

Moderating Influence of Self-Monitoring and Gender on Responses to Humorous Advertising

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ABSTRACT. From Snyder's (1987) suggestion that high self-monitors, relative to low self-monitors, choose form over function, it was hypothesized that high self-monitors should be more susceptible to humorous advertising and low self-monitors to nonhumorous advertising. Also, it was predicted that this interaction effect would be stronger for American male students than for female students. The results of a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Humor \times Self-Monitoring \times Audience Gender) experimental research design failed to support this particular interaction hypothesis. However, self-monitoring did significantly interact with audience gender in moderating responses to advertising. Taken together, the patterns of the significant self-monitoring and gender interactions showed that high self-monitoring men, relative to low self-monitoring men, tended to become more positive toward the advertisement, whereas high self-monitoring women, relative to low self-monitoring women, tended to become more negative. Within-cell correlations between cognitive responses and attitude suggested that the subjects engaged in systematic rather than heuristic processing of the advertisement.

SNYDER'S (1974, 1987) self-monitoring theory has sparked considerable research and debate among American psychologists for the past decade and a half. High self-monitoring individuals are presumably sensitive to the expressions and self-presentations of others and use these cues as guidelines for managing their own behavior. They "strive to be the type of person called for in each situation in which they find themselves" (DeBono & Harnish, 1988, p. 542). Low self-monitoring individuals, however, are more attuned to their internal dispositions and less to the appropriateness of their situational behaviors. They "are concerned that their attitudes express important values and find information concerning the relations between their attitudes and values particularly important" (DeBono & Harnish, p. 542).

Because high self-monitors are driven more by external (situational/environmental) cues and low self-monitors are driven more by internal (dispositional) cues, it is not surprising that several studies have found that attitude-behavior consistency is usually greater for low than for high self-monitors (Kardes, Sanbonmatsu, Voss, & Fazio, 1986; McCann & Hancock, 1983; Nantel & Strahle, 1986; Zanna, Olson, & Fazio, 1980). Although Ajzen, Timko, and White (1982) failed to find these attitude-behavior correlations, they did find that the behavior intention-behavior correlations were significantly stronger for low than for high self-monitors.

In consumer behavior research, in which personality variables have not had a great history of success (Kassarjian, 1971), high self-monitors have been found to prefer national brands over private labels (Becherer & Richard, 1978). This finding is consistent with the possibility that preference for national brands is adaptive for those who are concerned about efficiently fitting into a variety of social environments. Also, high self-monitors, relative to low self-monitors, were more likely to have been influenced by reference groups (Becherer, Morgan, & Richard, 1979, 1982). This difference in reference group influence helps account for the findings that consumer preferences for a set of social products (cologne, mouthwash, complexion aids, and alcoholic beverages) have been associated with high self-monitoring, whereas preferences for nonsocial products (vitamin capsules, calculators, coffee, and candy bars) have been associated with low self-monitoring (Becherer & Richard, 1978).

Along similar lines, Nantel and Strahle (1986) have found that the impact of subjective norms in the Fishbein behavioral intention model was related to self-monitoring. As encouraging as all this may sound for self-monitoring theory, Brinberg and Plimpton (1986) concluded from their results that the self-monitoring and reference group relationship was very weak, although they did find that high self-monitors were more susceptible to reference group influence when considering luxury products.

Self-monitoring differences in consumer responses to marketing communications have also been examined. Snyder and DeBono (1985) showed that high self-monitors reacted more favorably to image-oriented advertisements, whereas low self-monitors reacted more favorably to product quality-

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oriented advertisements. Snyder (1987) even suggested that such differences in responses to advertising may illustrate the tendency for high self-monitors to choose "*form over function*", whereas low self-monitors choose "*function at the expense of form*" (p. 106). Unfortunately, recent attempts to replicate Snyder and DeBono's interaction effect have failed (Bearden, Shuptrine, & Teel, 1989; Zuckerman, Gioioso, & Tellini, 1988).

Nevertheless, Snyder's interesting notion that high self-monitors choose form over function when evaluating products, whereas low self-monitors choose function over form, has led to the major hypothesis of the present study: High self-monitors are more susceptible to humorous advertising than low self-monitors. Just as low self-monitors may be wary of form when evaluating products, they may also be quite suspicious of advertising messages couched or masked in humor.

On the other hand, high self-monitors, who presumably appreciate good form, may be more sensitive to and appreciative of humor in advertising. This relatively high appreciation of humor may come from learning that a good sense of humor is usually a positive personal characteristic in social relations. High self-monitors, being more concerned about positive images in social situations, may have learned that humor appreciation is adaptive for their social lifestyle.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986a, 1986b) may further strengthen the basis for the hypothesis. Briefly, the ELM posits two routes to persuasion: a central and a peripheral route. Audiences that are motivated and able to elaborate on the central, issue-relevant information given in a persuasive communication are likely to follow the central route. Central routers are more likely to be persuaded by strong message arguments than by peripheral cues. Attitude change that follows from progression through the central route is considered to be more permanent and predictive of behavioral intentions and behaviors. Peripheral routers, who lack the motivation and/or the ability to elaborate on the issue-relevant arguments of the message, will more likely be influenced by peripheral cues. Attitude change that follows from progression through the peripheral route is considered to be temporary and perhaps less predictive of behavioral intentions and behaviors.

The ELM has already proven to be instrumental in helping account for self-monitoring effects. Working from both the ELM and a functional approach to persuasion, DeBono and Harnish (1988) found that high self-monitors were more likely to systematically process a persuasive communication from an attractive source, whereas low self-monitors were more likely to systematically process the communication from an expert source, perhaps because the attitudes of high self-monitors may serve a social-adjustive function, whereas those of low self-monitors may serve a value-expressive function. This is not, however, to say that attractive and expert sources were in-

effective otherwise. On the contrary, DeBono and Harnish found that high self-monitors' attitudes were changed by the expert source and that low self-monitors' attitudes were changed by the attractive source. Analyses of cognitive responses, however, indicated that these latter attitude changes were through peripheral- rather than central-route processing.

In the present study, high self-monitors, because of their suspected heightened sensitivity to or appreciation of humor, were predicted to be more motivated to process the central, issue-relevant information in a humorous advertisement than in a serious version of the advertisement. Conversely, low self-monitors were predicted to be more likely to elaborate on the central information provided in a no-nonsense, serious advertisement than in the humorous version of the advertisement. To the extent that (a) self-monitoring actually does differentially affect motivation to elaborate on a message, (b) ability to elaborate is not inhibited, and (c) the central message arguments in the advertisement are strong rather than weak, the ELM also predicts that high self-monitors should be more susceptible to a humorous advertisement than a serious advertisement.

A second purpose of the present study was to test for the possible interaction of gender with self-monitoring and/or humor. Gender \times Humor interactions on humor appreciation responses are fairly common, with women usually showing more expressive behaviors such as smiling and laughter than men (e.g., O'Quin & Aronoff, 1981). However, Gender \times Humor interactions on compliance and persuasion appear to be less frequently observed (O'Quin & Aronoff). In the consumer psychology literature, Lammers, Leibowitz, Seymour, and Hennessey (1983) found that men generated more favorable responses to a humorous advertisement than did women, and Shama and Coughlin (1979) found that women felt the humor in an Alka-Seltzer advertisement took away from the product rather than enhanced it.

Lammers et al. (1983) speculated that contemporary women, relative to men, are more likely to perceive humor in advertising to be a manipulative tool of the advertiser. The female distrust of advertising may come from a long history of displeasure with the portrayals of women in advertising (Lammers & Wilkinson, 1980; Sharits & Lammers, 1983). Men may either be more naive about such manipulations or simply appreciate humor more. Shama and Coughlin (1979) did not discuss their gender-difference finding.

As for gender and self-monitoring, Ickes and Barnes (1977) found that high self-monitoring men, relative to low self-monitoring men, were less expressive in dyadic interactions, whereas high self-monitoring women, relative to low self-monitoring women, were more expressive. Ickes and Barnes suggested that self-monitoring enhances sex-role appropriate behaviors. Ellis (1988) found that high self-monitoring men, but not women, were likely to exhibit leadership emergence. In contrast, Garland and Beard (1979) found that high self-monitoring women rather than men were more likely to show

evidence of leadership emergence. To complicate perhaps the Gender \times Self-Monitoring interaction even more, Lassiter, Stone, and Weigold (1987) found no Gender \times Self-Monitoring interaction effects on eyewitness memory.

Unfortunately, Gender \times Self-Monitoring interactions in persuasion contexts have been either untested or unreported. At present, the most reasonable hypothesis seems to be that self-monitoring and gender interact when sex-role appropriate behaviors are involved. From the Lammers et al. (1983) and Shama and Coughlin (1979) findings described above, it is possible that the sex-role appropriate behavior of a female audience would be to resist advertising, particularly humorous advertising. To the extent that the presumed sex-role appropriate behaviors exist, it would be hypothesized further from Ickes and Barnes (1977) that women's resistance to humorous advertising should be even stronger for those high in self-monitoring than for those low in self-monitoring.

In ELM terms, high self-monitoring women and men may be highly motivated to elaborate on a humorous advertisement because of their self-monitoring tendencies. But high self-monitoring women, relative to high self-monitoring men, may be cast in a more counterarguing frame of mind when exposed to a humorous advertisement. Consequently, they may show less susceptibility to persuasion from a humorous advertisement than their male counterparts. Still, if the message contains relatively strong arguments, high self-monitoring women should be more susceptible to a humorous advertisement than low self-monitoring women. Low self-monitoring women may be less motivated to systematically process the humorous advertisement and may simply reject the advertisement because of its use of humor. Humor, then, may serve as something less than a positive peripheral cue for low self-monitoring subjects, especially for low self-monitoring women. For high self-monitoring men and women, humor may serve as an impetus for message elaboration and subsequent persuasion through the central route.

In summary, it was hypothesized that high self-monitors should be more susceptible to humorous and low self-monitors to nonhumorous advertising and that this interaction effect should be stronger for men than for women.

Method

Subjects and Procedure

The experiment used a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Self-Monitoring: high vs. low \times Humor: humorous vs. serious advertisement \times Gender) factorial design. Undergraduate business majors ($N = 111$; 54 male, 57 female) at California State University, Northridge, volunteered to participate in a study of their reactions to a new advertisement. They were randomly assigned to listen to either a humorous or a serious version of an industrial advertisement for Evatone Sound-

sheets. Soundsheets are very thin, flexible phonograph records that can be inserted in magazines and books and are often used for promotional purposes. The advertisement for Evatone Soundsheets was itself on an Evatone Soundsheet that had been inserted in trade publications (e.g., *Advertising Age*) and journals (e.g., *Journal of Marketing Research*), distributed to potential users of soundsheets (e.g., advertisers and small businesses).

The spokespersons in the advertisement were the American radio comedy team, Dick and Bert, who described some product uses seriously (e.g., songwriters promoting their songs) and some humorously (e.g., a foghorn manufacturer). The unedited version was used as the humorous advertisement in the present study. The serious version of the advertisement was created by deleting the humorous examples, as was done in Lammers et al. (1983). Pretesting had shown that both the product and the advertisement were unfamiliar to the participants.

After listening, subjects completed a questionnaire containing measures of attitudes toward the advertisement, cognitive responses, product/brand/use recall, and affect/mood, and a Likert version of Snyder's Self-Monitoring Scale (1974). A median split of scores on the Self-Monitoring Scale was used to classify subjects as high or low on self-monitoring. All subjects were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results

Univariate $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Humor \times Self-Monitoring \times Gender) analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted on the dependent variables. Post-hoc comparisons of significant interaction means were done with the Multiple Range Test.

Manipulation Check

Subjects rated the funniness of the advertisement on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all funny* (1) to *funny* (7). The three-way ANOVA on these funniness ratings showed that the humorous advertisement was perceived to be significantly more funny than the serious advertisement ($M = 4.67$ vs. 3.02 , respectively), $F(1, 99) = 34.79$, $p < .001$. No other main effects or interaction on ratings of funniness were found to be significant. The manipulation of humor appeared to be successful.

Attitude Toward the Advertisement

Attitude toward the advertisement was assessed by having subjects rate the advertisement on a set of 17, 7-point adjective rating scales. A principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed on these 17

items. Three factors emerged with eigenvalues of 7.80, 1.09, and 0.63. Scale scores on each of these three factors were computed for each subject by averaging responses to those items that loaded most heavily (.40 or higher) on the rotated factors. Nine items loaded heavily on Factor 1, hereafter referred to as Persuasiveness: persuasive, well-designed, effective, good, strong, believable, pleasant, a piece of art, and familiar. The internal consistency of this scale was very high (coefficient $\alpha = .924$). Five items loaded heavily on Factor 2, hereafter referred to as Attention-Getting: interesting, funny, sexy, hot, and arousing. This five-item scale showed moderately high internal consistency (coefficient $\alpha = .830$). Finally, two items, fast and active, loaded heavily on Factor 3, hereafter referred to as Activity. (Computation of coefficient α is not possible on a two-item scale). One item, complex, failed to load on any factor and was omitted from all subsequent analyses.

ANOVAs on scale scores showed a significant main effect of humor. Subjects rated the humorous advertisement, relative to the serious advertisement, higher on attention-getting ($M = 3.82$ vs. 2.88 , respectively), $F(1, 102) = 23.27$, $p < .001$. Humor did not significantly affect ratings on persuasiveness and activity ($ps > .05$).

Significant Self-Monitoring \times Gender interactions were found for persuasiveness, $F(1, 103) = 5.22$, $p = .024$, and activity, $F(1, 101) = 4.26$, $p = .042$. A similar but marginally significant interaction was also found for attention-getting, $F(1, 102) = 3.24$, $p = .075$. The means for each of these interaction effects are shown in Table 1. Internal comparisons of the interaction means for persuasiveness showed that high self-monitoring men rated the advertisement higher than did the high self-monitoring women ($p < .05$). On activity, low self-monitoring women gave significantly higher ratings than did low self-monitoring men ($p < .05$). No other internal comparisons of the means of either persuasiveness or activity were significant at the .05 level. No internal comparisons of the means of attention-getting were computed because this particular interaction was marginally significant.

It can be seen from these interactions that men and women had different reactions to the advertisements and that these differences were moderated by self-monitoring. Together, the patterns of the interactions showed that high self-monitoring men, relative to low self-monitoring men, tended to rate the advertisements higher on the persuasiveness, attention-getting, and activity scales.

Conversely, high self-monitoring women, relative to low self-monitoring women, tended to rate the advertisements lower on these same scales.

Cognitive Responses

Subjects' cognitive responses were collected by using a thought-listing procedure adapted from Lammers (1985). They were given 2 min to list any

TABLE 1
Interaction of Self-Monitoring and Gender on Attitude
Toward the Advertisement

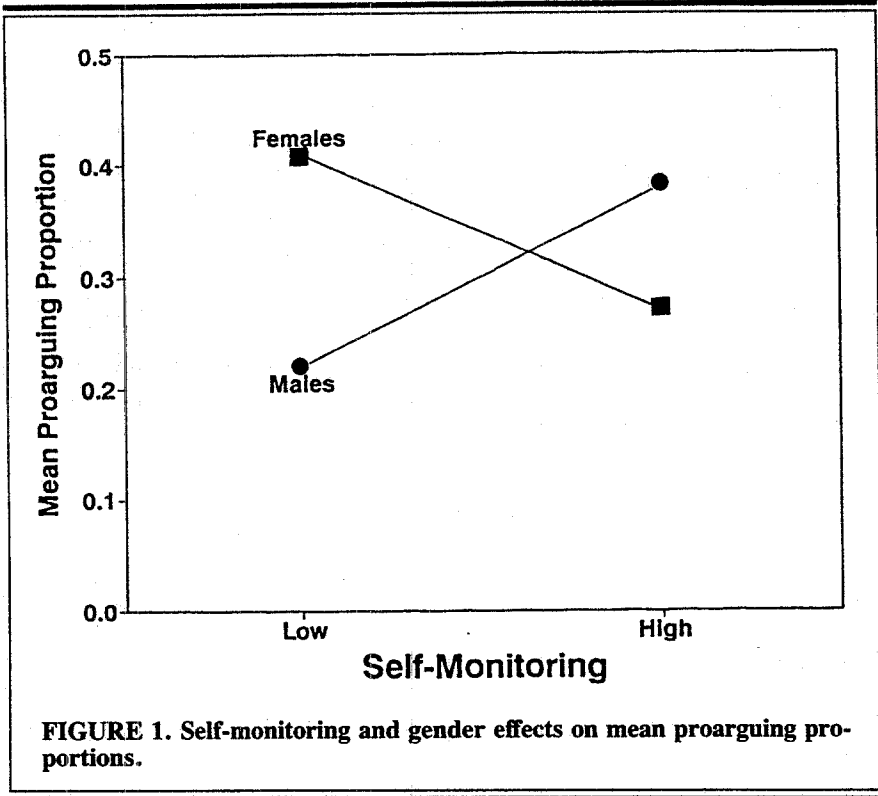
Scale	Self-monitoring	
	Low	High
Persuasiveness		
Women	4.2 _{ab}	3.7 _b
Men	3.8 _{ab}	4.4 _a
Attention-getting		
Women	3.5	3.3
Men	3.2	3.6
Activity		
Women	5.3 _a	4.9 _{ab}
Men	4.7 _b	5.3 _{ab}

Note. For each set of scale means, those means that have no subscripts in common differ significantly from one another at $p < .05$, Duncan's New Multiple Range Test. No internal comparison of means was done on the Attention-Getting Scale because that interaction was only marginally significant, $p < .08$.

thoughts, ideas, or feelings they had about the advertisement they had just heard. After listing their thoughts, they were asked to go over the list and rate on 7-point scales each thought according to how *favorable* (7) or *unfavorable* (1) it was toward the advertisement. Those thoughts that were rated greater than 5 were classified as proarguments, those that were rated less than 3 were classified as counterarguments, and those that were rated from 3 to 5 were classified as neutral arguments.

A proarguing proportion was computed for each subject by dividing the number of proarguments by the sum of pro- and counterarguments. An ANOVA on the proarguing proportion yielded a statistically significant Self-Monitoring \times Gender interaction, $F(1, 103) = 4.01, p < .05$. Internal comparisons of the means showed that low self-monitoring women proargued significantly more than low self-monitoring men ($p < .05$). No other internal comparisons of the means were significant at the .05 level. The pattern of this interaction (Figure 1), however, is very much the same as that found for persuasiveness, attention-getting, and activity (Table 1). No other effects on proarguing proportions were statistically significant.

Proarguing proportions were significantly correlated with each of the three attitude scales: $r_s = .59, .52,$ and $.32$ for persuasiveness, attention-getting, and activity, respectively (all $p_s < .001$). Within-cell correlations between attitude and proarguing proportions were also computed for the four cells of the Self-Monitoring \times Gender interaction. The pattern and significance of the correlations within each of these cells was virtually the same as



for the overall correlations. Correlations between cognitive responses and attitudes are sometimes taken to be signs of systematic rather than heuristic processing of the persuasive communication (e.g., DeBono & Harnish 1988, p. 544).

Product/Brand/Use Recall

A 3-point scale was used to score subjects' unaided product and brand recall responses: *totally incorrect* (0), *partially correct* (1), *totally correct* (2). A significant main effect of humor on product recall showed that subjects exposed to the humorous advertisement ($M = 1.86$) had greater product recall than those exposed to the serious advertisement ($M = 1.37$), $F(1, 103) = 4.159$, $p = .044$. No other effects on product recall were significant. Also, no effects on brand recall were significant. Subjects also recalled the various product uses discussed in the advertisement they heard, but no significant effects were found on this measure.

Affect/Mood

A factor analysis of the 12-item rating of affect or mood produced two factors: Good Mood, eigenvalue = 4.88, and Nervousness, eigenvalue = 1.33. Scale scores on each factor were computed by averaging each subject's responses to the items that loaded heavily (.40 or greater) on that factor. The reliabilities (coefficient α) for the good-mood items (active, good, pleasant, interested, aroused, happy, hot, attentive, and fast) and for the nervousness items (nervous, self-conscious, and distracted) were .91 and .64, respectively. The ANOVAs on affect yielded a significant main effect of humor on the good-mood scale, $F(1, 103) = 5.857, p = .017$. This main effect simply showed that subjects in the humor condition ($M = 4.54$) were in a better mood than were those in the serious condition ($M = 4.07$). No other statistically significant effects on the affect/mood factors were found.

Discussion

Any discussion of the present study must be carefully framed by the caveat that the external generalizability of the results is limited by the specific procedures, stimuli, and sampling of the study. In particular, the use of American undergraduates as subjects is a major constraint. Self-monitoring theory has been largely developed and tested on American subjects, usually American college students, and Snyder (1987) himself suggested that cultural differences in self-monitoring should be expected. For example, in a brief discussion of an anthropologist's characterization of Japanese life, he speculated: "A society that places such a high value on rule following and role enactment may also be one with a correspondingly large proportion of high self-monitors in it" (p. 11). However, Gudykunst, Yang, and Nishida (1987) found that American students scored significantly higher on self-monitoring than Japanese and Korean students, who did not differ significantly from each other. Gudykunst et al. notwithstanding, no known self-monitoring studies, including the present study, have seriously addressed the need for research on cross-cultural differences in self-monitoring.

In the findings of the present study, humor significantly affected cognitive responses, attitudes toward the advertisement, affect, and product recall. More specifically, subjects who were exposed to the humorous advertisement, relative to those who were exposed to the serious version, generated more proarguments, rated the advertisement more favorably on attention-getting ability, experienced more positive affect and mood, and had greater product—but not brand—recall.

Although these main effects of humor are consistent with Lammers et al. (1983), the hypothesized interactions of humor with self-monitoring and gender were of greater theoretical interest in the present study. Contrary to pre-

dictions, humor did not interact with self-monitoring. But the importance of self-monitoring ought not be underplayed, because self-monitoring did moderate gender effects on responses to the advertisement. Together, the patterns of the significant self-monitoring and gender interactions showed that high self-monitoring relative to low self-monitoring men tended to become more positive in terms of attitudes and cognitive responses toward the advertisement, whereas high self-monitoring relative to low self-monitoring women tended to become more negative.

A possible explanation for the pattern of the Self-Monitoring \times Gender interactions revolves around presumed sex-role appropriate behaviors (cf. Ickes & Barnes, 1977; Meyers-Levy, 1988). The spokespersons in the audio advertisement were men, not women. This particular source cue may have been more salient to the high self-monitoring than to the low self-monitoring women because of their differential sensitivities to social-environmental stimuli. Moreover, the women in this experiment were all career-oriented, third- and fourth-year business majors. It is highly likely that most of them would have been classified as more modern than traditionally minded. To the extent that they were indeed more modern in their beliefs about women's sex roles, they may have been fighting the stereotype of the traditional woman who is relatively easily persuaded by men. High self-monitoring relative to low self-monitoring women may be more sensitive to the sex-role appropriate behaviors of modern women (Ickes & Barnes, 1977) and may have shown greater resistance to the advertisement because it was delivered by men.

The finding that the high self-monitoring men tended to be the least resistant to a persuasive appeal is consistent with the possibility that they simply saw that the setting was a persuasion context; hence, they persuaded themselves.

Naturally, the explanation above for the patterns of the Self-Monitoring \times Gender interactions is largely speculative and based more on presumptions than on actual data about sex-role appropriate behaviors. In addition, the interactions must be viewed as correlational relationships despite the experimental trappings of this study until self-monitoring and gender can be experimentally manipulated.

The significant within-cell correlations between attitudes and cognitive responses suggest that the subjects, regardless of their gender and degree of self-monitoring, may have engaged in fairly systematic processing of the advertisement. There is a chance that the demand characteristics of the experimental situation induced central route-taking in all subjects and that there was not enough opportunity for the independent variables to bring out any differences in responses due to differences in the nature of the processing of the stimulus.

Overall, the findings of the present study suggest that self-monitoring effects in consumer psychology contexts may be more complicated than sug-

gested by Snyder & DeBono (1985). For the sake of self-monitoring theory, it might be hoped that the complications come more from measurement and research design difficulties than from construct problems (cf. Lennox, 1988; Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; Miller & Thayer, 1989; Wolfe, Lennox, & Hudiburg, 1983). The potential significance of self-monitoring theory certainly justifies further investigation of the construct and its measurement.

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