suggested that it would be appropriate to help individuals to develop the habit of making conscious musical choices from an early age via educational programs based on music and music literacy for all ages in the schools.

Key words: Music Sociology, Music Psychology, Arabesque Music, Music Genres, Respect for Differences

INTRODUCTION

In the present century, diversity, pluralism, equality and affirmative action have become frequently adopted terms. In contemporary studies, these terms are mostly discussed within the context of gender in organizations and the workplace, minority rights, disability, or multicultural state structures. These studies cite *difference* as the common denominator of diversity, pluralism, equality and affirmative action, also mentioning absolute differences (Balint, 2010; Çoban et al., 2010; Fettahlıoğlu & Tatlı, 2015; Karaduman, 2010; Nişancı et al., 2016; Ringelheim, 2006; Taylor, 1992; Ulucan, 2014) as differences exist with diversity, pluralism incorporates differences, equality becomes meaningful in an environment with differences, and affirmative action can only be discussed regarding topics that accommodate differences.

The qualities characterized as diversity are encountered in every domain of daily life, not just in the workspace or under the framework of state systems. No two people of the billions of human beings across the world are the same, be it in appearance or mentality, physical characteristics or lifestyle; although one person might be alike another in some respects, they are in fact different. According to Güvenç (1996, p. 219):

From primitive communal societies to contemporary socialist societies, in every era and location, humans have

always perceived the self and the others as different, differentiating and categorizing human beings. Some of these differences are biological, such as race, sex, complexion, height and weight, whereas the majority are sociocultural categories, such as marriage, wealth, nobility, power, rule, urbanity and social class.

Pişkin (2014) similarly attributed the differences among human beings to congenital genetic characteristics, as well as sociocultural circumstances that later shape the individual. Notwithstanding the similarities with other humans, what makes an individual unique is indeed their distinctive characteristics (Öksüz & Güven, 2012). Therefore, dissimilarity is inevitable, even among individuals living in the same society. According to Güvenç, (1996, p. 220):

epithets and concepts used to differentiate people from each other and from ourselves are indicative of the effort to be different. Each effort to differentiate ourselves is in fact a categorization, and each aggroupment and categorization is in essence an attempt to differentiate.

Irrespective of how we discuss diversity, people who share the same environment can experience conflict and division due to their differences. Indeed, according to Pilhofer (2011), researchers have indicated that intercultural communication can lead to misunderstanding and

miscommunication when individuals of different cultural heritages interact and have conducted long-term studies to develop coping strategies. Ultimately, they identified unawareness of cultural differences and expectation of others to have the same perspective as oneself as the root causes of these misunderstandings and conflicts. Ross (1919, p. 670) cited several factors, such as “the perception of difference in emotion, belief, manner and appearance, arbitrary discrimination, resented imputation of inferiority and traditionalism, which hinder socialization, creating a lack of comprehension and sympathy, and, on the other hand, explained these problems could be overcome through the *realization of common values*”. In addition, Budak (2008) suggested that differences, which we generally fear and shy away from, should be regarded as an opportunity for developing mutual communication, understanding and relationships, as well as promoting individual characteristics. Based on these considerations, resolving conflict and disagreement can only be achieved via respecting each other’s differences.

Music and Respect for Differences

Music, an important building block of cultural and social structures, contains inferences regarding the social, cultural and political experiences of communities. Trehub et al. (2015) characterized music as one of the cultural indicators of the commonalities and differences between communities, while Biber Öz (2001, p. 102) stated, “Music is the foremost artform that interacts and integrates with society. [...] As a cultural phenomenon, the present state of music displays parallelism with the current state of society”. According to Cengiz (2011, p. 364), “Music can be an expression of social messages, such as social integration and disintegration”.

Hirsch et al. (1988) maintained music and painting “are indispensable symbols of national existence; not just instruments of personal pleasure or recreation, but also important and fundamental symbols of *what* we collectively are” (as cited in Elliot, 1990, p. 147). Thus, a community’s musical identity, which has developed on the basis of their cultural background, leads to a characterization and separation as “our music” and “their music” (Elliott, 1990, p.147), which proves that music is precisely a social indicator, so much so that “music can make the unrevealed aspects of a culture clearly apparent” (Netti, 1983, p.159). When we examine its functions, we see that music has missions, such as collaboration, integration, agreement and solidarity between individuals, between individuals and society, between social segments, and between societies (Uçan, 1994). Işık and Erol (2002) explained that musical works expose the structural and cultural traits of the society in which they were produced, through the vibrancy of the rhythmic and melodic structure. According to Günay (2006), people’s social values and behaviors are reflected in their musical preferences and behaviors. Several studies indicate that an individual’s musical preference influences their choices, emotions and behaviors (Artemiz, 2009; Çiftçi, 2010; Erdal, 2009).

Diverse cultures, mentalities and structures naturally produce different musical genres. Similarly, it is not surprising that individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds, psychological states, character traits, mentalities and socioeconomic levels listen to different genres of music born out of various influences. Say (2001, pp. 219-220) emphasized the need to not discriminate between musical genres, which he categorized into three groups, namely *art*, *popular* and *traditional*, with “Each musical genre fulfilling different tastes based on different traits, which is natural, because each genre was born to meet particular social and individual needs. The human being cannot remain silent against life: Music expresses the emotions, thoughts, impressions, plans and wishes of human beings, regardless of the genre”. Chevassus (2011, p. 69) stressed the interlacement of various musical structures by different cultures and musicians, stating, “The main goal is to facilitate different potencies to live side by side and to ensure a true harmony by uncovering the specific qualities of each material. Old-new, traditional-modern, Asian-European dichotomies would thereby disappear”, which would enable living in harmony with not just intersocietal and intercultural, but also intermusical differences. In this context, we can expect music, which plays a critical role in many social and intersocietal issues, to promote respect for differences.

There are many studies on the social, psychological and behavioral influence of music in the international and local literature (Abdurrezzak, 2018; Bozkurt, 2015; Ekinci et al., 2012; Eroğlu & Mert, 2017; Juslin & Laukka, 2004; Liadi & Omobowale, 2011; North & Hargreaves, 1999; Özgan, 2004; Saarikallio & Erkkilä, 2007; Schwartz & Fouts, 2003; Took & Weiss, 1994); however, the researcher did not encounter any investigating the effect of musical preference on respect for differences. The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of musical genres preferred by university students on respect for difference. The significance of the study is the provision of cultural inferences from the findings on the musical genres examined. The study results are expected to provide insight into potential regulations to shape the musical preferences of university students.

METHOD

Design

Causal-comparative design, which is one of the quantitative research methodologies was used in this research. In causal-comparative research, investigators attempt to determine the cause or consequences of differences that already exist between or among groups of individuals (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 366).

Sample

Stratified sampling, a random sampling method, was adopted in the selection of the study group. As a result, data was gathered with the participation of students from seven faculties and two vocational schools, namely Faculties of Education, Science and Literature, Economics and

Administrative Sciences, Engineering and Architecture, Dentistry, Theology and Medicine, Sport Sciences, as well as Vocational Schools of Foreign Languages and Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation (n=1082).

Data Collection Instruments

The Information Form compiled by the researcher and the *Respect for Differences Scale (RfDS)* developed by Öksüz and Güven (2012) were employed in data collection. In the Information Form, the students were asked to write the musical genre they enjoyed listening to the most. The 16 musical genres the students specified (pop music, rock, rap, hip hop, R&B, heavy metal, jazz, blues, classical Western music, classical Turkish music, ethnic music, arabesque music, mystic/religious music, slow music and film soundtrack) were classified under five main headings, which were designated with respect to the three-category classification by Ahmet Say as “art music, popular music and traditional music” (2001, p. 220) and the suggestions of five domain specialists. These headings are as follows:

1. Art music: a) Classical Western music b) Classical Turkish music
2. Popular music: Pop music, rock, rap, hip hop, R&B, heavy metal, slow music, film soundtrack.
3. Traditional (Folk) music: a) Turkish folk music b) Ethnic music c) Jazz d) Blues
4. Arabesque music
5. Mystic/religious music.

The *RfDS* is a 30-item measure constructed as a 5-point Likert scale with the statements Disagree, Partially Agree, Moderately Agree, Mostly Agree and Completely Agree. “The scale’s Cronbach’s Alpha internal consistency coefficient was computed as .94” (Öksüz & Güven, 2012, p. 469).

Data Collection

Prior to data collection, Öksüz and Güven’s permission for the utilization of the *Respect for Differences Scale*, a report from the Ethics Committee for Human Research in Social Sciences at Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University (Protocol No: 2014/113), and the approval of the faculty and vocational school administrators for the administration of the scale and the form were obtained.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to calculate means and standard deviations (SD) for all variables. Data normality was tested by using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test. Mean *RfDS* scores for the five groups were compared with a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). In case of a significant difference, Hochberg’s GT2 *post hoc* tests were employed to locate the specific significant differences among the groups (Field, 2005, p. 341). All data analysis was performed by means of the IBM-SPSS statistical software 20.0 for Windows (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL). The level of statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

1082 students attending Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University (18-23 years) volunteered to participate in the study. The percentages of the musical genres preferred by the participants were Art Music 12.9% (n=140), Popular Music 56.9% (n=616), Traditional (Folk) Music 18.3% (n=198), Arabesque Music 4.8% (n=52) and Mystic/Religious Music 7.0% (n=76) (Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows that the majority of the participants mostly preferred to listen to popular music styles.

A one-way ANOVA was performed to investigate the existence of a significant difference in the *RfDS* score between groups ($F_{(4, 1077)} = 21.160, p = .000$) (Table 1).

The results of the one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in the mean *RfDS* score between groups.

A Hochberg’s GT2 *post hoc* test was conducted to investigate whether the *RfDS* score varied by musical genre (Table 2).

According to Table 2, Hochberg’s GT2 *post hoc* test results indicated a statistically significant difference in the

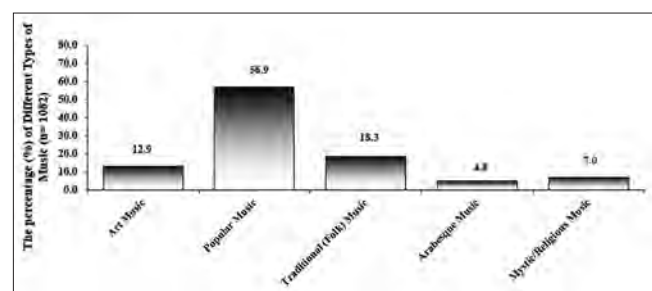


Figure 1. The percentages of the different musical genres as reported by the participants

Table 1. One-Way ANOVA test results for the five groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
<i>Respect for Differences</i>					
Between Groups	13307.358	4	3326.840	21.160	0.000*
Within Groups	169328.046	1077	157.222		
Total	182635.405	1081			

$p < .05^*$

Table 2. *RfDS* score (Mean±SD) comparison for the five groups

Variable	<i>RfDS</i> score	Comparison (Hochberg's GT2 Post Hoc)
Art Music (n=140)	120.04±09.43 ^a	^a No significant difference with any genre ($p>.05$) except Arabesque Music ($p<.05$)
Pop Music (n=616)	116.90±11.98 ^b	^b No significant difference with any genre ($p>.05$) except Arabesque Music ($p<.05$)
Traditional (Folk) Music (n=198)	118.32±14.25 ^c	^c No significant difference with any genre ($p>.05$) except Arabesque Music ($p<.05$)
Arabesque Music (n=52)	102.02±16.19 ^d	^d A significant difference with all types of music ($p<.05$)
Mystic/Religious Music (n = 76)	117.25 ± 14.27 ^e	^e No significant difference with any genre ($p>.05$) except Arabesque Music ($p<.05$)

mean *RfDS* score of Arabesque listeners with those of the participants who preferred other musical genres.

DISCUSSION

The study results showed that the musical genre preferred by the students influenced the *RfDS* score (Table 1). This is an expected finding as music is a cultural and sociological phenomenon (Cengiz, 2011; Dolfma, 1999; Elliott, 1990; Sağır & Öztürk, 2015; Yıldırım & Koç, 2003) that possesses an integrating and unifying power and sharpens perception of social differences (Işık & Erol, 2002). Abdurrezzak (2018) argued that music, an important instrument for emotional expression, possesses the power to influence and change the listener's feelings and thoughts, shaping the environment where it is performed and transforming the performance as well as the audience. North and Hargreaves (1999) suggested that particular musical genres might have particular effects on the identity development of particular adolescents who grew up in particular social and cultural environments.

There are many studies that indicate the positive or negative effects of musical preference on human psychology, emotions and behavior. In their study with university students, Erginsoy Osmanoğlu and Yılmaz (2019) reported that regular listening to classical music reduced anxiety and promoted personal well-being. Knight and Rickard (2001) found relaxing music had an alleviative effect on subjective anxiety and cognitive stress levels. Campbell et al. (2021) determined happy music promoted energy levels, reducing fatigue and confusion. On the other hand, the findings of Garrido and Schubert (2015) indicated increased depression in people listening to sad music. Özgan (2004) identified more severe self-harm behavior in university students with the consumption of certain musical genres. The findings of Took and Weiss (1994) suggested that listening to heavy metal and rap music induced several unfavorable outcomes, such as homicidal tendencies, sexual activity, lower academic achievement, problems with social behavior, alcohol and drug use and arrests. Liadi and Omobowale (2011) characterized multilingual hip hop music as an indication of the rising decadence within the youth's social environments, as well as within the country, stressing music's guiding role in the internal value judgment process through which the youth make meaning of their social environment. In addition, in the study conducted with high school and university students, Sezer (2011) highlighted music's ability to affect individuals positively or negatively.

Notwithstanding the lack of any prior research on the impact of musical genres on respect for differences, the study

by Mohammad Shah (2000) identified a moderate relationship between intercultural tolerance and music preferences, and that by Schwartz and Fouts (2003) reported greater disrespect of others and of social rules in adolescents who listened to heavy metal, were two studies whose results corresponds the most to those of the present study.

The study results also indicated that the students who preferred arabesque music had a lower mean *RfDS* score than the listeners of other musical genres (Table 2). The literature reveals that arabesque music is generally mentioned in the accompaniment of negative emotions and behaviors. Sezer (2011) reported higher anger out scores for young adults who preferred arabesque music, commenting that this situation resulted in their failing to control and thus overtly expressing their anger. Ekinci et al. (2012) showed adolescents at risk for depression listened to arabesque music more frequently than their peers who were not at risk. In the study examining the influence of musical preference on violent tendencies among high school students, Uluçay (2018) reported greater violent tendencies in adolescents who listened to arabesque music compared to those who preferred other musical genres. According to Tekman and Hortaçsu (2010), the participants associated the feeling of failure with arabesque music. Furthermore, the participants characterized arabesque music as an excluded genre, and arabesque music was found to be the genre that received the most negative reviews.

The term *arabesque*, used to refer to an overly elaborate part or melody in Western music and an artwork adorned with flower, leaf, animal or geometric figures in painting and architecture (Collins Dictionary, 2022), with the lexical meaning of "having an Arabian or Oriental quality" (Timuçin, 1984, p. 16), has experienced a semantic shift in Türkiye due to social, cultural or political developments. According to Güngör (1993, p. 20),

the disharmony of the meeting of the traditional Eastern lifestyle with its modern Western counterpart, as well as that of their corresponding values, with the beginning of modernization, and the complexity and cosmopolitan structure born out of the encounter of rural and urban values and lifestyles with the rise of urbanization was entitled *arabesque*.

Arabesque music, a genre incorporating Eastern and Western instruments and borrowing various qualities from complex, elaborate and different musical genres, embodies "iniquation and degeneration in the sense of a deviation from Turkish musical tradition" (Güngör, 1993, p. 19). Thus, arabesque music began to be perceived as an instrument of self-expression for the oppressed who experienced difficulty after rural-urban migration, felt desperate in the face of

numerous hardships while trying to build a new life in the city and held in contempt by the rest of society. This mood can be better understood from the lyrics:

I have an objection to this cruel fate
 I have an objection to this eternal grief
 To fortune's fickleness
 To life's blows
 To all suffering
 I have an objection
 To interrupted love
 To this borrowed smile
 To die without having lived
 I have an objection
 Am I always condemned to lose?
 Do I always have to be downtrodden?
 I have an objection to this lying and scheming
 What do I owe to this misery?
 It doesn't leave me be
 What is my problem with happiness?
 It is giving me hell
 (Singer: Müslüm Gürses)

There is no sorrow, no suffering I haven't felt
 I haven't had a day or night without crying out
 There are no streets, no corners I haven't wept
 There is not a trace of my former self now
 I'm weary and in agony now
 Hold me by my arms, or I shall fall now
 All I have seen, all that's happened to me
 I've reached this age through hell and high water
 Hold me and raise me up, for the love of God
 I'm alone, my friends, I'm alone, alone
 (Singer: İbrahim Tatlıses)

In these two examples that reached peak popularity especially during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the majority of other arabesque songs that were popular in the same period, the major themes were protest against fate, unrequited love and complaint to the beloved. Loving, not being loved back, remembering a partner after the relationship has ended, or events that are interpreted negatively are quite ordinary occurrences in life. However, arabesque song lyrics mention only the problems, and the protagonist is always helpless and desperate; does not strive to solve the problems and achieve positive outcomes, not having any strength or any belief it can be done. Lacking self-confidence and having a fatalistic mentality, the protagonist entrusts the solution of the problems to God. The protagonist has low self-esteem and is therefore always the victim; each happening and person is stronger than oneself. In view of Maslow's (2017) hierarchy of needs, it is impossible to expect anyone to demand or show respect while some of their most basic needs are unmet. The results of the study by Şenel (2013) also supported these findings: The participants of the study characterized arabesque music listeners as world-weary, psychologically troubled, unsuccessful, illiterate, rough, rude and uncouth people who were from the low-income group, had no expectation from life, harmed themselves or the people around them, and were intolerant of other musical genres.

The lyrics from another song that gained popularity at approximately the same period demonstrate love transforming into an obsession and becoming self-centered to the degree to prefer the beloved's death than being apart:

They can't take you away from me
 You belong either to me or six feet under
 They can't tear down our love
 You belong either to me or six feet under
 Put your hands in mine and locks on my heart
 Forget about someone else
 You belong either to me or six feet under
 You love, I love, you wait, I wait
 I take this as an oath
 You belong either to me or six feet under
 We have hearts full of love, we have our spring, our summer
 God's witness, we have a vow
 You belong either to me or six feet under
 (Singer: Ferdi Tayfur)

The lyrics of a song by an artist who has recently risen to fame takes it as far as to utter imprecations at the nominal beloved. It does not seem possible to expect someone in such a mental state to show respect to another person or to their different emotions, thoughts, characteristics and behaviors:

Always, there was only you
 Always, I used to hear it from you
 May my two eyes go blind
 Ah, how did I believe you?
 I have seen a thousand torments
 You've killed me a thousand times
 Damn it, I've had enough
 You've torn me away from myself
 You've sold me out, shame on you
 God damn you
 May God, make you suffer
 May what happened to me, happen to you
 You ruined my life
 You showed no mercy, how I have suffered
 May fate blind you too
 (Singer: İsmail YK)

The main element in arabesque music is the lyrics, the song's melody and rhythmic structure are shaped according to the lyrics (Güngör, 1993). According to Güvenç's research report, (1978, as cited in Güngör, 1993, p. 166) "shared taxi drivers preferred listening to arabesque music due to their lyrics". Erdal (2015) also highlighted lyrics as an important determinant in the preference for arabesque music. In the present study, it is possible to similarly speculate that the university students who preferred arabesque music might have been influenced by the lyrics. In this respect, it is not surprising that these students had a lower mean *RfDS* score compared to the students who listened to other musical genres.

Arabesque music was the genre preferred by the least number of university students, which can be explained by the study results of Erdal (2015, p. 1017) "Education level decreases as preference for arabesque increases". The fact that arabesque music is not widely preferred by university

students is a favorable outcome in consideration of its negative impact on respect for differences. Although it was reported to be the least preferred musical genre among university students, in view of its influence on respect for differences, the researcher believes it would be appropriate to help individuals to develop the habit of making conscious musical choices from an early age.

Although the university students who preferred the other musical genres examined in the study (i.e., popular, traditional (folk), art music and mystic/religious) had higher *RfDS* scores, there was no statistically significant difference between these groups. Popular music was the most widely preferred musical genre among university students; however, the results indicated no statistically significant difference in the *RfDS* score, which can be explained by the findings of Tekman and Hortaçsu (2010). The study reported that the respondents characterized listeners of six different musical genres as sophisticated, sprightly or loser, and associated popular music fans with the sprightly dimension. Furthermore, Çiftçi (2010, p. 152) described popular music as “a musical genre, with its rhythmic structure and simple melodies that are easy to remember, as well as the utilization of various acoustic and electronic instruments, that mainly appeals to the youth and is generally performed to dance or have fun”.

Traditional music and art music, which ranked as the second and third most preferred musical genres within the scope of the study, respectively, were associated with the sophisticated dimension in Tekman and Hortaçsu (2010). In addition, these two genres received very positive reviews, Western art music being characterized as deserving of appreciation and Turkish folk music as the most suitable for expressing identity. In the study by Şenel (2013), participants defined Turkish folk music as a natural and pure musical genre that narrates the culture, values, traditions and emotions of the Turkish people, and portrayed Turkish folk music listeners as loving, nostalgic, peaceful and sincere people without any ill will. North (2010) described individuals who preferred jazz and blues, which were categorized under *traditional music* in the present study, as intelligent and creative people with high self-esteem. In the study by Şenel (2013), the participants represented Western art music as positive, restful, relaxing, artistic and the opposite of arabesque, and envisioned Western art music listeners as cultured, elite, highly educated, high-income, social and happy individuals who had a wide perspective and an artistic soul, lived comfortably, dressed smartly and listened to music for pleasure. In the same study, the participants characterized Turkish art music as calm, nostalgic, outmoded, slow and reminiscent of old times, while portraying Turkish art music listeners as decent, respectable, gentle, calm, quiet, untroubled, chic, harmless and sympathetic individuals who wore a suit and spoke Turkish properly. In view of the study results cited above, the lack of a significant difference in the *RfDS* score for the second and third most preferred musical genres among the participants of the present study is not a coincidence.

In the study by Şenel (2013), mystic/religious music was characterized as a turning toward God, spiritual and

venerable, and associated with prayer, sacred days, rose imagery, the *ney* and love of God, while mystic/religious music listeners were reported to be perceived as devout, good, just, refined, respectable, ascetic, introverted and elderly people who did not partake in alcohol consumption. It is an expected outcome for mystic/religious music, with its musical and lyrical structure, to have these effects on the listener, and therefore the lack of a significant difference in the *RfDS* score for this musical genre is not surprising.

CONCLUSION

The study results show that the musical genre preferred by the students affected the *RfDS* scores, the majority of the participants mostly preferred to listen to popular music styles and although arabesque was the least preferred musical genre, the listeners of arabesque music had a lower mean *RfDS* score in comparison to the students who preferred other musical genres.

To conclude, it can be suggested that educational programs based on music can be applied students in the schools. Because a conscious choice of listening to music can be achieved beginning from an early age thanks to music literacy. Music genres of which scores of respect for differences are higher than arabesque music can be played in the social domains of school areas.

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