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Article:	Trivializing the Crime through Indifference: A Critical Discourse Analysis of News Headlines on the Assassination of Afzal Kohistani
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ABSTRACT

It is hypothesized that with the help of styling/framing and the language used in the news reports, the least important story can be turned into a top story, and similarly a very important issue can be sidelined. The present study investigates the news related to the assassination of Afzal Kohistani, who raised his voice against honor killings in Kohistan. The study aims at identifying the various linguistic features used by the mainstream print media about the assassination of Afzal Kohistani. Furthermore, the study unveils the effect of such linguistic choices on meaning projection. The data has been gathered from five local Urdu newspapers, four national and seven international English newspapers, and news agencies that reported this event on 7th March 2019. The critical discourse analysis provides the theoretical underpinning; furthermore, Van Dijk's (2001) and Olowe's (1993) approaches have been used for the data analysis. The finding establishes that the topic is trivialized despite the importance of the issue. Moreover, the intensity of the incident is toned down by the indifferent approach of some reporting agencies.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, News reporting, Afzal Kohistani, Honour killing, Style

1. Introduction

UNICEF defines the term honor killing as:

"An ancient practice in which men kill female relatives in the name of family 'honor' for forced or suspected sexual activity outside marriage, even when they are the victims of rape."

Though the definition given above describes the act of honor killing restricted only to women but Section. 299 of Pakistan Penal Code, 1860 defines this notion into more a neutral term: "Offence committed in the name or on the pretext of honor means an offense committed in the name or on the pretext of *Karo Kari*, *siyah Kari* or similar other customs or practices".

The situation of Pakistan related to violence against women is very bleak and dark. Pakistan has been considered as world's third most dangerous country for women. The statistics related to such a heinous crime are more alarming, as it is observed by Human Rights Commission that 15222 women were killed in the name of honor during 2004-2016. Only in the year 2017, 837 women were killed to reinforce and safeguard the name, grace, and esteem of a family, tribe, or community.

Killing in the name of honor is a serious issue and needs to be addressed by the state of the country. As media has a significant role to play in disseminating news and information across the globe, similarly, it is a strong tool for educating the masses and shaping their mindsets. Mahmood (2018) considers media as the fourth pillar of the state besides judiciary, legislature, and executive. The print media has a deep influence in formulating opinions, creating and challenging the dominant perceptions. The media has the power to turn a trivial matter into a breaking story and to sideline any significant incident. According to Van Dijk (1995), the media manipulates the news and gives it prominence if it is considered important by the elites of that newspaper. Similarly, the news event is emphasized and deemphasized with the way the event is reported by the news reporter. Hence, the study at hand is the analysis of the newspaper reporting dealing with the burning social issue of honor killing.

According to Van Dijk (1997), the editorials and articles are the representation of the opinion of the editor. The ideological affiliation influences the opinion and thus is rendered in the discourse structure of the newspaper. The present study is an investigation of one of the significant cases reported to the high judiciary of Pakistan which was an incident of honor killing reported in the Kohistan region where four girls and two boys were killed on the ground that they had brought a bad name to the family. Afzal Kohistani was the brother of the murdered boys. He reached the Supreme Court of Pakistan to provide them justice but was also killed on the 7th of March, 2019. This study is an endeavor to analyze the newspaper reporting related to the murder of Afzal Kohistani. The study is significant as honor killing is one of the sensitive social issues of Pakistan and is required to be discussed for bringing awareness among the masses. The main objective of this research is to analyze the news reporting on the murder of Afzal Kohistani to explore the hidden relationship between language use and ideological construction.

1.1. Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this research are:

- To analyze the linguistic features used in the headlines of Urdu and English newspapers on the murder of Afzal Kohistani
- To highlight the similarities and differences in the headlines of Urdu and English newspapers reporting the same incident
- To examine the construction of covert and overt meaning as given with the help of certain framing of the news

1.2. Research Questions

This study investigates to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the linguistic features used in the headlines of the national and international newspapers and editorials dealing with the news of the murder of Kohistani?
- 2) How is the portrayal of Kohistani similar to/different from the national and international newspaper articles and editorials?
- 3) How is the issue of honor killing being raised by the national and international newspapers and editorials?

2. Literature Review

Being considered old-fashion, the newspaper is still a popular and preferable source of disseminating information and news (Youssefi, Kanani, & Shojaei, 2013). Besides information, newspapers and news articles perform the role of influencer in shaping and molding the perspectives of the reader as this medium has a significant part in depicting and narrating issues related to society (Mahmood, Javed, & Mahmood, 2011). While discussing and highlighting the problems of society, the selection of the words in newspapers has ideological significance. These hidden meanings and intentions are exposed with the aid of CDA (Fairclough, 1995). CDA is a systematic study of the means through which power abuse, dominance, and disparity are constructed, endorsed, and resisted in a society (Van Dijk, 2004). Many studies have been carried out from a CDA perspective to understand the relationship between the use of language and the meaning construction in the newspapers. According to Van Dijk (1995), the selection of words in media is always ideologically motivated and to unveil such practices in the discourse is the basic facet of CDA.

Mahmood, Kausar, & Khan (2018) carried out research related to newspaper ideology by analyzing the news reporting of Dawn News and The New York Times on the 16 December attack on Army Public School. For data analysis, the ideological square model of Van Dijk was employed as an analytical framework. The analysis was carried out through the investigation of the lexical choices and syntactic structures. The results of the study demonstrate that The New York Times presented the given event in a more neutral custom as compared to Dawn. The assailants were identified as Taliban by The New York Times but on the contrary, Dawn reported the attackers as militants. The New York Times portrayed a visible demarcation between us and them but such sentiments were vague in the reporting of Dawn News. Hence, the news reporting of Dawn was different from New York Times keeping into consideration the ideological affinity of the newspapers.

Taiwo (2007) carried out a critical discourse analysis of newspaper headlines of Nigeria. A total of three hundred newspaper headlines were randomly selected from six Nigerian

newspapers and they were scrutinized for distinctive features related to vocabulary and rhetorical devices used to identify the hidden ideological construction. A study of the newspaper headlines revealed that there was significant ideological meaning lying under the structure. A division could be found in the representation of the views of those whose interests were being served and those whose interests were being undermined. The study concluded that headlines are an emotion-inducing strategy in the hands of the editor used to initiate and sustain discourse and shape the views of the readers on national issues.

Miranti (2014) touched upon the issue of illegal immigrants and their portrayal in two prominent news agencies: the New York Times and the Washington Times. The study investigated the ideological positioning of both these newspaper agencies, using the analytical framework of transitivity. She discussed the relevance of linguistic choices in the propagation of certain ideological postulations. The results demonstrated that material processes were more dominant in both texts. However, the participants varied in selected texts. In New York Times, undocumented immigrants were represented as victims and were attributed positively. On the contrary, undocumented immigrants were considered to be trouble makers and were projected negatively. The findings suggested that ideologically The New York Times is pro-immigrant and wants their readers to support the enactment of immigration reforms. On the contrary, the Washington Times is conservative and anti-immigrant. The study reinforces the relationship between language use and ideological positioning.

Bukhari (2015) examined the coverage of incidents of major bomb blasts in Pakistan. The study aimed to highlight the significant features employed by the print news media in representing and reporting certain events. The study scrutinized the news headlines from the lens of critical discourse analysis, selecting two daily Urdu and English newspapers respectively from June to September 2013. It also expounded how the same incident was reported differently based on the respective news media ideology, therefore, converging to the agenda-setting of the news. The finding demonstrated that the Urdu newspapers, which have a dominant readership, sensationalized the news; however, English newspapers adopted a milder tone. With Critical Discourse Analysis, it has been established that there could be a varied interpretation of the headlines covering the same event based on its ideological affinity. Align with the aims of the above research; Ulum (2016) explored the stance of the newspaper editors on the issue of Syrian refugees in Turkish and European newspaper headlines. The Turkish media highlighted the suffering of Syrian Refugees and depicted them as the victim of the circumstances. Contrary to this, the European media portrayed them as trouble makers and a security risk. Hence, it is concluded that the selection of particular linguistic choices leads towards certain ideological positioning of the writer.

Bhanbhro (2015) examined editorials, articles, pictures, letters to the editor, and stories related to 'honor killings during the year 2013 by employing a critical discourse analysis approach. The objective was to explicate the social effects of discourse and how relationships, people, and events are portrayed in media dealing with honor killing. The study discovered that the term 'honour killing' is overly used in mass media to report multiple incidents. The overwhelming use of the term 'honour killing/murder' in media has made some kind of legitimacy around this inhuman act. Generally, reporting and representation of murders in the name of honor are limited to the victim-perpetrator sphere that disguises the wider background causes and information in which that event took place. Consequently, the news reporting illustrates the event of honor killing as a

family or private affair, which provides an excuse to law enforcement institutions including police and judiciary to avoid interference. The study concluded that the discourse created by media gives the message that in Pakistani society, the life of an individual is not precious than the name and grace of the family and hence, makes it hard to argue on the social and cultural practices that protect such crimes.

The present study is an endeavor to understand the stance of local Urdu dailies, and national and international English newspaper headlines on the assassination of Afzal Kohistani. Furthermore, unveiling the ideology operating behind the selection of certain lexical choices made in these headlines is also the focus of the study.

3. Methodology

This research is qualitative and examines the construction of certain ideologies with the use of certain linguistic choices made by the local Urdu and English newspaper editorials and news headlines. The data has been gathered from five Urdu newspapers of March 7, 2019, namely: Mashriq, Nawa-e-Waqt, Aaj, Jung, and Nai Baat. The headlines of these newspapers have been compared with the local English newspapers namely: Dawn, Express Tribune, The Nation, and The News. Furthermore, The Editorial headings from 7 international newspapers are also considered for the analysis of the data. Van Dijk (2001) describes that the selection of particular topicalization or argument development persuasively presents an ideology to the viewers. The critical discourse analysis approach as given by Van Dijk (2001) and Olowe (1993) provides theoretical underpinning.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

All the headlines are divided into two categories which are the plain headlines and the headlines with pointers.

4.1. The different categories of headlines

i. Plain Headlines

Plain headlines are considered the reporting of an event in the form of a simple statement. The media discourse is always laden with some ideological stance/position which can be excavated with the help of close analysis of the text. Following are the Urdu newspaper headlines reporting the incident of the murder of Kohistani:

Mashriq:

- *Kohistan video scandal ka midday Abbottabad mein qatal*

Aaj:

- *Kohistan video scandal ke muddai Afzal Kohistani ko Abbottabad mein qatal kar diya gaya, teen afracad zakhmi*

Express:

- *Kohistan video scandal kay muddai ko qatal kar diya gaya.*

Jang

- *Kohistan video scandal case mein firing, mushrik qatal.*

ii. Speech as Headline

These headlines take the speech or statement made by an individual and use it to authenticate the news.

NDTV:

- *Pak Man Seeking Justice for Honour Killings Shot Dead by Nephew: Police*

The Washington Post:

- *A Pakistani man told me he feared he'd be killed for exposing honor killings. His worst fear just came true.*

iii. Headlines with Pointers

These headlines present the ideology of the journalist or the editor with the selection of certain lexical and syntactical choices which will be discussed in full length in the next section of the analysis.

- *Pak Man Seeking Justice for Honour Killings Shot Dead by Nephew: Police*
- *A Pakistani man told me he feared he'd be killed for exposing honor killings. His worst fear just came true*
- *Afzal Kohistani: Honour killing whistleblower shot dead*
- *Afzal kohistani: calls for justice after honor killing activist's murder.*
- *How Afzal Kohistani, the brave man who challenged honor killing in Pakistan's tribal belt lost his life*
- *The death of whistle-blower*
- *Pakistani boy, who exposed murders of girls killed for singing-dancing, shot dead.*
- *Afzal Kohistani—The man who spearheaded Kohistani's fight against choar custom.*

4.2. Linguistic Features of the Headings

According to Olowe (1993), certain linguistic features provide an insight into the ideology propagated in the news headlines. For the analysis of the headlines, nominalization, passivization, and thematization is employed. According to Van Dijk (2001), the most significant component for the study of language and ideology is the examination of lexical items used in the text. The choices of words lead straight to the ideological positioning of the language user. These words can express a value judgment but also with the help of predicates, communicate the opinion. The expressions used for Afzal Kohistani in Urdu and English news headlines reflect the opinion and ideology of the newspaper. These linguistic choices are quite contrasting in their frame and perception. The expressions used for Kohistani in Urdu, local English newspapers, and international media are as follows:

Table 1

The Expressions Used for Afzal Kohistani in the News Headlines by Urdu Newspapers

Sr.No	Newspaper	Expressions used for Kohistani
1.	Mashriq	Kohistan video scandal ka muddai
2.	Aaj	Kohistan video scandal kay muddai
3.	Jang	Muhrik
4.	Dunya	Kohistan video scandal ka muddai

Table 2

The Expressions Used for Afzal Kohistani in the News Headlines by International Media

Sr. No	Newspaper	Expressions used for Kohistani
1	BBC News	Whistleblower 'honor Killing' activist Whistleblower Afzal Kohistani
2	NDTV	Pak Man
3	Gulf News Asia	brave man The victim
4	India Today	Pakistani boy National figure
5	The Washington Post	A Pakistani man Honour-killing
6	The Guardian	Whistleblower

Table 3

The Expressions Used for Kohistani in the Headlines by Pakistani English Newspapers

Sr. No	Newspaper	Expressions used for Kohistani
1	The Express Tribune	Afzal Kohistani, Whistle-blower
2	Dawn News	Spearheaded Kohistani
3	The Nation	Honour Killing Whistle Blower

The above expressions demonstrate that the focus of Urdu newspapers is more on the video scandal case and therefore, the role of Kohistani has been ignored. In these headlines, the real efforts of Kohistani, his strong character, and the threats which he faced are all neglected. Contrary to this, English newspapers highlighted the struggle of Afzal Kohistani and associated him with the broader perspective of society. He has been presented as an activist, a social reformer, and a courageous man who challenged the inhuman tribal customs. Interestingly, the Indian media highlighted the association of Kohistani with Pakistan, as in both the headlines he has been called a *Pakistani boy*. Such a section of words is significant from the broader perspective of the India-Pakistan relationship and reflects the internal politics of both countries.

4.3. Thematization

McGregor (2003) describes thematization as the framing of a sentence. This feature of headlines offers the perspective or viewpoint of a reporter to attract the reader by putting something on topic position. The English headlines from both Pakistan and international media highlight the courage and strong character of Kohistani while the Urdu newspaper headlines highlight only the event of killing as a result of a video scandal.

English newspaper:

Afzal Kohistani: Honour Killing whistleblower shot dead. (BBC News)

A Pakistani man told me he feared he'd be killed for exposing honor killings. (The Washington Post)

Outrage as honor-killing whistleblower shot dead in Pakistan. (The Guardian)

All the above headlines report the same event but from different perspectives. The BBC news highlights the personal character of the participant by putting his name at the topic position. Contrary to BBC, 'The Washington Post' highlights the threats and danger to his life. This headline foregrounds the risk which Kohistani was facing due to challenging the tribal customs. The next headline from 'The Guardian' highlights the reaction of the people to the murder of Kohistani.

The pattern of thematization of Urdu newspapers is given below:

Kohistan video scandal case, Abbotabad mein firing, muhrik qatal (Jang)

Kohistan video scandal kay mudai Afzal Kohistani ko Abbottabad mein qatal kar dia gaya, teen afraad zakhmee. (Aaj)

In both these headlines, the topic is the video scandal. The headline of Jang highlights the case of the video scandal and represents the act of killing due to the case against the party. The name of the victim is not mentioned in the first headline. Similarly, the significant role of Kohistani as an activist or a human rights worker has been skipped. Furthermore, by not mentioning the name of the participant, Kohistani has been considered as an ordinary person from the masses with no significant social role.

The headline of daily newspaper *Aaj* also highlights the case of video scandal with further elaboration of the event by reporting the injury of three other persons besides Kohistani, but the newspaper is silent about his overall struggle as reported by English newspapers.

4.4. Agency and Passivization

Agency demonstrates the involvement of an actor in the performance of certain actions. In headlines, the description of agency can refer to the perspective of the writer. The agency can portray a positive image of the actor and can equally reflect a negative picture of the same participant. Such selection represents the power dimensions as well that who has the power to initiate and who is the ultimate recipient. In English news headings, Kohistani is involved in raising his voice against honor killing. He has been portrayed as an activist to bring awareness about the violence in the name of *honor*. The headlines representing Kohistani as the strong voice against such oppressive customs are the following:

- *A whistleblower who exposed honor killing in the country.*
- *How Afzal kohistani the brave man who challenged honor killing in Pakistan tribal belt, lost his life.*
- *The victim has exposed honor killing of a group of boys and girls by a tribal council.*
- *Afzal Kohistani—the man who spearheaded Kohistanis fight against choar custom.*

Contrary to the above-given headlines, the Urdu newspaper headlines present a passive picture of Kohistani and emphasize the event of murder where he is at the receiving end. Furthermore, the participant involved in this act has been ignored by the passive construction of the headlines.

Mashriq and Jang 7th March 2019

- *Kohistan video scandal ka muddai Abbottabad mein qatal*
- *Kohistan video scandal case, Abbottabad mein firing, Muhrik qatal.*

4.5. Application of Van Dijk Model of Critical Discourse Analysis

Van Dijk's model (2001) of critically analyzing news discourse can also be applied to assassination news for further understanding how significant news stories can be slightly touched in order not to send ripples into the conservative pool. This model provides three levels of analysis: micro and macro semantic proposition, local meaning, and global superstructure.

i. BBC News - March 8, 2019

Afzal Kohistani: calls for justice after 'honor killing' activist's murder.

Pakistani activists are calling for a high-level judiciary inquiry into the murder of a whistleblower who exposed "honor killing" in the country.

a. The Semantic Macro-Proposition

The headline consists of a headline and a subheading. This headline reports the event of the murder of Afzal Kohistani but also highlights the reaction from civil society and human rights activists. The heading artfully summarizes three interconnected events. The first part highlights the reaction of the society, the second part foregrounds his struggle against the tribal customs and the third part is about the event of his murder. A chain of events has been enclosed in one brief headline.

b. Local Meaning: Main Participants, Description, and Lexicalization

The news heading presents the event of killing and the cause and the effect of this event. The major cause of the murder has been considered his activism against the *honor killing*. Further, the reaction to his murder is anger in society and is demonstrated by protest. It has been presented that it is an unjust and cruel act. The word choices *whistleblower* and *activist* portray him as the informer against unfair practices in society. The headline also implied that the wrongdoers are still free and the government and law have failed to punish the culprits.

c. The Global Superstructure

This headline summarizes the chain of events after the murder of Afzal Kohistani. The headline highlights the causes of the event and further its reaction in society. Furthermore, the power of the conservative mentality has been described implicitly as the people are out on the road for protest but the murderers are out of the reach of the law.

ii. NDTV India - March 8, 2019

Pak Man Seeking Justice For Honour Killing Shot Dead by Nephew: Police

a. The Semantic Macro-Proposition

This headline provides the source of the information to authenticate the news. This headline highlights the background of the victim which is Pakistani, then his efforts for seeking justice, and then his murder. In a nutshell, this headline reports the story of the murder of Kohistani who was asking for justice in Pakistan against honor killings.

b. Local Meanings: Main Participants, Description, and Lexicalization

This headline explicitly identifies both the participants as Actors and Receivers. The nephew has been considered as the murderer although it is quite early to say. Secondly, his struggle has been represented against honor killing.

c. The Global Superstructure

The heading of the editorial on the webpage of NDTV India implied that Pakistani society is an unjust society and thus the victims of honor killing cannot get justice but are killed. If on one

hand, the headline highlights the strong character of the victim, then on the other, it represents a picture of Pakistani society where justice is always delayed and violence prevails.

iii. The Washington Post - March 8, 2019

A Pakistani man told me he feared he'd be killed for exposing 'honor killings. His worst fear just came true.

a. The Semantic Macro-Proposition

This headline highlights the threats to the life of Kohistani. His life was at risk but even then he could not be protected from the horrifying end. The cause of his murder has been explicated as his voicing against the honor killing.

b. Local Meanings: Main Participants, Description, and Lexicalization

The main participant of the event is Kohistani himself. His own words have been taken for framing this heading and thus, the event of murder has been emphasized. His origin has been highlighted and is described as an intolerant and conservative society where people are killed if they try to stand against the dominant group or discourse. Thus, on one hand, Kohistani has been represented as the activist in exposing and raising his voice against the social oppression but at the same time, the government agencies and public have been represented as helpless to stop the crime to happen although it was warned.

c. The Global Superstructure

This headline represents the stronghold of the anti-societal forces that can threaten and even kill the people, and that the government machinery has failed in protecting the people who differ from them.

iv. Aaj - March 8, 2019

Kohistan video scandal ka mudai Afzal Kohistani ko Abbottabad mein Qatal kar diya gaya, teen afrac zakhmi

v. Mashriq - March 8, 2019

Kohistan video scandal ka mudai Abbottabad mein qatal

a. Semantic Macro-Proposition

Both of the given Urdu newspaper headlines are different from the meaning point of view. In both of these headlines, the murder of Afzal Kohistani has been repeated but without identifying the cause of the murder. The reporting is precise and many details which were provided in the English news headings are missing in the given news headlines. The nature of the case and its link with the honor killing has been backgrounded. Thus, the intensity of the event has been mellowed by the omission of certain details.

b. Local Meanings: Main Participants, Description, and Lexicalization

The headline represents Kohistani as the recipient of the action but the doer is missing in the headlines. Afzal Kohistani has been described as the petitioner in a video scandal case but beyond that, no information is provided. The event has been presented as an event with no social implication. The selection of the word *Scandal* itself turns down the intensity of the event as the whole event of honor killing has been made controversial.

c. Global Superstructure

Both of the headlines are the same in meaning and report the murder of Afzal Kohistani in a brief headline. The related context and the role of Kohistani against the tribal customs are missing.

vi. Jang – March 8, 2019

Kohistan video scandal case, Abbottabad mein firing, muhrik qathal

a. Semantic Macro-Proposition

The headline reports the murder of a person involved in the case. This headline even didn't mention the name of the victim. The place of the firing is also highlighted. The cause and effect relation in this event is also missing. The nature of the case is assumed to be known to the reader therefore such information is also lacking in the heading.

b. Local Meanings: Main Participants, Description and Lexicalization

The actor is missing in the headline, as is the name of the victim. The news is reported in the way an incident of firing is covered in the newspaper. The relationship of the event with honor killing is also missing. The news headline backgrounds the relationship of honor killing and the firing event. Thus, the event is reported very casually where some important information is missing. Kohistani has been represented as *muhrik*. Again the word scandal has been used which questions even the authenticity of the news of the killing of five girls and two boys.

c. Global Superstructure

The efforts of Kohistani have been ignored and therefore, the event was reported as a personal and private matter with no social implications.

4. Conclusion

This study probed the news reporting of English and Urdu news headlines on the event of murder of Afzal Kohistani. For analysis of the data, Pakistani and International news headlines both in Urdu and English were selected. The data were analyzed in the light of critical discourse analysis by employing Van Dijk and Olowe's model. The findings reported a sharp contrast between the representation of the same event in Urdu and English daily newspapers.

The stance of local and international English newspapers is in sharp contrast with the Urdu newspaper. Both types of headlines propagate their perspective and stand with their ideological positioning, keeping into consideration the expectation of the readers. The local and international English headlines portray a positive image of Kohistani and highlight his heroism, courage, and bravery for challenging tribal customs. He has been depicted as an asset of society who tried to

bring awareness among the masses against oppression in the name of honor. He has been considered as the voice of the unheard but ironically, the Urdu newspapers keep themselves distant from the event and report the news as a private and personal matter. In these headlines, the focus is on the event of killing but the efforts which have been highlighted in the English news have been neglected altogether. Urdu newspaper reported him as a petitioner and did not project his services for the overall community. If on one hand, English newspaper headlines represent him as the whistleblower, vocalist, and activist who gave a speech to the suppressed sect of the society, then, on the other hand, the Urdu news headlines turned him mute by omitting many of the details of the news. The trivialization of such an important issue as honor killing and backgrounding many of the significant information is criminal negligence which has been committed by the Urdu newspapers.

The study also highlighted the relationship between language and ideology. On one hand, the English newspapers strongly supported Kohistani for his fight against honor killing and his stance on suppression of people in the name of tribal norms and customs, hence, they represented liberal ideology, but on other hand, Urdu newspaper represented a conservative outlook by not foregrounding the struggle of Kohistani.

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