

SPONSORSHIP AS A MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS TOOL: A THEORETICAL REFLECTION OF CONCEPT AND DIMENSIONS

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ABSTRACT

*Sponsorship is one of the most important tools of modern marketing communications, which are used by companies to achieve their marketing goals. Sponsorship is the provision of resources (money, people, or equipment) by an organization directly to an event or activity in exchange for a direct association to the event or activity. Sponsorship has increasingly been viewed as a way in which to generate audience awareness and has the ability to transcend cultural and linguistic barriers. It is no coincidence that sport, the arts and music are the areas that receive the most amount of sponsorship funding as these are activities with appeal. This paper theoretically explored the concept of Sponsorship and identified its objectives, types, benefits and dimensions of Sponsorship. These dimensions of Sponsorship include goodwill, event- sponsor fit, and **Fan involvement***

KEYWORDS: Sponsorship, Goodwill, Sport sponsorship, Social cause sponsorship.

INTRODUCTION

As many corporations become concerned about the value of traditional forms of marketing, technological advancements have resulted in an explosion of marketing possibilities 'with the attendant problem of clutter and cost efficient access' (Meenaghan 1998). As the number of commercial television and radio stations has risen, traditional advertising has produced a proliferation of messages within the medium. Sponsorship is seen as an alternative and often cheaper form of gaining exposure that avoids clutter and allows a sufficiently distinctive message to be seen and/ or heard (Howard & Crompton 1995). In the recent years, sponsorship has been one of the most important means which are used by companies to achieve their promotional objectives and to build brand loyalty to ensure their survival and continuity, even to have competitive advantages. Commercial sponsorship represents one of the most rapidly growing sectors of marketing communications activity. More recently as a result of globalization and digitalization, the use and selection of different marketing tools among the organizations is playing a key role in which the marketing ability impacts the financial success of a company. Indeed, in this environment, the ability to develop and implement new strategic communication tools such as sponsorship is becoming a key differentiator.

Sponsorship has increasingly been viewed as a way in which to generate audience awareness and has the ability to transcend cultural and linguistic barriers. It is no coincidence that sport, the arts and music are the areas that receive the most amount of sponsorship funding as these are activities with appeal. Sponsorship as a marketing medium are used to influence strategic partners, company staff, civic officials and government regulators, while at the same time appealing to customers and, as such, influence a company's 'bottom line (Nadube, 2021).' Sport sponsorship in particular provides a vehicle to litigate products such as alcohol and tobacco. While a number of countries ban or provide stringent regulations to govern the advertising of tobacco and alcohol products, sponsorship has provided a platform that has given these potentially harmful products an air of respectability. It also allows them access to television coverage and a youth market, nationally and internationally. Sponsorship has grown in popularity as a form of marketing communication because it provides an excellent means of targeting selected market segments. As Sleight (1989)

pointed out. Sponsorship works because it fulfills the most important criterion of a communications medium – it allows a particular audience to be targeted with a particular message.

Sponsorship is a rapidly growing element of the marketing Communications mix and yet, while it is one of the most widely used, it is also one of the least well understood. Sponsorship is a very powerful and effective marketing tool because it increases the impact that business has on people beyond awareness and promotion. Unlike advertising, sponsorship creates dynamic connections with positive ideas. Sponsoring an event offers significant, different and exciting marketing opportunities to actively engage with audiences as well as showing support. Attracting your business' audience, sponsorship of an event broadens exposure, increasing your credibility, image and prestige. Sponsorship provides the publicity of an organization in the media- the events that are followed by the whole world (for instance, football championships, tennis tournaments, the Olympics) provide global media attention and therefore gives organisations global exposures.

The Concepts of Sponsorship

Sponsorship is one of the most important tools of modern marketing communications, which are used by companies to achieve their marketing goals. Indeed, events are the main and the widest application field for sponsorship. To sponsor an event is to support it financially with cash or in-kind, in return for benefits that help the organization reach its marketing goals. Sponsorship of an event is a three-way exchange: it provides your business with access to the event audiences; it allows audiences to enjoy an enhanced event; and it gives the organisers the means to put the event together. Sponsorship is a commercial transaction, not a charitable donation. It is an opportunity to engage in a marketing exercise that is going to promote the organisation in many ways.

Sponsorship is a two way mutually beneficial partnership between an organization being sponsored and the sponsor. Sponsorship works on the premise that association largely affects image and that the sponsor may exchange money and /or goods or services in kind return for the association that the sponsorship provides. Those being sponsored may include groups or teams, events, charities, individuals, buildings and TV program (Fill & Hughes 2008). Furthermore, sponsorship is an investment, in cash or in kind, in return for access to exploitable business potential associated with an event or highly publicized entity. The key words in this definition are 'investment', 'access' and 'exploitable'. Sponsorship is an investment opportunity, where there is a viable pay back in the form of brand recognition and brand value. Using the word investment automatically implies that value will be returned to the investor. Secondly, access to means having the ability to capitalize on your association with that particular offering (event, sports, festival, etc.). Lastly, "exploitable" means "to take the greatest advantage of the relationship. In other words, allowing sponsors to make the greatest use of their investment and capitalize on their relationship (Allen, 2010).

From the aforementioned definitions, it means sponsorship involves investments in events or causes for the purpose of achieving various corporate objectives such as increasing sales volume, enhancing a company's reputation or brand image and increasing awareness. It also means the company provides financial resources, personal services, equipment or facilities to create an alliance with the event. In return, the company obtains direct exposure to the public targeted by the event. There are both primary and secondary objectives associated with using sponsorship. The primary reasons are to build awareness, develop customer loyalty and improve the perception held of the brand. Secondary reasons are more contentious, but generally they can be seen to attract new users, to support dealers and other intermediaries and to act as a form of staff motivation and morale building (Reed, 1994).

IEG, (2017); Meenaghan, (1991) defined sponsorship as "a cash and/or in-kind fee paid to a property (typically of sports, entertainment, non-profit events or organisation) in return for access to be exploitable commercial potential associate with that property ".Sponsorship is the provision of resources (money, people, or equipment) by an organization directly to an event or activity in

exchange for a direct association to the event or activity” (Sandler & Shani, 1993). Sponsorship is also defined as ‘a business relationship between one that provides means, resources or services and individuals, events or organizations, which in return offer certain rights and associations that can be used for commercial purposes (Sleight, 1989, in Jobber, Fahy, 2006). Meenaghan (1983) defines sponsorship as a financial investment or materials on an activity, person, or event and having access to a potential communication associated with this activity, person, or event. The goal of sponsorship according to Meenaghan (1991) remains unclear, as its definition does not specify the communication objectives and does not allow for non-commercial sponsorships. Derbaix *et al.* (1994) indicate that this technique is to create an event or independent support and assimilate to the event through the media, to achieve marketing objectives. Used as a means of communication beyond media, sponsorship led to a commercial return for the sponsor (Allen *et al.* 2005). In most cases, sponsorship involves three actors: the sponsor, agency events, and consumers. The sponsor provides financial support, equipment, or know-how; in return, the event organizer will help provide an image and awareness, promoting its event space for the sponsor. Sponsorship is considered an indirect form of communication quality objectives in terms of awareness and image (Burton *et al.* 1998; Derbaix *et al.* 1994). For businesses, the benefits of sponsorship lie mainly in the fact that it is a means of two-way communication (Harrison & O'Reilly, 2005).

There are a number of different definitions of sponsorship (Meenaghan 1983, 1991; Sleight 1989; Sandler & Shani 1993). In an attempt to provide a sufficiently broad definition to accommodate a wide range of sponsored activities, and the motives for such support, an adaptation to Berret's (1993) definition is appropriate. Berret (1993) defined sponsorship as a contribution to an activity by a commercial organization in cash, or in kind, with the expectation of achieving corporate and marketing objectives. In the fulfillment of corporate objectives, sponsorship can be seen to have strategic recognition. Sponsorship may also be used for particular brand and marketing communications purposes and, as such, fulfill specific marketing objectives (Nadube, 2021, Pickton & Broderick, 2001).

It is important to distinguish sponsorship activity from charitable donations and patronage. Unlike sponsorship, these organizations rarely expect public recognition for this type of contribution. A sponsoring company will view its sponsorship as a business relationship from which it expects to gain a competitive advantage; philanthropy in the form of charitable donations and patronage carries no such direct expectation although there may be marketing public relations benefits that can be exploited.

Objectives of Sponsorship

1. **Gaining Publicity:** Sponsorship provides an opportunity to create publicity in the news media. Worldwide events such as major golf, football, tennis tournaments supply the platform for global media coverage. Millions of people watch these events. Sponsorship of such events provides brand exposure to millions of people. Some events such as golf have a more upmarket profile. The publicity opportunities of sponsorship can produce major awareness shifts. Sponsorship can create entertainment opportunities for customers. Sponsorship of music, the performing arts, and sports events are particularly effective in this regard. Attendance at sponsored events can be used to reward successful employees, customers, and trade partners.

2. **Fostering Favorable Brand and Company Associations:** Sponsoring a mega-event like the Olympics or Soccer World Cup ensures almost instant international recognition. There is a huge amount of prestige associated with sponsoring such big events and the sponsoring companies' credibility soars up. They are considered as big as the events they are sponsoring as it is known that big money is involved in sponsorship deals of such events. A company advances to the big league as soon as it associates with a mega event. But a company can also foster favorable brand

associations by sponsoring special events like some arts or some charities. The patrons of the events will start viewing the sponsoring company favourably.

3. Improving Community Relations: Sponsoring an event or an organization that will help the community where the event is being organized or where the organization functions is always a good idea. Sponsorship of schools, for instance, by providing low-cost computers and supporting community programs, can foster a socially responsible, caring reputation for a company. Developing community relations is the most usual sponsorship objective for both industrial and consumer companies. There are usually many such opportunities to help a community. Two or more companies can join hands to sponsor a program beneficial to the community where they are based.

4. Creating Promotional Expenditure: Bags, pens, etc. carrying the company logo and the name of the event can be sold to a captive audience. Flags and banners bearing the name of the company and the event can be displayed at the site of the event and outside to boast of the association. This is especially important when there are many companies sponsoring the event. It is important that the company takes leverage of the association between itself and the event by promoting the association aggressively. Where the brand can be consumed during the event, it provides an opportunity for customers to sample brands

Types of Sponsorship:

The American approach developed by IEG (2011) categorizes the types of sponsorships in order of their monetary importance. This approach neglects media sponsorships totally and develops and assesses the categories:

- Sports.
- Entertainment tours and attractions.
- Cause sponsorship.
- Arts sponsorship.
- Festivals, fairs and annual events.
- Associations and membership organizations.

However, a state-of-the-art aggregation, gathering the central orientations, divides sponsorship into:

- Sport sponsorship
- Culture sponsorship
- Social cause sponsorship
- Environmental sponsorship
- Educational sponsorship
- Media sponsorship.

Sport sponsorship: This is the distribution of resources (money, people, equipment by an organization (sponsor) directly to a sponsee for example, (sport personality, sport authority, body or code) to enable the sponsee to pursue some activity (for example, participation by the individual or event management by the authority or sport body or in the return for rights contemplated in terms of the sponsors marketing communication strategy, cross impact and leverage between sponsorship and other marketing communication variables employed before, during and after the sponsorship campaign). And which can be expressed in terms of corporate, marketing, sales and/or media objectives and measured in terms of linking the objectives to a desired outcome in terms of return on investment in monetary and non-monetary terms. For example, sports kit giants Nike, presented soccer equipment worth several thousands of dollars to MTN Soccer Academy, (2010 edition) Ghana- Nigeria edition. By the gesture, Nike is now the official kit sponsor for the soccer reality show, inducting seven Ghanaians and seven Nigerians into the academy house to battle for supremacy (Aduonum, 2009).

Culture sponsorship: It is defined as a financial, human or material support provided without compensation by a business to any activity in the creative arts and culture sector. Cultural Sponsorships continue to grow and flourish throughout the art world.

Social cause sponsorship: Corporations have long history of giving to charitable causes but in recent years they have become increasingly concerned about realizing some commercial advantage for funds they give to these causes (Nadube, 2021, Pickton & Broderick, 2001). As such, cause-related marketing has grown in popularity and in 1997 accounted for 9% of US sponsorship spending (IEG 1997). This type of sponsorship involves a firm aligning itself to particular charitable cause or foundation, and supporting it either financially, or donating staff time and/or product. The sponsoring company, if providing a direct financial contribution, will often make this amount proportional to the sales generated by the promotion over a particular period of time (Meenaghan 1988). Meenaghan (1998) suggests that cause-related sponsorship allows firms to portray themselves as 'caring, benevolent, community-oriented and humane' although he has cautioned that companies must be careful not to over-exploit the relationship and thus generate a negative reaction among the general public.

Environmental sponsorship: A central challenge for environmental governance is inducing organizations to incur private costs to produce positive environmental externalities, such as reducing the environmental impact of their activities. Command and control regulations are predicated on the belief that without state coercion, business organizations are not likely to voluntarily provide such non-excludable societal benefits. Although these traditional regulations have led to profound environmental benefits, they have been criticized for being inefficient, enforcement intensive, and less effective at combating the new generation of environmental problems (Fiorino 1999; Prakash & Potoski 2006). As complements to command and control regulations, a slew of new policy instruments, including voluntary environmental programs (VEPs), have been designed to induce organizations to voluntarily adopt progressive environmental policies.

Educational sponsorship: Educational sponsorship is one of the wide used types of sponsorship. This can take several forms, from the sponsoring of individuals' student at college/university through to the provision of books, tuition fees, cost of living, computers and travel expenses. In other words, educational sponsorships involve providing funding to help students pay for their education or providing any assistant to students with respect to their education.

Media sponsorship: Media sponsors are financial sponsors that secure advertising for an event. Media sponsors agree to advertise the event. This can mean purchasing advertising space and time in appropriate international, national or regional media vehicles, publishing content about the event on their own social media channels. A programme is deemed to be sponsored if any or part of its costs of production or transmission is met by an organization or person, other than a broadcaster or producer, with a view to promoting its own or another's name, trademark, image, activities, products, or other direct or indirect commercial interests (Intel 1997). Options for programme sponsorship are as follows;

- **Off- the-peg sponsorship:** This is sponsoring of a programme that already exists. You pay your money and the programme is aired whenever the broadcaster wishes.
- **Made-to-measure programme sponsorship:** The sponsor describes the sort of programme that is wanted and the broadcaster makes the programme or re-schedules an existing one that suits subject to not contravening national rules.

- **Pre-commissioned programme funding:** This requires a producer or production company to be found who is willing to develop the sponsor's programme idea or one that presents an idea for funding to the potential sponsor. It is recommended that funding is withheld until there is a definite commission so that, as sponsor, you know that the programme will be aired. The producer maintains most of the control for the development.
- **Programme - led off- air promotion:** This is where the sponsor exploits a programme through off – air promotions such as fact sheets, in – store promotions, use of the stars, etc. The sponsor is basically cashing in on the programme's popularity without necessarily being involved in sponsoring the programme itself.
- **Pre-sponsoring or pilot co-funding:** The sponsor agrees to sponsor a programme before it is made or gives the producer development money to secure the right (either exclusive or joint) sponsorship.
- **Invent own format, have a producer/broadcaster make it and sponsor it:** The advantage of this route is that there is involvement in the process of production from the start. It requires the producer/broadcaster to like the ideas enough to think it is worth producing, the programme is theirs once made.
- **Speculative funding:** In this instance, the sponsor arranges for a broadcaster to agree a commission. The sponsor makes their own programme and delivers it to the broadcaster once made. It is speculative in that there may be no guarantees that the programme will be commissioned. Once it is accepted, the sponsor owns the rights that can be sold on to others. As an alternative approach to limit the risk, if a broadcaster is willing to commission the programme idea before it is made, the sponsor can simply sell on the rights and have someone else make the programme. In reality, this is not really the area in which sponsors will tend to become involved.

The "Sponsoring Trends 2010" report for Germany shows that amongst the sponsorship portfolio, sport sponsorship is the most popular category with 81.1% usage, followed by cultural sponsorship and social cause sponsorship. So, there are lots of kinds of events, but the most important one in sponsorship field are sports events.

The Benefits and Risks of Sponsorship

As was noted earlier, one of the benefits attributed to sponsorship is that it can be more efficient than other forms of marketing communication because it can generate both audience appeal and link the values of the sponsored entity to the sponsor. Sponsorship can also transcend cultural and geographical boundaries. It is effective at targeting different audiences, can help forge links with local business and political communities, and can be used to improve employee relations (Berret 1993). While these characteristics have been widely acknowledged as contributing to the rapid growth of sponsorship, they are not the only benefits. Others include:

- **Community image building:** Sponsorship can be used to present the sponsoring company as a good corporate citizen, an organization that gives back to the community. Slack and Bentz (1996), showed how small business owners felt that they were able to build up an image as a socially responsible organization with community politicians, the local media, and other non - consumer audiences could then be used when the manager needed help from one of these individuals or the organizations they represented.
- **Marketing leverage:** Sponsorship also appeals to corporations as a marketing communications medium because it can be tied to other marketing activities that are

designed to influence both customers and strategic partners. Product trial opportunities which are often linked to sponsorships can move a customer from the interest stage of the product adoption process to the desire stage, the stage which involves a serious evaluation about whether or not to purchase a product (Howard & Crompton, 1995).

- **Hospitality opportunities.** In addition to influencing customers, many companies want to create a good relationship with existing and/or potential partners, suppliers or distributors. One way to strengthen these business to business relationships is to tie sponsorship to hospitality opportunities. According to Meenaghan (1983), hospitality refers to those opportunities whereby the company can make face – to – face contact with selected publics in a prestigious social context, thereby strengthening and personalizing relationships with decision makers, trade channels, and business associates.
- **Media leverage:** Because many of the events that receive sponsorship money are high profile, sponsors are often able to capitalize on the media attention that follows these types of activities. This coverage has also allowed some companies to circumvent regulations on their products which state that they are unable to advertise on television – alcohol and tobacco products being the most obvious examples.
- To **counteract the strategic initiatives of competitors:** Slack and Bentz (1996) posit that one benefit that can accrue from sponsorship is that it can be used to counteract the strategic initiatives of competitors. Using data from a sample of small businesses involved in a variety of sponsorships, they showed how owner- managers become involved in similar sponsorships to competitors to negate any advantage the competitors may derive from their association with a team or event. The types of work, which takes its lead from the broader literature on strategic management and marketing has considerable potential to increase our understanding of the benefits of sponsorship, but has as yet received only limited attention.

Other benefits of sponsorship are as follows

- ❖ Enhance corporate image.
- ❖ Increase brand awareness.
- ❖ Stimulate and increase sales.
- ❖ Leverage corporate reputation.
- ❖ Creating entertainment opportunities.
- ❖ Fostering favorable brand and company associations.
- ❖ Creating promotional opportunities

Dimensions of sponsorship

There are many dimensions of sponsorship that have been discussed in marketing literature:

Goodwill: It is consumer perception of sponsorship and the positive attitude consumers convey toward a sponsor that supports and facilitates an event, team, or cause in which they are passionate. Windy, (2004) posits that the largest factor distinguishing sponsorship from advertising is goodwill. The notion of goodwill is central to an understanding of sponsorship. Both Meenaghan (1991) and McDonald (1991), collaborated this view when they assert that one of the prime factors that distinguish sponsorship from advertising was the existence of goodwill. Such goodwill was believed to be driven by the appreciation of individuals who recognize the benefits of sponsorship to activities with which they are involved.

Fan involvement: The extent to which consumers identify with, and are motivated by, their engagement and affiliation with particular leisure activities. Involvement in the case of sponsorship is a kind of genuine excitement caused by a strong and solid interest in a specific activity which results from the importance of this activity for an individual. We should know that the knowledge of consumer has a strong influence in increasing interest, considerable motivation on the sponsorship and bring about the benefit of sponsor.

Event-sponsor fit: The degree to which the pairing (of an event and sponsor) is perceived as well matched or a good fit, without any restriction on the basis used to establish fit. It is generally accepted that if target audience see the sponsor and sponsored objects as congruent, that sponsorship is more likely to arouse positive responses. Thompson and Speed (2000) found that consumers who perceive fit between the sponsor and the sponsee are more inclined to form positive attitudes toward sponsor and use sponsor's products. There are several studies which showed similar findings reinforcing the positive relationship between the perceived fit and behavioral intentions.

Sponsorship Selection

Sponsorship can be a one-off deal or it can be a continuing association. While the promotional leverage from sponsorship is important, it is more crucial to assess the impact that the association will have on the perceptions of the customers and other stakeholders towards the company. Selection of an event or a programme to sponsor should be undertaken by answering a series of questions:

1. What does the company wants to achieve from the sponsorship deal: Is the company looking for increased brand awareness? Or does the company want to improve its image, or its community relations? Or is it looking for entertainment opportunities for its customers and employees? The choice of the individual, the event or the organization that the company will sponsor should be governed by what it wants to achieve from the sponsorship deal. If the company wants increased brand awareness, it should get associated with mega events like soccer world cup. If it wants to improve its relations with the community it is a part of, it should sponsor a literacy programme for the locality. And if the company wants to improve its image, it should sponsor a dying art or an event which would not take place if the company does not pitch in.

2. Does the personality of the event matches the desired brand image: It is easy to get enticed by the promotional opportunities of mega events but if that is all that the corporation is looking for in a sponsorship deal, it will be better off putting the money in advertising. It will at least have more leverage in deciding how to spend the money in advertising than it has when it puts the same money in a sponsorship deal. Sponsorship should be used to shape the personality of the sponsoring company. If the company sponsors a prestigious golf tournament, the motive should be to bestow an image of exclusivity on the company. The company should be very clear about the type of image that it wants to portray and then associate with an individual, an event or an organization that has a similar image.

3. Target market: The profile of the company's customer base should match the likely audience of the sponsored event or programme. One of the most important objectives of a company entering any sponsorship deal is to influence its customers. This can only happen when the enthusiasts of the sponsored event are also the customers of the company. The enthusiasts of the event should feel grateful to the company for having sponsored their favourite event or sport.

4. Risk: What are the chances that the event or programme might attract adverse publicity? The sponsoring company should dig deep to find the individual's events, or the organization's character and other associations. And as soon as the skeletons in the cupboard of the sponsored event, individual or the organization are out, the sponsoring company should publicly declare discontinuance of the relationship between the two. Any dithering on the issue would damage the interests of the sponsoring company. The company should try to ensure that its stakeholders are not hurt because of its association with the individual, the event or the organization.

Sponsorship Evaluation:

Understanding sponsorship objective, i.e. why an event or programme is being sponsored, is the first step in evaluating its success. Formal measurement of media coverage and name mentions and sightings, and the change in perception of the company's stakeholders have to be undertaken. It is important that there is a formal system to find out the gains from a sponsorship deal. It is often convenient to believe that gains would have accrued from the association with the event. It is also important to qualify the gains for the company in terms of whether it primarily gained awareness or whether it was able to improve its relationship with the community, or some other gains. The results of the evaluation process will be useful when the company is considering a sponsorship deal in future or when it has to decide the continuation or termination of a sponsorship deal.

When to terminate a sponsorship:

Terminate a sponsorship deal, even if it is a long standing one, if the reputation of the event has suffered. Companies sponsor events primarily to enhance their reputations. They want to leverage someone else's credibility and image for their own benefit. It does not make sense to continue associations with an event whose reputation has been tarnished, no matter how rewarding the relationship has been in the past. IBM walked away from a 40 year relationship as a top Olympic sponsor in the wake of findings about corruption in its site-selection process. In 1968 Pepsi-Cola ended its support of the Miss America contest because the event no longer represented the changing values of America. There is always a danger of running into a sponsorship deal with an event engaged in sordid deeds not known to the public yet. It is imperative that marketers display due diligence when selecting a partner for a sponsorship deal. A sponsorship deal with a partner with sullied reputation can alienate important customers (Meenaghan, 1983).

CONCLUSION

Marketing communications is goal-directed and is aligned with an organisation's marketing strategy, with the aim to deliver a particular message to some specific audiences, and with a targeted purpose of altering perceptions and/or behaviour. Sponsorship is considered to be an important marketing communication tool. Sponsorship communicates companies' product and its benefits. It generates goodwill and brand awareness and recall for sponsored companies. There is a positive link between sponsorship and marketing communication. It is 'the acquisition of rights to affiliate or directly associate with a product or event for the purpose of deriving benefits related to that affiliation or association. Sponsorship is a mutually useful relationship, regulated by sponsorship agreement. There is a need to understand that sponsorship has moved from being a purely philanthropic activity practiced by firms with personal connections with a particular event or activity, to a resource that needs to be integrated into the firms' entire marketing communications mix. Sponsorship also involves a range of very effective strategic and tactical activities.

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