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S. Chernobrovkina,

PhD in Economics, Associate Professor, Associate Professor of the Department of Marketing, National Technical University «Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute»

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6309-6466>

Y. Tataryntseva,

PhD in Economics, Associate Professor, Associate Professor of the Department of Marketing, National Technical University «Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute»

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2910-9280>

DIGITAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN MULTICULTURAL MARKETS: NEGOTIATION PRACTICES, MANIPULATION RISKS, AND MEDIATION TOOLS

С. В. Чернобровкіна,

к. е. н., доцент, доцент кафедри маркетингу, Національний технічний університет «Харківський політехнічний інститут»

Ю. Л. Татаринцева,

к. е. н., доцент, доцент кафедри маркетингу, Національний технічний університет «Харківський політехнічний інститут»

ЦИФРОВІ БІЗНЕС-КОМУНІКАЦІЇ НА МУЛЬТИКУЛЬТУРНИХ РИНКАХ: ПРАКТИКА ВЕДЕННЯ ПЕРЕГОВОРІВ, РИЗИКИ МАНІПУЛЯЦІЙ ТА ІНСТРУМЕНТИ МЕДІАЦІЇ

The article offers a conceptual and analytical examination of digital business communication in multicultural markets, focusing on how negotiation practices, manipulation risks and mediation tools jointly shape the effectiveness and resilience of international marketing relations. The study systematizes dispersed theoretical and empirical insights into a coherent framework that explains how digital channels, cultural differences, and organizational governance interact in the negotiation process. Special attention is given to the hybrid nature of contemporary negotiations, where asynchronous text-based communication (email, messaging platforms, collaborative tools) is combined with synchronous audio-visual formats (video conferencing, online meetings) and where negotiators must continuously adapt their strategies to different levels of media richness, formality and time pressure. The article conceptualizes subtle forms of informational, relational, and procedural manipulation in digital negotiation contexts, including selective disclosure, strategic vagueness, the orchestration of artificial deadlines, and the use of visibility and hierarchy in digital channels to create pressure or marginalize certain actors. These practices are analyzed as systemic risks that accumulate over time and undermine both interpersonal trust and confidence in the digital infrastructure underpinning marketing relations. A three-layered mediation model is developed. It distinguishes interpersonal mediation (boundary-spanning roles, intercultural brokers, ethical communicators), procedural mediation (rules of engagement, escalation protocols, documentation standards, channel policies) and structural mediation (organization-wide principles and policies for responsible digital communication, transparency and accountability). The proposed conceptual schema links digital negotiation practices, risk mechanisms and mediation instruments, offering an integrated perspective that bridges gaps between negotiation research, marketing communication and corporate digital responsibility. On this basis, the article formulates practical recommendations for companies seeking to design ethically robust, trust-enhancing digital communication systems in international marketing,

and outlines directions for future empirical studies that could test and refine the proposed framework in different sectoral and cultural contexts.

У статті представлено концептуально-аналітичне дослідження цифрових бізнес-комунікацій на багатокультурних ринках із акцентом на те, як переговорні практики, ризики маніпуляцій та інструменти медіації спільно визначають результативність і стійкість міжнародних маркетингових відносин. Спираючись на сучасні напрацювання в галузі міжкультурних переговорів, довіри в онлайн-середовищах та етичного цифрового маркетингу, здійснюється систематизація розпорошених теоретичних та емпіричних положень, формуючи цілісну рамку пояснення взаємодії цифрових каналів, культурних відмінностей і організаційних механізмів врядування у переговорному процесі. Особливу увагу приділено гібридному характеру сучасних переговорів, у яких асинхронна текстова комунікація (електронні листи, месенджери, колаборативні платформи) поєднуються із синхронними аудіовізуальними форматами (відеоконференції, онлайн-зустрічі), а переговорники змушені постійно адаптувати стратегії до різних рівнів насиченості медіа, формальності й часових обмежень. На основі інтеграції досліджень маніпуляції довірою та комунікативних механізмів концептуалізовано тонкі форми інформаційних, реляційних і процедурних маніпуляцій у цифрових переговорних контекстах, зокрема вибіркове розкриття інформації, стратегічну невизначеність, штучне формування дедлайнів і використання видимості та ієрархії в цифрових каналах для створення тиску чи маргіналізації окремих учасників. Показано, що такі практики мають системний характер, накопичуються з часом і підривають як міжособову довіру, так і впевненість у цифровій інфраструктурі, яка забезпечує маркетингову взаємодію. Спираючись на напрацювання в галузі етики міжкультурної комунікації, корпоративної цифрової відповідальності та цифрового врядування, сформовано трирівневу модель медіації, що розрізняє міжособистісну медіацію

(пограничні комунікатори, міжкультурні посередники, етично орієнтовані комунікатори), процедурну медіацію (правила взаємодії, протоколи ескалації, стандарти документування, політики використання каналів) і структурну медіацію (загальноорганізаційні принципи й політики відповідальної цифрової комунікації, прозорості та підзвітності). Запропонована концептуальна схема пов'язує цифрові переговорні практики, механізми ризиків та інструменти медіації, забезпечуючи інтегрований погляд, який поєднує підходи досліджень переговорів, маркетингових комунікацій і корпоративної цифрової відповідальності. На цій основі сформульовано практичні рекомендації для компаній щодо проєктування етично виважених, орієнтованих на довіру систем цифрової комунікації в міжнародному маркетингу, а також окреслено перспективи подальших емпіричних досліджень для перевірки та уточнення запропонованої рамки в різних галузевих і культурних контекстах.

Keywords: *digital business communication, multicultural markets, intercultural negotiations, manipulation risks, mediation tools, corporate digital responsibility, international marketing relations, trust, digital governance, ethical communication.*

Ключові слова: *цифрова бізнес-комунікація, багатокультурні ринки, міжкультурні переговори, ризики маніпуляцій, інструменти медіації, корпоративна цифрова відповідальність, міжнародні маркетингові відносини, довіра, цифрове врядування, етична комунікація.*

Problem statement and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks

Digitalization has radically transformed how companies initiate, conduct and maintain business relations in international markets, shifting a significant part of negotiation and coordination processes into digital communication environments. In multicultural markets, email, messaging platforms, videoconferencing systems

and social media have become primary channels for structuring marketing offers, discussing terms and resolving conflicts, while simultaneously amplifying the impact of cultural differences, information asymmetries and power imbalances on negotiation outcomes. Empirical evidence shows that virtual negotiations complicate the reading of non-verbal cues, slow down trust-building and increase the risk of misunderstandings, especially when partners operate in different cultural and institutional contexts and rely on asynchronous communication modes.

At the same time, the expansion of digital marketing and platform-based interaction has intensified manipulation risks, such as strategic framing, information withholding, use of dark patterns and opaque data practices, which undermine transparency and may erode both consumer and partner trust. The design of mediation mechanisms and conflict-management tools that are adapted to digital, cross-cultural negotiation settings becomes an important scientific and practical task, as they can help firms prevent escalation, reduce transaction costs, and preserve the long-term value of international marketing relationships. The study responds to this need by focusing on how negotiation practices, manipulation risks and mediation tools interact within digital business communication in multicultural markets.

Analysis of recent research and publications. A growing body of literature has explored intercultural negotiation and digital communication, though often in a fragmented manner. Čuhlová R. and Demel J. investigate intercultural negotiation dynamics in the digital age and demonstrate that, despite cost reductions and greater accessibility of online meetings, experienced negotiators still prefer face-to-face interaction for handling cultural nuances and building deep trust, while digital formats are perceived as more vulnerable to misinterpretation and relational fragility [1]. Hammami H., analyzing intercultural negotiation strategies in e-business contexts, argues that cultural intelligence and adaptability significantly enhance negotiation effectiveness in multicultural online environments, but also stresses that virtual settings require deliberate strategies for managing time lags, communication ambiguity, and relationship maintenance [2].

Williams, based on a survey of negotiators involved in WTO Joint Statement Initiative and UNCITRAL processes, shows that virtual negotiations generate a specific configuration of advantages and risks: they lower logistical costs and increase inclusiveness, yet they also create participation asymmetries, fatigue and difficulties in informal consensus-building, which are particularly pronounced in cross-cultural settings [3]. A complementary perspective is offered by the study on cross-cultural communication challenges in global trading, which documents how language barriers, divergent communication styles and non-verbal signal loss in virtual environments delay agreements and raise the probability of contractual disputes, underscoring the need for explicit strategies to manage digital communication barriers.

Studies on transparency and ethical marketing in digital brands likewise indicate that clear disclosure and responsible communication standards reduce perceived risk and strengthen long-term trust, whereas dark patterns and hidden persuasive tactics undermine credibility and increase skepticism toward digital interaction. At the organizational level, emerging work on corporate digital responsibility argues that systematically embedding ethical, social and environmental considerations into digital governance not only mitigates risks related to data and privacy, but also becomes a driver of market performance and stakeholder confidence, thereby positioning responsible digital communication as a strategic asset rather than a purely compliance-driven obligation [4-6].

Formulation of the article's objectives (problem setting). The purpose of the article is to develop a framework for understanding how digital business communication in multicultural markets shapes negotiation practices, generates manipulation risks and can be supported by mediation tools to ensure effective, trust-based marketing relations.

Presentation of the main research material. Companies increasingly rely on a mixed portfolio of digital channels, such as email, video conferencing, corporate messengers and collaborative platforms, to conduct negotiations across time zones and cultural contexts. Interviewees emphasized that this shift

accelerates information exchange and reduces travel costs, but simultaneously increases the cognitive load associated with continuous multitasking across channels and devices, which can undermine the depth and focus of negotiation preparation. These findings resonate with recent work on intercultural negotiation strategies in e-business settings, which shows that cultural intelligence and communication adaptability are critical for maintaining clarity and relational quality in virtual environments [2].

To systematize the observed variation, digital negotiation practices were classified along three axes: degree of synchronicity (asynchronous vs. synchronous), richness of the communication channel (text-based vs. audio-visual) and level of structuring (ad hoc vs. protocol-driven). Table 1 summarizes the most typical configurations identified in the empirical material.

Table 1. Typical configurations of digital negotiation practices in multicultural markets

Configuration type	Dominant channels	Main advantages	Main risks in a multicultural context
Asynchronous, low-richness	Email, document comments	Time flexibility; traceability; formal record	High misinterpretation risk; slow clarification cycles
Synchronous, high-richness	Video conferencing, calls	Faster alignment; richer cues; relationship building	Technical failures; “Zoom fatigue”; unequal participation
Hybrid structured sequences	Email + scheduled video meetings	Combination of record and rapport; planned escalation	Complexity of coordination; dependence on digital literacy
Platform-centric collaboration	CRM, shared workspaces, chat tools	Integrated data; visibility; team coordination	Information overload; blurred boundaries between formal/informal

Source: systematized by the authors based on [2;7;8]

The data indicate that experienced negotiators deliberately combine these configurations across negotiation phases: asynchronous channels dominate during information exchange and proposal drafting, while synchronous high-richness formats are reserved for critical moments such as first contact, framing of the relationship, or resolution of contentious issues. This sequencing is consistent with

the observation that effective online negotiators adapt their strategies to the affordances and limitations of different digital tools, using richer media when cultural nuances and trust-building are paramount [2]. At the same time, respondents noted that organizational pressure for speed and scalability often pushes negotiations toward predominantly asynchronous, text-based interaction, which can gradually erode the relational dimension of marketing partnerships.

An additional pattern concerns the management of cultural identity and expectations in “trans-digital” spaces, where interlocutors simultaneously navigate offline norms and online platform logics. Recent research on negotiating cultural identity in digital communication shows that individuals actively calibrate self-presentation, politeness and directness to align with perceived partner expectations while remaining anchored in their own cultural frames. Empirically, this appeared in careful choices of greeting formulas, the use of hedging, the avoidance of overt disagreement in group calls, and the reliance on private follow-up messages to repair potential face-threatening acts. These micro-strategies function as informal mediation mechanisms that help maintain relationship continuity despite the limitations of digital channels.

The analysis revealed several recurring patterns of perceived manipulation in digital negotiations, often linked to the affordances of specific communication mechanisms. Interviewees most frequently mentioned selective disclosure of information, strategic ambiguity in written messages, pressure through artificial deadlines and the use of copied stakeholders in email (“CC pressure”) as tactics that alter the perceived power balance. These practices align with broader models of trust manipulation, which highlight how deceivers exploit authenticity cues, rapport-building and channel characteristics to create a veneer of credibility while pursuing opportunistic aims. In digital environments, manipulation often operates less through explicit falsehoods and more through the framing of issues, timing of responses and control of what is visible to whom.

To clarify these patterns, manipulation tactics observed in the data can be grouped into three categories: informational, relational and procedural. Table 2

summarizes these categories, their typical manifestations and their impact on negotiation dynamics.

Table 2. Categories of manipulation tactics in digital multicultural negotiations

Category	Typical tactics	Communication mechanism exploited	Impact on negotiation and trust
Informational	Selective disclosure; strategic vagueness; data overload	Asymmetry of information; limited verification	Distorted evaluation of options; delayed detection
Relational	Over-personalization; flattery; implied exclusivity	Need for rapport; authenticity cues	Short-term trust boost; vulnerability to disappointment
Procedural	Artificial deadlines; last-minute changes; “CC pressure”	Control of timing; visibility; formal hierarchy	Stress; rushed concessions; perceived unfairness

Source: systematized by the authors based on [8;9]

The interviews show that informational tactics are particularly effective in asynchronous channels, where the absence of immediate clarification allows ambiguity to persist and gradually shape expectations. Relational tactics often rely on individualized messages, private chats and carefully curated self-presentation, echoing findings that authenticity cues and rapport are central levers in deceptive communication [9]. Procedural tactics tend to manifest in email threads and calendar invitations, where control over scheduling, agenda setting and visibility can be used to create pressure or marginalize specific voices. Across cases, respondents associated these tactics with a decrease in perceived fairness and an increase in defensive communication, which in turn jeopardized the stability of marketing relationships.

Trust in technology and trust in the provider are distinct but interrelated, and both depend heavily on reputation, familiarity, and institutional safeguards. When digital negotiation practices are perceived as manipulative, they erode not only interpersonal trust in specific counterparts but also trust in the digital tools and organizational processes that mediate interaction. This double erosion increases

resistance to future digital initiatives, forcing firms to revert to more costly offline modes or to invest heavily in relationship repair.

Given these challenges, we can examine how firms attempt to mediate conflicts and stabilize relationships in digital multicultural negotiations. Three layers of mediation emerged from the data: (1) interpersonal mediation by boundary-spanning individuals (e.g., key account managers); (2) procedural mediation embedded in internal policies and protocols; and (3) structural mediation through digital governance and corporate digital responsibility frameworks.

At the interpersonal level, many interviewees described informal practices of “soft mediation”, where a trusted individual from one side or a neutral project manager intervenes via bilateral calls or side-channels to clarify misunderstandings, reframe contentious issues and separate substantive disagreements from perceived personal affronts [10]. These practices mirror intercultural communication ethics models that emphasize dialogic listening, attentiveness and iterative negotiation of meaning as conditions for ethical interaction. In digital contexts, such mediators often act as translators not only of language, but also of platform norms – for instance, explaining why brief messages in one culture are not necessarily a sign of disrespect, or why delayed responses may reflect time-zone constraints rather than low commitment.

Procedural mediation is expressed through standardized templates for proposals, requirement matrices, escalation routes and documented “rules of engagement” for digital communication. Organizations that had codified acceptable response times, channel hierarchies (e.g., when email vs. chat vs. video should be used) and rules for copying third parties reported fewer instances of perceived manipulation and conflict escalation. This finding is consistent with recent guidance on digital governance strategies, which emphasizes the importance of clear rules, defined responsibilities and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that digital technologies are aligned with organizational objectives and stakeholder expectations. By making expectations explicit, procedural mediation reduces the

interpretive space that can be exploited for manipulative tactics and lowers the likelihood of accidental norm violations [11;12].

Structural mediation operates through broader corporate digital responsibility (CDR) frameworks, which integrate ethical, social and environmental considerations into the governance of digital tools and data. Recent studies argue that CDR goes beyond technical compliance and positions ethical digital practices as a source of competitive advantage and stakeholder trust. Empirically, firms that had adopted explicit CDR principles (e.g., commitments to transparency, fairness in algorithmic decision-making, responsible data use and respectful communication) reported higher internal awareness of manipulation risks and greater willingness to invest in training for ethical digital negotiation [13;14]. These organizations tended to embed mediation logic “by design”, for example, by integrating feedback mechanisms into communication platforms, enabling anonymous reporting of problematic practices, or establishing digital ombudsperson roles.

To capture the interplay of these elements, the findings can be summarized in a conceptual schema of digital communication and mediation in multicultural marketing relations (Fig. 1).

Isolated interventions (e.g., ad hoc interpersonal mediation) are insufficient if they are not complemented by procedural and structural mechanisms that address the systemic sources of communication distortion. From a practical perspective, the results lead to several key recommendations. First, firms should design channel strategies that deliberately combine rich and lean media across negotiation phases, using synchronous formats for relationship-critical interactions and asynchronous ones for documentation and reflection. Second, organizations need to explicitly map and monitor manipulation risks in their digital negotiation processes, using training and scenario-based learning to help employees recognize and neutralize informational, relational and procedural tactics. Third, mediation should be institutionalized both through designated roles and through digital governance

frameworks that embed transparency, accountability and fairness into communication infrastructures.

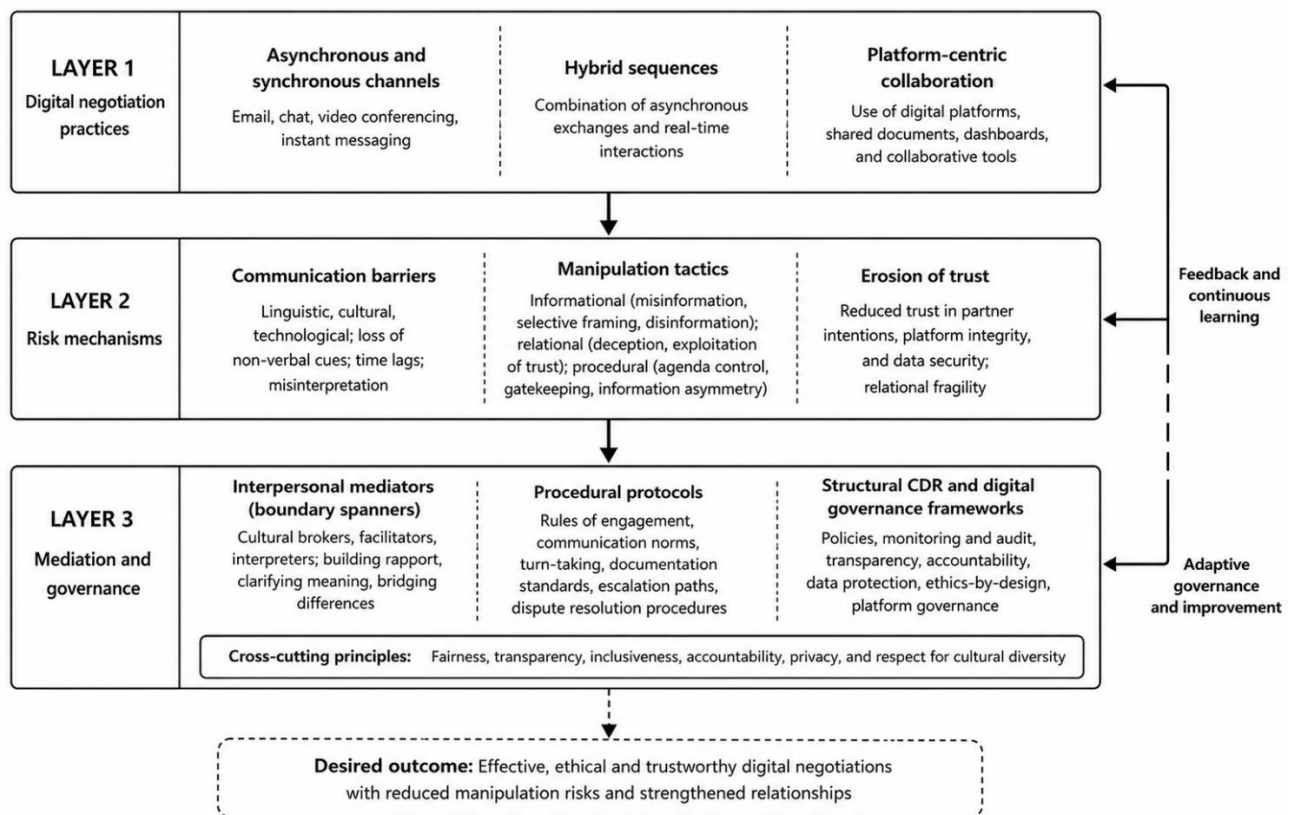


Fig. 1. Conceptual schema of digital negotiation, manipulation risks and mediation tools

Source: developed by the authors

Digital business communication in multicultural markets is not merely a technical issue of tool selection, but a complex socio-technical system where negotiation practices, manipulation risks, and mediation tools are deeply intertwined. Addressing this complexity requires coordinated efforts at interpersonal, procedural and structural levels, anchored in intercultural competence, ethical awareness and robust digital governance.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. The conducted research has demonstrated that digital business communication in multicultural markets forms a complex socio-technical environment in which negotiation practices, manipulation risks and mediation tools are tightly interlinked. Digital channels

provide clear advantages in terms of speed, cost reduction and scalability of international marketing relations, yet these benefits are systematically accompanied by increased interpretive ambiguity, loss of contextual cues and heightened sensitivity to cultural differences. In this setting, negotiation effectiveness depends not only on technical proficiency and strategic preparation, but also on the capacity of participants to read and manage intercultural signals in text-based and audio-visual formats, to adapt communication styles and to consciously design channel combinations across negotiation phases.

The analysis further showed that manipulation in digital negotiations operates predominantly through subtle informational, relational and procedural mechanisms rather than explicit deception. Selective disclosure, strategic vagueness, pressure through deadlines or “CC pressure” and over-personalized rapport-building serve as tools to shift perceived power and frame outcomes, often without crossing formal ethical or legal boundaries. These practices gradually erode both interpersonal trust and confidence in the digital infrastructures that mediate interaction, thereby undermining the long-term stability of marketing relationships. Accordingly, the ethical quality of digital communication must be regarded as an integral component of negotiation effectiveness, not as an external constraint.

The study concludes that sustainable digital negotiation in multicultural markets cannot be ensured by interpersonal skills alone. Effective conflict prevention and resolution require the institutionalization of mediation at three levels: interpersonal (boundary-spanning mediators and intercultural brokers), procedural (clear rules of engagement, escalation paths and documentation standards) and structural (corporate digital responsibility and digital governance frameworks). Organizations that deliberately combine these levels are better positioned to detect and neutralize manipulation, manage communication barriers, and maintain trust-based relationships in complex, culturally diverse markets.

The results of the study open several promising directions for future scholarly inquiry. First, there is a need for more fine-grained, longitudinal research

on how specific combinations of digital channels and negotiation strategies affect relationship trajectories over time, including the evolution of trust, perceived fairness, and cooperation in different cultural constellations. Such studies could employ process-tracing, digital ethnography or sequence analysis to capture dynamic patterns of interaction rather than isolated episodes.

Second, further work is required to deepen the understanding of manipulation mechanisms in B2B digital negotiations, particularly in relation to emerging technologies such as AI-assisted communication, automated translation and decision-support systems. This includes examining how algorithmic recommendation, personalization and content filtering may unintentionally amplify information asymmetries or create new forms of subtle pressure, as well as identifying safeguards that could be embedded into digital platforms to protect users from manipulative patterns by design.

Third, future research should focus on the systematic evaluation of mediation tools and governance interventions in real organizational settings. Comparative case studies and quasi-experimental designs could help determine which combinations of interpersonal mediation, procedural protocols and corporate digital responsibility instruments produce the most significant improvements in negotiation outcomes and relationship resilience. In addition, there is considerable potential in exploring how training programs in intercultural digital competence, ethical communication, and conflict mediation influence the behavior of negotiators and the quality of marketing relations.

Finally, it would be valuable to extend the geographical and sectoral scope of empirical studies, including markets with different levels of digital maturity and institutional development. This would allow the identification of context-specific and universal patterns in digital negotiation practices, manipulation risks and mediation strategies, thereby contributing to the refinement of theoretical models and the development of more nuanced, evidence-based recommendations for international marketing and digital communication management.

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