| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Transcultural Efficacy in Translation: A Skopos Comparative Analysis of Arabic and English Advertisements

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| **ABSTRACT**

There is a growing emphasis on localized advertisements that resonate with specific cultural or regional audiences. Translation is essential in this, making such content accessible and relatable to a wider audience from varied cultural backgrounds. This study zeroes in on the comparison of advertisements in Arabic and English, representative of the eastern and western consumer markets. We employ two theoretical lenses: the *Skopos theory* of Vermeer and *Text Analysis* model of Nord. Through this study, we aim to ascertain the effectiveness of translating advertisements between these two linguistic domains. Results hint that the challenge is not solely linguistic. Indeed, components such as regional distinctions, individual preferences, and pragmatic requirements come into play. That is why it becomes evident that for successful advertisement translation, linguistic expertise alone is not enough; a profound understanding of cultural differences is equally imperative to ensure the core message and appeal of the advertisement remain potent across different countries.

1. Introduction

In an age where the world is more connected than ever before, advertising has evolved as the lynchpin of modern commerce, wielding unparalleled influence over consumer perceptions and choices. This power of advertising hinges not merely on its aesthetic appeal or memorable slogans, but fundamentally on its ability to forge a deep-seated resonance with its intended audience. The strategic alchemy behind effective advertising is multifaceted, encompassing decisions on content crafting, optimal timing, selection of mediums, and pinpointing precise demographic segments (Fletcher, 2010). As a bridge facilitating dialogue between corporations and potential consumers, advertising is more than a simple showcase of products; it is a narrative, a story told in the language of the audience, with cultural and contextual underpinnings that foster relatability.

Embedded within this narrative is the domain of translation, often misconstrued as a straightforward linguistic task, but in essence, it is a complex endeavor demanding linguistic prowess and cultural acumen in equal measure. Especially in the context of advertising, translation transcends mere linguistic transposition; it becomes an exercise in reimagining a brand's voice, visual appeal, and very ethos, tailoring it for a new audience while retaining its original essence. This metamorphosis is strewn with potential pitfalls, necessitating that the translator remains anchored in the foundational spirit of the source material even as they navigate the intricate landscapes of the target audience's language and culture (Smith & Klein-Braley, 1997). Echoing this sentiment, theoretical frameworks in translation emphasize the cardinal principle of fidelity, championing translated versions that are not mere replicas but resonant echoes of their source counterparts (Nord, 1991).

Despite these guiding tenets, the journey from source to target is seldom linear. The potential for cultural disjuncture looms large, especially when the advertisement's backdrop and its anticipated market are oceans apart, both geographically and culturally.

Audiovisual advertisements might intuitively convey foreign cultural differences but translating them into the written word is a colossal task, demanding not just linguistic skills but a profound cultural sensibility. While technology, especially machine translations, promises speed and scalability, it often grapples with the intricate subtleties that characterize human cultures and emotions. Such scenarios emphasize the indispensable role of human translators, particularly in the high-stakes realm of advertising, where the core is paramount. A focus on the core message, sometimes at the expense of strict linguistic fidelity, can lead to profound transformations in the translated content. These transformations, whether they be linguistic, visual, or thematic, can redefine the advertisement's very objectives, often driven by the need to align with or diverge from the cultural norms of the target audience. This intricate dance between fidelity and adaptability underscores the assertion that, at its heart, translation is a delicate balancing act between linguistic precision and cultural congruence (Munday, 2008).

In light of these complexities, this paper embarks on an exploration of the many-sided world of advertisement translations, with a keen focus on ubiquitous, everyday advertisements. By delving deep into the advertisements that punctuate our daily lives, we aim to unearth the intricate interplay of functional theories, cultural changes, and translation strategies. Through this exploration, we seek to provide a general perspective on the synergies and dissonances that characterize the relationship between original advertisements and their translated counterparts.

1.1 Research Aim

The aim of this paper is to examine the complexities surrounding the visual translation of advertisements. It is paramount to note that these challenges are not solely anchored in linguistic variances but also encompass many elements associated with the underlying objectives of the advertisement. In essence, several promotional materials may possess intentions that are incongruent with the cultural and social norms of the target audience due to significant SL functional differences. Such mismatches can lead to varying consumer responses, resulting in a product achieving rapid market penetration in certain regions, while witnessing subdued interest in others.

Considering the crucial role that advertising plays in molding consumer's perceptions, this study seeks to spotlight the intricate challenges tied to the visual translation of advertisements. Our research aspiration is rooted in discerning the effect of translated advertisements in resonating with the target audience. To lend structure and depth to our exploration, we will employ a framework steeped in the tenets of seminal functional translation theories. This dual-purpose approach not only sheds light on the ramifications of employing specific translation strategies in advertising but also provides, in the interim, corrective suggestions for translations that may fall short of capturing the essence of their TT counterparts

a) How do the functional differences in the source language (SL) and target language (TL) impact the efficacy of visual translation strategies in conveying the underlying objectives of advertisements across different cultural and social norms?
b) In what ways does the translation of globally recognized brand names and key terminologies in advertisements influence consumer perceptions and market penetration in different regional contexts, and how can functional translation theories be employed to address challenges tied to these translations?

2. Literature Review
2.1 *Translating Advertisements*

The exploration of advertisement translation has always been a significant topic within translation studies. One of the pioneering discussions on this topic was by Hurbin (1972) in his article, *Can We Translate the Language of Advertising?* This piece was especially notable as it emerged during an era when translation studies revolved predominantly around the notion of 'equivalence'. Hurbin's motivation was partly influenced by the works of Nida and Catford, which gave a deeper understanding of text types and their respective functions.

Translation is not a straightforward process. Every text presents its unique set of challenges, and the role of the translator is to determine the most effective way to navigate these. In advertisement translation, this might involve the development of specialized glossaries to aid in finding appropriate linguistic counterparts. However, relying too heavily on these glossaries might stifle a translator's creative freedom. Cook (2001) points out that advertisements often embody a poetic quality, drawing parallels with literary style. Hurbin (1972), on the other hand, highlights the innovative use of rhetorical figures in advertisements. The crux of this discussion is to understand the methods and strategies employed to translate advertisements across various languages.

Over time, the focus of translation studies shifted. While 'equivalence' was the central tenet during Hurbin's time, later scholars like Vermeer, Holz-Manttari and Nord explored other perspectives. For instance, Reiss introduced the 'text type model,' emphasizing the relationship between Source Text (ST) and Target Text (TT). This model was later integrated into Vermeer's Skopos theory, which underlines the importance of purpose in translation.

Tatilon (1990) divides advertising texts into four primary functions. The initial two focus on content, highlighting identification and quality description, while the latter two zero in on the means of expression, specifically the creative usage of wordplay in advertising. Holmes's paper, *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies*, serves as a touchstone in advertisement translation research (2000). He segmented translation studies into pure research fields and applied training. According to Toury (1995), earlier studies on advertisement translation lean towards the 'pure' category, endorsing a 'descriptive product-oriented approach'. Abdul-Ghani (2000) addresses the translation of culture-specific elements in advertising, considering visuals, gender roles, and register. Numerous scholars, including Valdés (2000), have also discussed cultural stereotypes in advertisements, emphasizing the impact of translated advertisements on target audiences.

2.2 The Functional Approach to Translation
Functional theories, at their core, underscore the role of purpose in the act of translation. They pivot on the idea that every translation is conducted with an end goal in mind, which might align with the function of either the ST or TT. This perspective fundamentally shifts away from a rigid word-for-word translation approach and embraces the idea of serving a function or purpose.

Reiss's contribution to this school of thought is particularly noteworthy. Her text type model, primarily developed for assessing translations, is rooted in Buhler's functional paradigm (2011) that delineates language into three distinct categories. Reiss, drawing from Buhler, ties these categories to the dimensionality of language and further aligns them with specific text types. Her three-fold classification encompasses 'informative', 'expressive', and 'operative' categories. While we intend to discuss Reiss's text type model, our primary focus will revolve around its applicability to advertisement translation, showcasing how this model can be instrumental in understanding the complexities of translating promotional content.

Hans J. Vermeer presented the 'Skopos theory', stemming from the Greek word for 'purpose'. Skopos suggests that the main goal dictates the methods used. Vermeer's key focus is on achieving an effective and true outcome, termed 'translatum'.

Nord's methodology zeroes in on analyzing texts, paying particular attention to instrumental translation. Given that advertisement translation falls under the purview of instrumental translation, her insights prove invaluable. By examining the functional aspects of texts and understanding their inherent purposes, translators can better navigate the challenges posed by advertisement translation and ensure that the translated content resonates effectively with its intended audience.

2.2.1 Vermeer's Skopos Theory
It is a universally accepted notion that every action is undertaken with a specific intention or objective in mind. The world of translation is no exception to this, as epitomized by Vermeer's Skopos theory developed in 1970s. Taking its name from the Greek word denoting 'aim', the Skopos fundamentally shifts the focus of translation from a mere linguistic transfer to one that encapsulates purpose.

One of the distinguishing attributes of Skopos is that it does not rigidly dictate how the ST should be translated. Instead, it provides a framework or general guidelines to assist the translator. A key implication of this is the recognition that a singular text, when presented to the translator from diverse clients or individuals, could necessitate different translation approaches depending on the intended outcome of the translation.

The crux of Skopos, as Munday (2008) aptly encapsulates, is that the theory 'does', but abstains from prescribing what exactly to 'do'. This inherently emphasizes the agency and discretion of the translator. Choices made during the translation process are not strictly based on the ST. Drawing an analogy, if a translator is handed a legal document, the decision-making process may lean towards aligning with the recipient's conventions and norms, or sometimes with the ones of the ST. In some cases, a word-for-word translation might be the most fitting approach.

Vermeer and Reiss (1984) further elucidate the foundational principles of the Skopos theory. They enumerate that:

- The TT, termed 'translatum' within this theory, is inherently shaped by its designated purpose or skopos.
- The TT furnishes information within the cultural context of the target audience, while concurrently, the SL offers insights rooted in its native culture.
- Information conveyed through the TT is not designed to be reversible.
- Coherence is paramount in the TT.
- The TT should maintain a level of consistency with the ST.

While the Skopos theory offers an innovative approach to translation, it is not without its detractors. Schaffner (1998) has raised concerns about the theory's application to literary translations, which often possess ambiguous intentions. Even though both Skopos by Vermeer and Text Type by Reiss stem from the concept of translation functionality, they take different paths when it

comes to their goals and how they are applied. Another significant criticism is that Skopos may neglect the linguistic core of the ST, especially when it comes to its stylistic and semantic characteristics.

2.2.2 Nord's Analytical Insight into Texts:

Christiane Nord's *Text Analysis* model offers a profound understanding of text organization, placing a significant emphasis on function or functionality. Nord insists that for a translation to be deemed successful, understanding the function of a text is important. In line with the views of Vermeer and Reiss on Skopos, Nord argues that the relevance of the translation to the demands of the target audience is determined not by the ST but by the function the text serves (1991).

This model's flexibility, grounded in a functional framework, allows it to be applicable across various text types. It provides a more profound understanding of the ST's purpose and the optimal strategies for translation. Within her model, Nord distinguishes two translation types: documentary translation and instrumental translation. Given the focal point of this discussion, the emphasis will be on the latter.

Documentary translation essentially acts as a record of communication between the author and the recipient in the source culture (SC). An example can be seen in literary translations where the TT gives readers insights into the original text, making them cognizant of the fact they are reading a translation. Another intriguing concept Nord introduces is the "exotizing translation". This pertains to retaining cultural lexical elements from the ST to preserve its local flavor in the translated text.

On the other hand, instrumental translation presents the TT as if it were an original composition. This is prominently observed in user manuals for products, software, and apps where the text's function is retained, making it appear as if it is the original. Nord (2005) is emphasizing the role of a translation as a standalone communication tool within the target culture (TC). When a text is translated effectively, the reader or listener in the new culture should not feel that they are engaging with a text that was originally part of another culture or context. Instead, they should experience it as if it was originally crafted for their own cultural and communicative setting. In other words, a successful translation seamlessly integrates into the TC, making the audience unaware of its origins from a different communicative situation.

The overarching objective of instrumental translation is to convey messages seamlessly, ensuring the recipient remains unaware of the text's origins. Chesterman et al. underscores the necessity for translators to clearly outline their translation approach and goals. He further categorizes two distinct functionalities within instrumental translation: "function preserving", which stays true to the ST's original intent, and "function changing", where there might be unintentional shifts in the conveyed function (2000).

One of the hallmarks of instrumental translations is their construction to mimic original texts. For instance, audiences often perceive translated advertisements as native to their culture, unaware of its translated nature (Santos, 2016). This underscores the translator's pivotal role in understanding cultural divergences to deliver a text that seamlessly integrates into the TC.

The effectiveness of instrumental translation is contingent on the degree of cultural alignment between the ST and TT. This synchronization is only attainable if the communicator (sender) straddles both the STs and TCs.

Nord's primary aspiration with her model is to furnish translation practitioners with a universal ST analysis tool (Nord, 1997). This ambition materialized even more holistically in her later work, "*Translating as a Purposeful Activity*", where she highlights three salient functional attributes. Firstly, the significance of the translation commission, which offers external context to the translation. Secondly, the essential role ST analysis plays, by dissecting various internal factors. Lastly, the functional hierarchy of translation challenges, which guides translators through the intricacies of their tasks.

3. Methodology

In this study, we predominantly employed qualitative techniques to address the research question. Visual content and related resources were fundamental to our examination. We curated advertisements for analysis, ensuring the inclusion of both English and Arabic in the roles of source and TLs. The focus was on functional translation methods, chosen for their ability to highlight and clarify the ST and TT within advertising.

Initially, our attention was on comparing the language elements of the two products' ST and TT. This was followed by a detailed exploration of their similarities and distinctions. Our investigative model was informed by several functional translation theories, such as Vermeer's Skopos and Nord's Instrumental translation. We also integrated components from other frameworks presented by Baker (1992), Newmark (2008), and Reiss and Vermeer (2014). However, we selectively utilized elements from these theories, adjusting based on the study's requirements. This research also sheds light on the translation methods and strategies grounded in the Skopos theory. Our examination began with an assessment of the translation processes and subsequently transitioned to a critique of the employed strategies. While investigating advertisement translation, we did not encompass every conceivable

method and strategy due to their fluidity. Also, specific strategies were seldom or never applied, depending on the distinctiveness of the data at hand.

4. Results and Discussion
Renowned brands like 'GARNIER', 'Doritos', 'Neutrogena', and 'DOVE' serve as examples of how translational choices can bridge or widen the gap between the brand's global identity and its local perception. This section delves into the intricacies of translational decisions, deeply-rooted in theories like the Skopos theory, to understand how these advertisements have navigated the challenges of retaining brand essence while catering to diverse audiences. By exploring the strategies adopted by translators, from transliteration to borrowing, we gain insight into the complex role that translation plays in advertising.

Figure 1

The 'GARNIER' brand (Figure 1), housed under the behemoth L'Oréal, is a testament to the meticulous attention paid to translational subtle differences. Its brand name remains untouched across various linguistic terrains, illustrating a conscious decision by translators to preserve brand integrity. The intrinsic value and global recognizability of a brand name can often trump the need for linguistic adaptation, as the weight of a brand's reputation might be diluted or misconstrued with transliteration or translation. For instance, the sub-line 'Color Intensity' is transliterated as 'كولور انتنستي' rather than being translated, perhaps to preserve its essence or Skopos. One cannot emphasize enough the importance of hiring professional translators, especially for global brands like GARNIER. Their role is important not just in preserving linguistic accuracy but also in ensuring that the brand ethos and image remain unscathed across diverse markets.

The Skopos theory, as stated before, focuses on the overarching purpose or function of a translation. Even when delving into the details of the 'GARNIER' translations, one observes that while the TT might not be a direct mirror of the ST, the underlying function or Skopos remains unaltered. For instance, 'Powerful long-lasting color' in English and 'لون غني يدوم طويلا جدا' in Arabic might differ linguistically, but they convey the same purpose. The Skopos theory prompts the translator to introspect, to understand the inherent objectives behind a client's specific translation request. This might elucidate choices like using 'غني' instead of 'قوي', or 'كاملة' instead of '100%'. Nord (1991) aptly opines that a translation brief acts as a compass, guiding both ST and TT and helping decipher the external factors and objectives shaping a translation. This includes recognizing the intended function, understanding the sender (in this case, L'Oréal), pinpointing the target audience (English-Arabic speaking communities), and acknowledging the medium and overarching intent.

Diving into the strategies adopted by the translator, one can discern a clear inclination towards paraphrasing rather than adhering to verbatim translations. This strategic decision, often grounded in the Skopos theory, allows translators the leeway to mold the translation to best fit the target audience while staying true to the core message. Despite the palpable differences at the linguistic level between the ST and TT, the essence, tone, and intent remain consistent. This congruence in feel and function, despite linguistic divergences, underscores the deftness of the translator and their adept application of the Skopos theory. It showcases that while linguistic fidelity is essential, sometimes the strategic flexibility provided by theories like Skopos can result in translations that resonate more profoundly with the target audience.

Figure 2

Doritos (Figure 2), a brand under the umbrella of the American company Frito-Lay, has been a staple snack for chip lovers since its inception in 1964. With its origins tracing back to a Disneyland restaurant, the brand shot to global fame primarily for its Nacho Cheese flavor, which became synonymous with the Doritos name. However, with time, the brand diversified its flavor portfolio, introducing myriad tastes catering to different palates and cultural preferences. This expansion in flavor variety has not only led to Doritos' omnipresence on global supermarket shelves but has also showcased the brand's adaptability in catering to evolving consumer preferences.

The translation of product labels and descriptions is paramount, especially for global brands, as it dictates consumer perceptions. The sequence of words, "SWEET CHILI PEPPER", on the Doritos packaging serves as a classic example of the complexities in translation. A translator's task is not just about linguistic precision but also capturing the essence of the product. The conundrum here arises from deciphering if 'CHILI' stands alone or combines with 'PEPPER'. Both 'Chili' and 'Pepper' have distinct meanings, with the former generally denoting a hot and spicy element, while the latter could refer to the more benign, flavor-enhancing type. Then, there's the descriptive 'SWEET', which adds another layer of semantic intricacy. The TT translation of (حار وحلو) reflects a simplistic approach, breaking down the flavor profile into two distinct tastes - spicy and sweet. Yet, the addition of a linking word, absent in the ST, could be perceived as altering the flavor's narrative and, by extension, the product's essence.

In translation, the overarching function or Skopos of the text is paramount. The Skopos theory emphasizes that while achieving a replica of the ST is ideal, the ultimate goal is ensuring the TT fulfills its intended purpose. In the case of the Doritos flavor translation, while there might be discrepancies in the linguistic representation, the essence, which is conveying the flavor profile to an Arabic-speaking audience, remains intact. A bilingual customer proficient in both Arabic and English might discern the differences in translation. However, from a broader perspective, the aim is to communicate the flavor's essence, which the TT seems to achieve commendably.

Figure 3

Neutrogena (Figure 3) is a renowned brand with its roots in California and a global reach. Being a part of the extensive Johnson & Johnson corporation only amplifies its market presence. When such a global brand attempts to cater to diverse linguistic

communities, the challenge becomes how to ensure that the brand's essence remains undistorted while resonating with the local audience (*Neutrogena*, retrieved August 13, 2018).

To retain the brand's authenticity, certain elements are deliberately left untranslated. Taking the brand name 'Neutrogena' as a case in point, its recognition is global. As such, translating it could cause confusion or even diminish its brand value. Yet, other elements like 'NORWEGIAN FORMULA' need some form of localization, so the local audience understands its significance. The presence of the Norwegian flag alongside the phrase acts as a visual cue, linking the product's essence to Norway without necessitating a literal translation.

In translation, especially when related to marketing and advertising, there are numerous ways to convey the same message. The challenge is finding the most effective way within the constraints of the TL's grammar and the SL's essence. The phrase 'DERMATOLOGIST TESTED' is a testament to this challenge. The brevity required in advertising language means that long expressions can dilute the intended message's potency. Thus, the choice of the passive form in Arabic, ' تم اختباره بواسطة أطباء الجلد', while linguistically more cumbersome, aims to mirror the English structure closely. However, as Baker points out, the direct translation of passive structures from English to languages that use it less frequently, like Arabic, often attracts criticism from linguists and trainers (1992). The translator's challenge, therefore, is not just about linguistic translation but also about ensuring the transcreated message's effectiveness. In the vast spectrum of brand translations, each decision, from what remains untranslated to the linguistic structures chosen, can impact the brand's perception and its success in the target market.

Figure 4

Advertisements, particularly those of global brands, present unique challenges when translated for different linguistic markets. In Figure 4, DOVE's approach to the Arabic market highlights an interesting intersection of localization and global brand identity preservation. The intriguing use of the non-standard Arabic character 'ڤ' for the brand name 'DOVE' speaks volumes about the challenges of transliteration and the inherent desire to retain brand familiarity. The choice not to translate 'DOVE' into its Arabic equivalent 'يمامة', which means 'pigeon', underlines the importance of brand recognition over linguistic purity. Translation is not just about linguistic accuracy; it is also about cultural and market appropriateness. Here, DOVE's strategy appears to strike a balance between cultural adaptation and maintaining global brand consistency. The mingling of colloquial and standard Arabic, as seen in the verb 'بيفهم' (meaning 'he understands' in colloquial Arabic), adds a local flavor, fostering relatability for Middle Eastern audiences.

The technique of 'borrowing' in translation can be particularly useful for terms that do not have direct equivalents or for maintaining brand identity. Trudgill's reference to the term 'borrowing' delves deeper into this approach. In Figure 3, the transformation of the word 'cream' into its Arabic equivalent 'كريم', as opposed to 'دهان', illustrates this strategy. It is not just about rendering words from one language to another but assimilating them such that they integrate seamlessly into the TL. Words like 'entrepreneur' have shifted from being exclusively French to being wholly accepted and understood in English (Trudgill, 1974, as cited in Srikandi, 2010). This phenomenon, however, ensures that the borrowed words adhere to the linguistic norms of the TL.

In conclusion, the intricate process of translation, especially in the advertising, requires much more than simple linguistic transformation. Translators have a critical role in ensuring that messages between cultures are conveyed accurately and without hiccups, and Holz-Manttari's translatorial action model (1984) makes this point clear. It recognizes the translator as more than a linguistic mediator but as a conduit connecting all stakeholders involved—from the client to the end-consumer. The onus is not just on linguistic accuracy but on ensuring the message is conveyed as intended, resonating with the audience while maintaining brand identity and ethos. In this complex web of interrelations, the translator emerges as the linchpin, ensuring the integrity of the message from inception to its final delivery.

5. Conclusion

This paper investigated the challenges of visually translating advertisements, focusing on issues that extend beyond language to include cultural and social norms. It highlighted how discrepancies in the SL functions could lead to different consumer reactions and affect market success. The study aimed to understand how translated advertisements impacted their target audience. Using functional translation theories, it analyzed advertising translation strategies and proposed solutions for those that did not fully capture the TT's essence.

The study pointed out that proficient translation practices, as represented in Figure 1, include maintaining original brand names, like 'GARNIER', due to their global recognition and marketing impact. Changing a brand name can make it unrecognizable, as seen with 'DOVE' in Figure 4. Brand names carry implications of quality and are highly important in advertising, significantly affecting sales in a globally connected market. As global interactions grow, the translation of brand names, a key intercultural act, becomes more crucial in the competitive international market (Wang, 2012). However, translation issues can arise, such as with 'CHILI PEPPER' in Figure 2, where the translator must decide whether to translate terms jointly or separately, a decision that can complicate the translation process.

Drawing from the observations and critical analysis, it is palpably clear that a vast majority of advertisements undergo considerable alterations when transitioning from their original cultural context to target audiences. While a subset of these advertisements triumphantly preserve the intended sales objectives, others falter.

The study revealed that retaining original brand names in advertisements, like 'GARNIER', was key to global brand recognition and market success, as opposed to poorly received translations, such as 'DOVE'. It highlighted the critical role of culturally sensitive translation in advertising effectiveness and global marketing. These insights are important for the field as they underline the need for translation strategies that respect both linguistic and cultural differences to ensure the international success of a brand.

Although the previous insights from the findings are significant, the study has some limitations; it may not fully capture the diverse global consumer perceptions, especially in markets with huge linguistic and cultural differences from the source material. The examples cited, while illustrative, might not encompass all possible scenarios or reflect the full range of translation strategies employed in different regions. These limitations suggest that the study's conclusions are a starting point for understanding the complexities of advertisement translation rather than definitive solutions. They invite further research to explore a broader array of contexts and consumer responses, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of cross-cultural advertising.

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