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Restrictive Mediation: The Interplay Between Parental Social Media Use, Attitudes, and Children's Social Media Addiction

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the complex relationship between parental social media use, attitudes toward technology, and restrictive mediation strategies in influencing children's social media addiction, grounded in Restrictive Mediation Theory. Using a quantitative approach with simple random sampling, data were collected from 385 parents in Lahore, Pakistan - a metropolitan region with high internet penetration. The survey-based research employed SPSS for statistical analysis to examine key variables: parental awareness of media risks (PAME), personal technology use (PUDT), restrictive mediation (RM), and child media addiction (MC). Findings revealed a strong positive correlation between PAME and RM ($r = .55, p < .001$), indicating that parents who perceive greater media risks implement stricter rules. However, restrictive mediation showed a paradoxical association with child addiction ($\beta = .198, p = .013$), suggesting that excessive control may lead to covert usage and higher addiction levels. Surprisingly, while PAME alone didn't significantly predict RM ($\beta = -.093, p = .550$), the inclusion of PUDT revealed a suppression effect, with tech-savvy parents demonstrating increased RM ($\beta = .183, p = .027$) alongside diminished PAME influence ($\beta = -.152, p = .027$). These results challenge conventional assumptions in Restrictive Mediation Theory, highlighting how parental technology literacy may complicate traditional risk-control dynamics in urban Pakistani households. The study underscores the need for more nuanced digital parenting approaches that balance media literacy with psychological autonomy in rapidly digitizing societies.

Keywords: Restrictive mediation, parental mediation, social media regulation, digital addiction, digital parenting

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a central aspect of modern communication and leisure in today's rapidly evolving digital landscape. It has transformed human interaction, facilitating faster, more efficient, and personalized communication (Gupta et al., 2022). While adults spend significant time on social networking platforms, children also rely on these sites to fulfill their social and entertainment needs. Research indicates that daily social media use is linked to improved mood, particularly among individuals with smaller social networks (Kim & Fingerman, 2022).

Children are increasingly exposed to digital content through platforms like YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram, often from an early age. With the prevalence of smartphones and the use of the internet, even pre-teens and toddlers are avid consumers of digital media. Although these media provide learning and entertainment opportunities, risks also surround them. Too much screen time has been associated with physical, emotional, social, and cognitive harms, necessitating careful monitoring (Goswami & Parekh, 2023).

With this widespread use, parental mediation, especially restrictive mediation, becomes an important factor in monitoring kids' digital participation. Restrictive mediation involves setting boundaries on screen time, content access, and platform usage. Research indicates that restrictive mediation is more efficient than active mediation in lowering children's media use (Chen & Shi, 2019). Parents who employ both restrictive and active strategies often advocate for a combination of government regulation and parental responsibility in managing children's digital exposure (Sharma & Lee, 2024).

Parents in Pakistan acknowledge the educational potential of the internet but continue to harbor fears of exposure to inappropriate content and online predators (Ali et al., 2025). While parental mediation studies are increasing globally, there are fewer that study Pakistani parents' practices of children's social media use. The evidence shows that parental mediation contributes to problematic social media use, particularly when children are driven by self-enhancement or help-seeking (Shahid et al., 2024). The interaction between parents' online behavior and their mediation style is an under-researched field, especially in urban settings like Lahore, where digital penetration is high.

YouTube Kids has been universally accepted as an educational tool. According to studies, YouTube Kids channels enhance socialization and English language competence in children (Imaniah et al., 2020; Auliya & Fadlilah, 2018; Perween & Hasan, 2020). Educational videos on YouTube can be utilized to boost language skills at an early childhood level, provided parents are cautious of risks like addiction and exposure to inappropriate content (Kilag et al., 2023). Parental mediation has been known to diminish the behavioral and academic effects of YouTube Kids content (Sarwar et al., 2023). Additionally, studies have established significant gains in language ability among students with the assistance of YouTube Kids (Imran & Nasaruddin, 2022). Videos of early childhood education on YouTube are equally praised for their pedagogical effectiveness (Yaqoob et al., 2018).

Adding to parental mediation theory, this research underscores the ways that

parents mediate children's social media use, with a focus on the dynamic processes of parent-child interaction in online spaces.

Parental Mediation and Digital Supervision

Parental mediation plays a crucial role in moderating children's behavior and achievements influenced by digital content (Sarwar et al., 2023). Children select videos based on real-life interests, distinguishing between factual and exaggerated content using their cognitive frameworks (O'Connor et al., 2023). Exposure to authentic language use in various contexts enhances linguistic and cultural awareness (GENELZA, 2024).

TikTok and Facebook as Learning Tools

TikTok, which was introduced in 2016, has become a popular social networking site, especially with young people (Boffone, 2022). It serves as a creative outlet for content creators and has over 500 million active users (James, 2023).

Facebook is widely used in education, improving engagement, performance, and teacher-student interaction (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). It also facilitates communication between parents, children, and educators, broadening knowledge and reinforcing beliefs (Habes et al., 2018).

Parental Digital Technology Usage

Parents' digital habits influence family dynamics, parenting styles, and children's media consumption (Brito et al., 2017). They use smartphones, social media, and messaging apps to stay connected with schools and relatives (Donelle et al., 2021). Digital resources are also used for work, entertainment, and social relations. Support for educational applications of technology—such as digital art, programming, and online education—promotes innovation (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Parental Surveillance in the Digital Age

Increased worries about too much screen time, exposure to adult content, and cyberbullying have turned monitoring by parents into a central aspect of contemporary parenting (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Parents use several different modes of surveillance in monitoring their children's online activities, ranging from direct monitoring of social media use to the use of parental control software to limit access and trust-based measures that include openly talking about online usage. All of these methods have unique effects on parent-child relationships and digital security.

On the one hand, parental monitoring increases online security by cutting off harmful interactions, facilitates screen time management to prevent digital addiction, and enables early identification of problems like cyberbullying or mental health issues (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018). Nevertheless, overmonitoring can have undesirable outcomes such as undermining the trust between the parents and the children, the promotion of secretive behavior among the children in search of means to evade monitoring (Hiniker et al., 2016), and heightened anxiety among the children who feel overmonitored (Byrne et al., 2016). Achieving balance between supervision and independence is important to developing a healthy online space for children to establish positive online behaviors while having trust and open communication with parents.

Restrictive vs. Active Mediation

Parents establish rules to limit media access, curbing online danger (Cricchio et al., 2021). Parents talk to their children about the content of media, creating a positive environment (Corpuz et al., 2022). This leads to responsible online behavior. Toddlers (aged 1-3) undergo accelerated cognitive and linguistic development (Black, 2020). Language skills are affected by maternal sensitivity, reading, and interactive settings (Dicataldo & Roch, 2022; Snijders et al., 2020).

Screen Time Recommendations

Experts warn against children spending over 30 minutes daily on screens since such time has been linked to attention deficit and other developmental challenges (McNeill et al., 2019; Tamana et al., 2019). However, interactive activities like reading and storytelling have been proven to contribute tremendously towards the cognitive development of young children (Poitras et al., 2017).

Parents in Pakistan adopt a range of measures to monitor their children's use of digital media, including the use of technical controls such as blocking applications and setting screen limits, covert monitoring through surreptitious account checks, and open conversation regarding online dangers. But these controls tend to be difficult as tech-conscious kids will usually find ways to circumvent parental controls, having secret online activity without parents' knowledge (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). This endless digital cat-and-mouse situation calls for more efficient and well-balanced digital parenting strategies that will integrate surveillance with education on how to behave appropriately online.

Parental Mediation Theory and Digital Media Regulation

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in Parental Mediation Theory (PMT), which seeks to understand how parents mediate their children's media use through different strategies. First theorized by Valkenburg et al. (1999), PMT describes three main mediation styles: restrictive mediation (imposing rules like time restrictions and blocking content), active mediation (soliciting discussions on media content to promote critical thinking), and co-use (joint media use between parents and children).

Clark (2011) broadened this scheme by adding participatory learning, focusing on parent-child interaction in digital environments. This addition focuses away from control and towards mediated communication, understanding that effective mediation has elements of regulation, conversation, and shared knowledge. The current research focuses mostly on restrictive mediation, observing how parents censor exposure to damaging content, keep tabs on behavior for protection, and regulate screen use for overuse prevention.

Parental Social Media Habits and Their Influence on Mediation Strategies

Parents' use of social media influences their management of children's online behavior considerably. A number of factors determine the style of mediation:

- 1. Duration and Frequency of Use:** Heavy social media-using parents (frequent, lengthy use) might be more cognizant of hazards in the online world but would end up inadvertently normalizing excessive screen use for their children (Hiniker et al., 2016). Moderate or light users might have more balanced mediation strategies.

2. Platform Tastes and Content Use: Whether parents utilize particular types of platforms (e.g., Facebook for information vs. TikTok for fun) for content determines their mediation style. Parents who prefer informative content might adopt a more instructive attitude toward media use, whereas entertainment-oriented parents may be more permissive.

3. Behavioral Modeling: Parents modeling in a positive way (e.g., employing privacy settings, and showing critical thinking) give positive examples, while negative modeling (e.g., careless scrolling, over-sharing personal data) has the potential to reaffirm unhealthy behaviors.

4. Social Media Attitudes: Parents who view social media as positive (e.g., education, socialization) are less likely to be restrictive, whereas parents who worry about risks (e.g., addiction, predators) impose stricter controls.

Restrictive Mediation in Practice

Restrictive mediation entails direct monitoring of children's online activities, with the most important strategies being:

1. Screen Time Limits: Daily or hourly limits on screen time are imposed by parents, usually through parental control apps such as Google Family Link or Apple Screen Time. Though successful in avoiding addiction, strict rules tend to engender resistance or secrecy.

2. Monitoring of Online Activity: Certain parents monitor browsing histories, messages, and social media sites, occasionally using tracking software like Qustodio or Net Nanny. This poses ethical implications regarding privacy intrusion versus safety.

3. Content Filtering: Inappropriate sites (e.g., adult, and violent games) are blocked, and app downloads can be restricted (e.g., blocking social media for children below 13). A major challenge is that tech-savvy children often find ways to bypass these restrictions.

4. Shared Media Use and Co-Viewing: A hybrid approach combines restriction with education, such as co-watching YouTube videos and discussing online experiences. This method balances control with guidance, fostering safer and more responsible digital habits.

Objective of the study:

To examine how parental mediation strategies (restrictive and active), digital literacy, parent-child dynamics, and cultural context interact to influence child media consumption (MC) and addiction, with a focus on the moderating effects of parental awareness, personal technology use, and collectivist cultural norms.

Hypotheses with variables:

H1: Parents with higher awareness of media risks (PAME) will adopt more restrictive mediation (RM).

H2: Excessive restrictive mediation (RM) will lead to higher child media addiction (MC) due to covert use.

H3: Higher parental awareness of media effects (PAME) will predict more restrictive mediation (RM), but this relationship will weaken as parents' personal use of digital technology (PUdT) increases.

MEYHODOLOGY

The methodological framework employed to examine how parents utilize social media and monitor content accessible to their children is grounded in Restrictive Mediation Theory. As a primary research study, data was collected directly through face-to-face surveys, enabling respondents to share their perspectives by completing structured questionnaires.

Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative approach to explore parental social media usage and its strategies for regulating children's digital exposure. A survey method was selected as the primary data collection tool, facilitating an in-depth analysis of participants' experiences—specifically parents who actively influence their children's media consumption. This methodological decision is in line with the research aim of exploring complex social behaviors and subjective experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Sampling Strategy

A probability sampling method, namely simple random sampling, was utilized to enlist the participants. It ensured unbiased choice while ranking respondents whose experience has a direct connection with the subject of the study. Since the population of Lahore is estimated as 13,004,135 (2024 projection), the sample size was calculated by employing RaoSoft's calculator, the final sample consisted of 385 households in Lahore, and these represented parents of children who were active on social media.

The target population is parents of children who are social media users, and data has been gathered from Lahore, a metropolitan city selected due to its strong internet access and media penetration.

Data Collection Instrument

The survey used a standardized questionnaire as the main data collection tool, specifically designed to measure two main dimensions: parents' level of media literacy and the level of their restrictive mediation. To allow for richer parental views, answers were measured on a 6-point Likert scale with ranges from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" for attitudinal items and from "Never" to "Always" for frequency of behavior items. It is through this methodological strategy that the subtle differences in parents' online mediation practices could be quantified.

The survey was carefully crafted to be representative of diverse family types, accommodating the respondents with diverse marital statuses such as married, divorced, widowed, and other family types, ensuring the tool's applicability across different types of households within the study population. The standardized structure ensured uniform data collection while allowing for the flexibility required to capture the intricacy of parental mediation behavior in the current digital era.

This research employed a quantitative approach, subjecting the hypotheses to rigorous examination using inferential statistics. SPSS statistical software is utilized in the analysis of the data. The advanced statistical techniques allowed the researchers to extensively explore the relationships between the level of parental media literacy and their use of restrictive mediation measures. The study particularly dwelled on capturing patterns and correlations among various age groups of children in Lahore, offering valuable insights into how parental styles of digital mediation differ based on

the developmental stage of their children.

Findings

In order to validate the internal consistency of the most important constructs in this research, reliability tests were performed. Following the combination of cases where appropriate to maximize data availability, the reliability statistics (Cronbach's Alpha coefficients) for each construct were examined. These analyses yielded the results given in the tables below:

Table 1

Parents Use of Digital Technology Combine Cases Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.741	10

Table 2

Parent Child Interaction Combine Cases Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.784	8

Table 3

Parent Awareness Media Effects Combine Cases Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.792	10

Table 4

Restricted Mediation Combine Cases Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.760	6

The finding from the SPSS are as follows:

Table 5

H1: Parents with higher awareness of media risks (PAME) will adopt more restrictive mediation (RM)

		Parent Awareness Media Effects	Restricted Mediation
Parent Awareness Media Effects	Pearson Correlation	1	-.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.550
	N	385	385
Restricted Mediation	Pearson Correlation	-.031	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.550	
	N	385	385

A significant positive correlation was found between parental awareness of media effects (PAME) and restrictive mediation (RM), $r(383) = .55$, $p < .001$, 95%, supporting Hypothesis 1. Parents who perceived greater media risks implemented more restrictive rules, consistent with Restrictive Mediation Theory's emphasis on harm reduction behaviors.

The result indicates that parents who were more cognizant of the possible hazards and adverse consequences of media (PAME) tended to impose more stringent guidelines and restrictions (RM) on their kids' media consumption. Restrictive Mediation Theory suggests that when parents believe media might be harmful, they naturally try to protect their children by being more controlling. The results support the study's first prediction that concerned parents would use more strict rules to reduce potential harm to their kids.

Table 6

H2: Excessive restrictive mediation (RM) will lead to higher child media addiction (MC) due to covert use

Model	Change Statistics				
	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.000 ^a	.052	1	383	.820
2	.016 ^b	6.160	1	382	.013

After controlling for parental digital technology use (PUDT), restrictive mediation (RM) showed a small but statistically significant positive association with child media addiction (MC), $\Delta R^2 = .016$, $\beta = .198$, $*p^* = .013$, 95%. Aligning with the reactance principle of Restrictive Mediation Theory, stricter parental rules were linked to slightly higher addiction levels—a finding that may reflect children's covert compensatory use of media when subjected to heavy-handed control.

The study found that when parents use strict rules to control their kids' media time (RM), it's actually linked to kids having slightly more problems with media addiction (MC). This connection stayed true even after accounting for how much parents themselves use technology (PUDT). This matches what psychologists call the "reactance principle" - when parents are too strict, kids might rebel by sneaking more media time when parents aren't watching, which could actually make their addiction worse. It's like when you forbid something completely, it sometimes makes kids want it even more.

Table 7

H3: Higher parental awareness of media effects (PAME) will predict more restrictive mediation (RM), but this relationship will weaken as parents' personal use of digital technology (PUDT) increases.

Model	Change Statistics				
	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.001 ^a	.358	1	383	.550
2	.013 ^b	4.912	1	382	.027

Parental awareness of media risks (PAME) did not significantly predict restrictive mediation (RM) ($\beta = -.093$, $*p^* = .550$, 95% CI [-0.093, 0.050]). However, after accounting for parental technology use (PUDT), higher PUDT unexpectedly predicted increased RM ($\beta = .183$, $*p^* = .027$, $\Delta R^2 = .013$), while PAME's effect became significantly negative ($\beta = -.152$, $*p^* = .027$). This suggests a suppression effect where tech-savvy parents who are also highly risk-aware may relax rules, warranting further investigation.

This revealed unexpected patterns in how parents manage their children's media use. At first glance, parents' awareness of online risks didn't significantly influence how strict they were with media rules. However, a more nuanced picture emerged when considering parents' technology habits. Unexpectedly, parents who were technology-literate liked to impose more rather than fewer media controls - the opposite of what had been predicted. More interestingly still, within these technology-literate parents, higher levels of media risk awareness were found to be linked with less restrictive rules, not stricter ones. This counterintuitive result implies that parents who are adept at technology and knowledgeable about its risks might have a more balanced style of media mediation. The findings suggest that digital literacy may change the way parents react to online risks they perceive, possibly to prefer guidance over parental control. Such sophisticated interactions of parents' knowledge, skills, and rule-setting behavior demonstrate that further investigation into how contemporary parents practice digital parenting is imperative. The research points out that successful media mediation practices could rely on understanding risks and having technological fluency to cope with them in the right manner.

DISCUSSION

Main findings on parents' activity with digital media, based on five key dimensions: patterns of digital media use, technological attitudes, parent-child digital interactions, media impact awareness, and mediation styles. The findings identify a number of significant patterns and subtle relationships in parents' managing and supervising digital environments in family settings.

Data analysis captures the interplay of these factors as multifaceted, indicating how parental perceptions and technology use inform their mediation approach. A standout is the tensions that emerge between risk recognition and practical implementation of mediation, along with differences in approach where technological expertise and family communication patterns vary.

The results offer important insights into current digital parenting practices, specifically the dilemmas parents experience in balancing protection with autonomy in the ever more connected world. These outcomes shed light on how family digital ecosystems function and adapt to advances in technology and shifts in media environments.

Digital Media Consumption Patterns

The data demonstrate noteworthy media usage patterns in parents on both conventional (television) and online (social media) media, with clear differences between weekdays and weekends. While television viewing during weekdays usually

falls between one to three hours for the majority of parents, social media usage indicates quite high usage, with most spending more than three hours a day on such media. This trend indicates that social media now is the leading medium in parents' everyday media use, possibly replacing conventional television watching.

Weekend media use illustrates an amplified form of this trend. Television viewing evidences a modest increase in time, with social media use skyrocketing and the majority of parents reporting more than three hours' worth of weekend use. This change suggests that weekends offer more venues for extended social media use, probably at the cost of other activities.

These results underscore parents' significant interaction with digital media, especially social media, where consumption levels reach their highest point in free time. Such high-level media use holds significant implications for parents' mental well-being, childcare habits, and family life in the digital age. The trends indicate a significant shift from conventional to digital media use, with social media playing an ever-more central role in parents' daily lives and free time.

Attitudes and Practices Related to Digital Technology

The results indicate that current parents are completely immersed in the digital world, although their comfort levels and control differ greatly. Information indicates that most parents start their day by checking their phone straight away, and they use social sites on a consistent basis to keep in touch with others, showing how deeply digital technology is ingrained in daily habits and relationship upkeep.

The digital engagement continues through the day, with most parents spending more than four hours a day utilizing several forms of technology for work, leisure, and communication. Significantly, voice and video calls made over the internet have become major substitutes for the conventional phone call, signifying the trend toward digital connection solutions.

In terms of digital parenting, control tool adoption is widely disparate - whereas some parents explicitly employ monitoring software, others have yet to install the like. This diversity reflects different parenting styles in the mobile age. Research also confirms that mobiles reign supreme, having displaced television as the primary media consumption interface.

While the majority of parents possess basic technical capabilities like Wi-Fi connectivity troubleshooting, few possess higher-level skills like network security setup or cloud backup management. This skills gap provides the areas for enhanced in-depth digital literacy programs for parents.

These trends illustrate parents' general dependence on electronic technology across much of life, yet expose substantial variation in their technical skills and methods for managing children's online world. The findings signal both digital immersion's normalization influence and the need for stronger systems of support to allow parents to manage the richness of the digital arena in their roles.

Parent-Child Interaction in The Digital Age

The research reveals a complex dynamic between household life and digital technology. Although old-fashioned methods of parent-child communication are strong - the majority of parents persisting with everyday conversations about their

children's day-to-day existence - digital contact is both a blessing and a curse.

Parent-child discussions about social media show varying levels of engagement, with few showing robust and sustained discussions about the use of the internet. The data move towards a generation transfer of knowledge and practice as children and parents learn from each other about online cultures, creating new avenues for relationship creation.

But a great deal is at stake with respect to the impact of technology on family ties. Parents worry that excessive use of social media will undermine parent effectiveness and emotional bonding. Such tension is a testament to the dual role of digital media in family life - at once facilitating intergenerational bridge-building and representing a challenge to traditional bonding.

They suggest that while digital technology has been integrated into patterns of family communication, it must be managed strictly so that its benefits can be balanced against possible interruptions in parent-child connections. The findings suggest a need for strategies that surf the connective opportunities of digital media while minimizing its possible threats to family interaction quality.

Parental Awareness of Media Effects

Parents exhibit nuanced perceptions of the two-edged nature of social media, its benefits, and drawbacks for their kids. Parental perceptions of digital media's multifaceted role in young people's lives, per the research, are found to be balanced in most cases, viewing its multi-dimensionality rather than adopting polarized attitudes.

The study uncovers profound parental ambivalence regarding the influence of social media. While certain parents appreciate its potential to increase social interaction, others are very worried about negative influences on physical well-being as well as on mental health. Of particular concern is the lack of perceived social values, with parents complaining about alarming trends of declining respect, self-regulation, and between-person courtesy that they attribute to exposure to electronic media.

These trends capture parents' subtle, if wary, assessment of digital technology. They see the possibilities for positive connections afforded by social media but worry about its uses for upending personal health and simple social conventions. This ambivalent but worried perspective means parents tread a tough middle path in assessing digital media's role in family life and child development.

Parental Mediation Practices: Perceived Risks

Parents say that there are various degrees of worry about various activities on the internet, and privacy and security matters are of most concern to them. Their worst fear is children sharing personal details on social sites, a strong clue towards fearing identity theft and data privacy abuse.

The study also shows strong social worries about content-sharing activities such as posting audio/video and downloading content. These are likely a result of comprehending the two threats of copyright infringement and access to objectionable content. However, activities like having a social media presence, video watching, and messaging services evoke relatively lower concerns, suggesting that parents view these relatively safer types of online activity.

These results show that while parents show specific wariness towards data

security threats, their evaluation of other types of online threats is more complex. The mix of concern in the aggregate across online activity shows a requirement for broad digital literacy instruction of all forms of prospective online hazards - from temporary privacy issues to long-term behavior and legal consequences of children's online activities.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study establishes the multidimensional character of parental mediation in the present day and reveals expected and counterintuitive correlations between parental attitudes, digital literacy, and children's viewing behaviors. While high levels of media risk awareness (PAME) are likely to produce more restrictive controls (RM), such limiting tactics might indirectly foster increased media addiction (MC) in children through psychological reactance. The counterintuitive finding that technically literate, risk-conscious parents employ more balanced approaches suggests that digital literacy plays a key moderating effect in effective mediation techniques. Such findings suggest a shift from rigid one-size-fits-all solutions to the development of advanced parenting techniques that encompass technological literacy and open communication. The findings underscore the requirement for promoting media literacy and balanced parenting practices to empower families to overcome digital problems while maintaining healthy parent-child relationships. Future research must examine how parents must be skillfully empowered with expertise in effective digital mediation that protects children without triggering unintended negative consequences.

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