

The Impact of Social Media on Communication and Popularity in the Fashion Industry

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Abstract: Recent years have seen a proliferation of fashion buzzwords on social media platforms and a transformation of the fashion industry, which is closely related to the rapid development of social media. Therefore, this paper will specifically analyze the impact of social media on various aspects of fashion communication and popularity from the perspectives of social media, fashion brands and users. This paper takes two social media platforms, Instagram and RED, as typical cases to analyze the different features of different perspective media platforms and their positive and negative impacts on the fashion industry. Through the analysis of this paper, it is found that social media influences the development of the fashion industry through influencers, new digital technology, and high efficiency and instant characteristics, which not only helps the fashion industry to transform in the context of the new era but also promotes the dissemination of fashion concepts in people's lives. At the same time, however, there are some problems found in the fashion industry that need to be improved with the help of social media, such as the need to strengthen the supervision of the way of cultural dissemination, the need to correctly guide the negative impact on the consumer's concept of consumption, and at the same time, publicize and improve the mode of production of the fashion industry, paying attention to the protection of the environment and the maintenance of sustainable development.

Keywords: social media, fashion industry, Instagram, RED, fashion brands

1. Introduction

From the popularity of CHANEL's little black dress to YSL's famous smoking suit, from today's 'Dopamine Wear' to 'Old Money Style' and 'Maillard Style', the emergence of these fashion buzzwords means that the fashion industry has moved from the concept of luxury serving a minority to serving the general public, with social media playing an important role. The fashion industry has been more accessible to the general people as social media has grown in popularity in recent years [1]. Some of the fashion terms mentioned above can be easily accessed and understood through social media platforms. For example, people can easily learn the meaning of the dopamine color palette - i.e., the layering of multiple bright and vibrant colors; or users can learn how to color coordinate clothing by mimicking the 'Maillard color response' of food. In recent years, the forms of media communication have been continuously improved and enriched, gradually building a bridge between fashion and people's everyday lives. With the development of the media industry, more and more fashion concepts and styles are influencing everyone's lives through mass media, self-media, and other media platforms,

which is the result of media diversification and the embodiment of the concept of fashion media diversification. Furthermore, the impact of social media platforms on fashion trends cannot be underestimated. Social media has become a powerful tool for disseminating fashion-related content and influencing consumer behavior, and the evolving media communication landscape is deeply integrated into people's daily lives, creating new avenues for self-expression through fashion. For a long time, people did not have a deep understanding of fashion vocabulary and styles because the fashion industry was focused on show business and luxury marketing. There were no platforms for these art forms, which could only be seen in magazines and shows, and there were very few channels for the dissemination of fashion concepts. For the public, the lack of a platform to better understand fashion buzzwords also limits their ability to engage with fashion and update their style.

Social media has altered the way people communicate and connect, and the industry of fashion is no exception. Fashion companies have been able to reach a larger audience and create awareness in previously inconceivable ways thanks to the emergence of platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. This article will analyze the significant impact that the development of mainstream social media has had on fashion communication by analyzing the performance of fashion brands and the fashion industry on the Chinese social media platform RED and the social media platforms of other countries, Instagram. Whether it is the popular social media platform RED in China or Instagram being used in other countries, they are trying their best to recommend fashion concepts and the latest fashion buzzwords to a wider group of viewers in a quick and concise way. Using images and subtle text overlays, brands are able to retain their audience in this way, even in a world of ever-shortening attention spans and great creative potential [2]. Some brands have also been able to expand their brand's audience by attracting more new users in the form of social media. For users, they can learn about the blind part of their knowledge about fashion by searching for keywords on social media in the shortest possible time through pictures and short videos. People also follow their favorite bloggers and brand marketing numbers, gradually accepting ideas and styles that might once have existed only in fashion shows. At the same time, social media platforms are a popular place for fashion brands to market and advertise [2]. With the introduction of native advertising, users no longer have to put up with unassuming and unattractive banner adverts [2].

By examining Instagram and RED as two cases to study, this paper will investigate how social media enables fashion brands to connect with consumers at a more individualized level and how influencers on these platforms have a significant impact on shaping consumer trends and fashion preferences. Additionally, the article will scrutinize how social media actively promotes local and national culture while disseminating fashion ideas. The paper will also explore the instantaneous nature of social media, which allows for real-time updates and rapid dissemination of information in the fashion industry and enables fashion brands to gather instant feedback and insights while engaging consumers. The paper will also reflect on the disadvantages of social media for the communication and development of the fashion industry, exploring the singularity of fashion styles caused by the fashion media in social media, the psychology of comparison caused by consumers who are blindly following the trend, and the contradictory relationship between some of the fast-selling products and flash fashions created by fashion brands and the environmental protection. Towards the end of the paper, the critical analysis of the whole paper will give the outlook and suggestions for the future development of fashion media, how to avoid negative consequences and how to promote a positive attitude towards life through fashion media.

2. Case Studies on Two Major Social Media

In the fashion industry, social media refers to social networking sites and other digital channels that allow firms to communicate with customers using cutting-edge technology [1]. Brands can develop their promotional systems through social media channels, allowing users to perceive and appreciate

fashion in a novel manner. Simultaneously, the rise of social media and online platforms has allowed individuals to express their opinions and comments on fashion [1]. This has provided an opportunity for people with limited knowledge of fashion to participate in the industry [1]. When individuals are interested in a particular brand's style from a fashion show or want to learn about emerging fashion terms after a fashion week, they can search for keywords on social media. They can access the content through the official accounts of fashion bloggers or fashion brands. Fashion news and knowledge can be accessed in a clear, concise, and objective manner through the content of fashion bloggers or official accounts of fashion brands. Social media platforms have given rise to several popular self-publishers who have helped to popularize the fashion industry and its concepts to a wider audience. In the following section, this study will use Instagram and RED as examples to analyze the relationship between social media, fashion brands, and consumers.

2.1. Brands and Opinion Leaders on Instagram

Instagram is a popular social media platform that provides a creative outlet for sharing everyday fashion. With more than one billion users, Instagram has transformed daily life and the culture of visual social media [3,4]. This platform exemplifies a digital cultural revolution, displaying a wide spectrum of preferences and trends [3]. It allows fashion to be showcased beyond the limitations of time and space, presenting everyday looks in a visual format [3]. It serves as an essential medium for inspiring and sustaining everyday fashion [3]. On such a digitized platform, fashion bloggers and celebrities are attracting an increasingly diverse audience to follow the news and ideas of the fashion industry.

Social media platforms are even acting as an interactive medium for fashion journalism and are no longer seen as a supplement to print magazines [1]. Some international brands, such as Yves Saint Laurent, Christian Dior, Chanel, Alexander McQueen, LOEWE, and Giorgio Armani, no longer rely on magazines and traditional media for advertising and promotion. They have registered their own accounts and posted brand news and product information in live time to keep users up to date with brand news and fashion trends, and many of them have attached official websites to their homepages, allowing users to quickly find their way to the official website and gain a deeper understanding of the brand's products. With a mobile phone, viewers can even keep up with the latest styles of Fashion Week from the biggest brands. As a result of social media, there are more and more opinion leaders in the fashion industry [5]. Some fashion bloggers also share their outfit suggestions on Instagram, attracting a large number of fans to imitate and learn from them. As consumer "opinion leaders", they know exactly what resonates with their audience and are gradually guiding their audience's fashion concepts and aesthetics with their own forms of publicity. As consumer "opinion leaders", they know exactly what resonates with their audience and are gradually shaping their audience's fashion concepts and aesthetics with their own forms of advertising.

To summarise, Instagram, as a new sustainable cultural platform for portraying ordinary life and lifestyles, enables a larger audience to live more sustainably [3]. Allows a wider audience to experience fashion culture in their lives and integrate fashion concepts into their lives.

2.2. The Role of RED for the Fashion Industry in China

RED is China's leading social media platform. It was launched on 6 June 2013 [6]. Not only does RED have a large number of active brands on its social media platform, but fashion bloggers and self-publishers are also increasingly influencing its users. RED is a socialized e-commerce platform for young people, with over 300 million registered users in 2019, including more than 100 million monthly active users [6]. The number of users continues to climb to this day. Led by a large number

of users, RED has gradually become one of the more highly used social platforms for Chinese people pursuing fashion trends.

Influencers and celebrities regularly post style tips on RED, and with the OOTDs (short for Outfit of the Day) they share, they provide more and more users with new ideas on how to dress. Knowledge influencers will also often lower the threshold of learning, rewriting obscure fashion knowledge with humorous language, close-to-life content, and vibrant three-dimensional presentation to a level that ordinary people can understand [7]. At the same time, fashion bloggers' different brands of clothing have also become more and more people's "Zhong Cao" and "Ba Cao" products. ("Zhong Cao" is a Chinese Internet buzzword, which can be translated as "Recommendation", referring to the recommendation of a commodity, stimulating people's desire to buy; "Ba Cao Ba Cao" is also a Chinese Internet buzzword, which can be translated as "Removing items from shopping cart", meaning no longer hanging on to something or removing something from the shopping cart.)

RED has also transplanted the overseas "Black Friday" promotion to China and renamed it as "Red Friday" for a big sale of goods, which reduces the price cost for consumers [6]. On RED, some new brands and individual designers also put their products directly on the platform for sale. At the same time, RED also actively cooperates with third-party e-commerce platforms, such as opening up external links to taobao.com to provide users with convenient shopping channels [8]. RED also establishes its own "community", using big data algorithms to accurately divide users into different areas so that more users can quickly find the right fashion style for themselves. When consumers have a need, they search for relevant topics on RED, browse and evaluate the content with their own practical experience, and when they find that the content is of high quality, effective and useful to them, they will naturally like, bookmark and comment on the content, which will further trigger their purchasing behavior [6].

With its diverse users, huge data capacity and extreme influence, the RED uses digitalisation to connect the fashion industry to the daily lives of more and more people, driving the commercialisation of brands while injecting fashion concepts into people's daily lives.

3. Utilising the Attributes of Social Media Platforms for the Fashion Industry

3.1. Influencers Drive Consumption and Commercialization Transformation of Brands

In social media, influencers have become key players and are often regarded as thought leaders with a significant impact on the industry [1]. Influencers play an increasingly vital role in shaping fashion choices by promoting specific brands and products. Their endorsements can quickly popularize certain fashion trends or products. When celebrities post their outfits on social media, fans tend to mimic their style, leading to increased demand for specific products or similar styles. With influencers' and celebrities' authenticity and relevant testimonial content, they build a sense of trust and connection with consumers and viewers. By endorsing certain brands, influencers can even influence their fans' purchasing decisions. Following the acquisition of a fan base, various influencers market things to their followers, including, but not limited to, testing and analysing the quality, performance, and cost-effectiveness of the products, and inspiring their followers to make purchases through their own influence [9]. Therefore, as a promotional method for the fashion industry, fashion advertisers should consider influencers, as many consumers find inspiration from their fashion styles [10]. The symbiotic relationship between Influencers and fashion brands on social media is very beneficial for both parties, as fashion bloggers gain more attention and followers along with brand recognition and partnerships, while brands enjoy higher visibility and sales through this communication channel. Influencers can grow their online communities, which in turn increases their partnerships with brands, and brands can promote their products as a result [10]. For example, in China, RED has made use of the celebrity effect to promote the commercialization of well-known

brands and independent brands nurtured by RED. A large number of celebrities and "regular bloggers" who have changed their identities through variety shows have become sharing directors, constantly marketing and recommending products to consumer circles, thus promoting e-commerce consumption [9]. At the same time, in order to better trigger consumers' active attention to fashion and in-depth understanding, RED commercialization of the luxury clothing industry has launched Fashion Talk, a fashion column, through TALK, CASE, TREND and INNOVATION four panels, for brands to create fashion events and find resonance with the new generation of young consumers. Fashion brands on social media platforms, driven by fashion bloggers, are attracting more and more consumers, and these brands have accumulated more users from different fields while transforming commercially.

3.2. New Promotional Approach on Social Media

Fashion brands are also investigating new promotional approaches to adapt to the properties of social media. In addition to relying on influencers to attract viewers and consumers, more and more fashion brands are gradually discovering more forms of promotion on social media. Nonoo became the first designer to display her collection solely on Instagram under the specifically formed account @mishanonoo_show on September 12, 2016, during New York Fashion Week, in order to better engage with consumers and audiences [11]. She also became the first designer to use insta-show in the SS16 fashion show. Since then, major brands have experimented with virtual shows, attracting more audiences and consumers. Fashion Week also launched an online version of the show, with real-time updates of the shows on the Instagram account @fashionweekonline, allowing audiences to watch live broadcast videos of the fashion week shows even during COVID-19. With the rise of virtual events, fashion shows on social media platforms allow consumers to access the latest designer collections on the go. For example, Vogue and Snapchat collaborated on a travelling show that debuted in June 2022 at the Centre d'art La Malmaison in Cannes, using cutting-edge augmented reality technology to amplify and transform the creations of six of the world's leading fashion brands and designers: Dior, Kenneth Ize, Richard Quinn, Stella McCartney, Thebe Magugu, and Versace are among the designers represented [12]. Moreover, it is not just augmented reality technology that's used to show off the work of brands or designers. There is a potential gap between how a brand looks to its target customers and how it actually feels [13]. To mitigate this disparity and improve all aspects of the consumer online shopping experience and overall customer satisfaction, major brands have begun to experiment with AR-based and VR-based try-ons to provide consumers with a more holistic visualisation of how a product appears and feels. For example, using AR-based try-on, it is possible to combine some virtual components from a real scene to simulate a variety of different virtual scenarios and then help users try on clothes according to different wearing requirements [14]. Meanwhile, the beauty websites of many famous fashion brands have AR-based try-on functions to provide consumers with the most intuitive product feelings. China's RED has also launched a fashion "virtual show" format which is also for fashion cutting-edge information dissemination to bring the differentiated value of major favorable content forms. RED has become the most suitable position for brands to do online shows. For the old brand, the form of online live broadcast can not only break the stereotypes of young consumers on the brand but also have new power to launch more new products that follow the trend of the times to attract more consumers. For new brands, it can be a faster way to promote the brand through live broadcasting and improve the brand's commercial conversion process. Through high ratings and the connection these audiences have with celebrities, the style and identity generated on social media determine the general stylization of people's everyday lives and maximise the value of fashion goods [3].

3.3. The Connection Brands Make with Consumers

Social media has the immediacy and efficiency that other forms of media do not have, not only in its promotion for brands but also in its ability to provide a platform for consumer feedback and build a bridge between brands and consumers. Today, social media is considered a trend that can influence the consumer buying process to a certain extent [15]. Customers can directly interact and share their buying experience [15]. It is vital for designers and brands to stay connected with their customers by using online platforms to welcome them as part of the brand community [1]. Brands can collect reliable user feedback on online transactions through user review columns on social media platforms and can also communicate with users on product issues in the first instance. At the same time, fashion companies use social media to advertise and reach their target customers easily [15]. Furthermore, social media has evolved into an alternate marketing tool to traditional marketing, where enterprises may access customer statistics to assist them in enhancing future product development [15]. Consumers can reply immediately to ideas, comments, and suggestions regarding the items supplied to them via social media [15]. This allows them to obtain the items they desire more readily [15]. After the transaction is completed, consumers communicate their purchase experience through social media, providing brands with authentic user feedback.

At the same time, brands can use big data in social media to capture consumers' interests and consumption habits for precision marketing. Users' spontaneous sharing of information through the platform is also conducive to the marketing of fashion products, as the voluntary customer evaluation system not only ensures the authenticity and accuracy of the information but also helps to enhance the brand image and brand awareness and reduces marketing costs.

Taking RED as an example, with the development of Cloud Computing, through the collection of everyone's browsing, searching and purchasing records, big data analysis and decision-making, it can more accurately locate the needs of each consumer, and enterprises can use big data to make predictions about consumer demand and produce products that may be explosively popular [6]. Whether for individual users or brands, with RED's high-quality content ecosystem and innovative solutions brought by the commercialization team, personalized style trends and fashion concepts can be showcased and disseminated. RED's consumer analytics have drawn a huge number of emerging companies to the platform, allowing multi-party engagements between consumers, brands, and their content providers [8]. Mature and emerging brands are able to capture the trends at RED in a timely manner and complete efficient product iterations, as well as establish or rebrand their brand image. For international fashion and luxury brands, RED is the ideal place to reveal the latest consumer trends in China [16]. Brands can then devise Chinese social media and marketing strategies that align with these trends [16]. It also offers an unprecedented opportunity to gain visibility in the Chinese market [16]. Some famous brands have attracted many consumers through RED. Consumers can respond directly to the opinions, critiques and recommendations of the products offered to them [15]. At the same time, consumers can also retrieve user reviews of brands and recommendations from internet celebrities through social media platforms such as RED and evaluate branded products from a personal perspective. Social media software has become a powerful enabler for the fashion industry, bringing complete and disruptive upgrades to the whole cycle of branding and product diffusion, creative diffusion, and in-depth user interaction from brand building to consumer conversion.

4. Social Media Platforms Facilitate the Fashion Industry to Improve its Shortcomings

Social media can also spread the cultural concepts of different countries and regions in a more colloquial way. Through social media, fashion cultures from different regions can be integrated and exchanged, and popular culture can be spread into more people's daily lives through the fashion industry, allowing more people to understand the diversity of different cultures. Popular culture is

able to spread into people's daily lives, enriching individuals' understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. In addition, social media serves as a bridge to connect people from different cultures, facilitating the exchange of ideas and traditions on a global scale. This worldwide convergence not only celebrates diversity but also promotes cross-cultural understanding and solidarity.

At the same time, however, social media is gradually leading to an understanding of the fashion industry's deficiencies in the comprehension, use, and dissemination of culture. An example of this is the issue of cultural appropriation and cultural misappropriation in the fashion industry. Jessica Metcalf contends that cultural appropriation occurs on a daily basis, particularly in the fashion industry [17]. It is an amorphous concept based on borrowing, sharing, and being influenced by different cultures [17]. Fashion cannot be developed without culture, so designers need a mix of cultures from different countries or between different races. There is a long tradition of cultures learning from each other for the general advancement of civilization [17]. However, cultural appropriation and cultural misappropriation are not the same concepts. Cultural misappropriation, according to Susan Scafidi, is the unauthorised stealing of intellectual property, traditional wisdom, cultural expressions, or cultural items from another society [17]. For example, the use of American Indian imagery in product branding, such as traditional headdresses and other cultural symbols, and the promotion of negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples in advertisements, do not encourage cultural appropriation of Native American Indians in the United States [18]. However, for a long time, cultural appropriation such as this has not been taken more seriously, and the concept of cultural appropriation is not well understood by the younger generation. However, news of a new dress designed by Dior in 2022 involving cultural appropriation has taken the internet by storm. A Dior dress with a price tag of 29,000 RMB (about \$4,295) bears a surprising resemblance, both in design and effect on the body, to the Chinese Hanfu Mamian skirt [19]. Soon after the product was launched, attentive netizens noticed the similarity between the dress and the Chinese Horse Face Dress. With the help of social media networks, many netizens not only found comparative pictures of the Chinese Horse Face Dress and the Dior dress but also spread the news quickly with the help of social media platforms, which led to Dior having to take the dress off the shelves in the end. Because of the increasingly rapid spread of news on social media platforms, more and more people are paying attention and understanding the boundaries of cultural appropriation. This is a better way for fashion brands to be monitored, and through user communication on social media, the fashion industry is not only able to spread culture quickly but also gradually realize the deficiencies in their own industry, actively drawing on the opinions of their audience to improve on their weaknesses and spreading culture in a positive and affirmative way.

5. Reflection and Critique: the Negative Impact of Social Media on Fashion Distribution and Development

The impact of social media on the communication and development of the fashion industry also has some disadvantages, which makes it worthwhile for both the fashion industry and the social media industry to reflect seriously and find ways to improve and optimize. Led by social media influencers and celebrities, consumers' mindless following of trends can affect their self-judgment of aesthetics, which can then lead to the homogenization of fashion on social media. Some claim that social media causes consistency and uniformity in attire, which trumps individual originality and distinctiveness [20]. Young audiences and consumers can be influenced by these media leaders and lose their creativity and judgement. Fashion should be a way for us to develop and communicate our identity to the world [20]. However, social media seems to increasingly homogenize personal style rather than celebrate individuality [20]. The creative spirit and a little individualism that the younger generation

needs to have been gradually being buried, and young people are just blindly following the fashions in social media and losing the ability to create new fashions.

The use of social media also promotes a sense of competitiveness among some consumers, which often leads to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Many social media platforms display carefully curated and idealized versions of the lives of influencers and celebrities, making it easy for others to compare themselves unfavorably. As a result, users may feel pressure to portray their lives in the best possible light, creating a circular cycle of comparison and resentment. For example, most bloggers in the RED community operation recommend goods to their fans and non-fan users by reviewing higher-end cosmetics, branded clothing, jewelers, etc., which promotes the emergence of overspending, blind following, and constant comparison behaviors among some university students [9]. As students who are not yet financially capable of repaying their debts, comparison and overspending will have a great impact on their psychological pressure and, at the same time, encourage bad habits such as extravagance and wastefulness. At the same time, when consumers choose fashion items, they may follow the products recommended by social media celebrities, and instead of pursuing quality, they may go for luxury or expensive products.

As for the fashion industry itself, the over-ambitious pursuit of consumer satisfaction and the constant emergence of fast fashion has led to another noteworthy issue: the environmental impact of the low-quality garments and fashion items produced by fast fashion. The fashion business has a massive and widespread environmental effect [21]. In recent years, the problem of the low quality of the materials used in ready-to-wear garments on major fashion shows has come to the fore, with cheap clothing being sold on social media under the guise of "fast fashion" or "low-cost access to designer labels", which is of very low quality. Given the global expansion of fast fashion and the volume of things created and discarded, the fashion industry poses a significant environmental risk [21]. There is no denying that social media has revolutionized the way people buy clothes, but it has also come at a huge environmental cost. The manner in which items are manufactured, acquired, used, and discarded has a wide-ranging impact on the environment [22]. The high rate of production of low-quality clothing leads to excessive waste and pollution, posing a serious threat to our planet's ecosystem. The increased production and consumption of fast fashion products have led to the release of large amounts of textile waste, as well as harmful chemical pollutants, into the environment.

At the same time, excessive water consumption, pollution from chemical treatments used in dyeing and preparation, and the disposal of vast numbers of unsold stock via incineration or landfill make apparel one of the most environmentally damaging businesses on the globe [23]. A large amount of non-recyclable materials are used in the preparation and set-up of every major fashion show, including the annual Fashion Week. This poses a serious challenge to environmental sustainability and requires urgent attention and immediate action by consumers and industry participants to safeguard environmental sustainability.

6. Conclusion

This article provides an in-depth analysis of the impact of social media platforms on the fashion industry from the perspectives of fashion brands and consumers through case studies of two social media platforms, Instagram and RED, respectively. By comparing the features of two social media platforms from different countries, this article finds that different social media platforms influence the direction of the fashion industry from different degrees. For Instagram, driven by social media platforms, more and more internationally renowned fashion brands have gradually completed the transition from offline shows and newspapers and magazines to digitalization, and at the same time, a number of opinion leaders have been born and led more users to understand and experience different fashion styles. For RED, which is more popular in China, influencers are leading more and more consumers to understand fashion buzzwords and pursue their own styles, while RED's unique mode

of operation has also led to the development of online shopping. Influential people play a big role in social media, and their fashion ideas influence consumers' purchasing behavior and drive the promotion of fashion brands. At the same time, the efficiency and immediacy of social media has not only given birth to a new online live promotional operation model but also enabled barrier-free communication between brands and consumers. Social media exposure has also become a means of regulating the fashion industry, allowing the cultural dissemination of the fashion industry to move towards a positive trend.

The research in this article facilitates the planning and improvement of future operations of social media platforms and provides ideas and directions for the development of social media platforms. The fashion industry can optimize its marketing strategies and improve its deficiencies within the industry by studying the impact aspects of social media platforms in this article. Naturally, social media has a negative influence on the fashion sector; this article also points out some aspects that need to be improved and reflected upon. In the future, social media should optimize the process of pushing fashion words to avoid the homogenization of fashion and, at the same time, to strengthen the supervision of the content released on the platform to avoid the adverse impact of the released content on the users and to correctly guide the young users to establish a correct concept of consumption, and try to prevent the emergence of Over-consumption or comparing and following the trend. For the fashion industry, the pursuit of product iteration should also strictly control product quality to avoid environmental pollution caused by improper handling of low-quality products and, where possible, to encourage industry insiders and consumers to use environmentally friendly materials to ensure sustainable development of the fashion industry.

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