

Investigating the Decision Process of Artwork Acquisition Before and During the COVID Pandemic

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Abstract

Art influences our lives and society. The forms acquired by art have evolved, making art a part of our everyday life. Before the second half of the 19th century, music and stories could only be heard live and seldom, but today it is difficult to imagine a day without them. With the increasing complexity of art forms, the complexity of artwork acquisition decision-making process has also increased. Personal choice is influenced by factors like the availability of artworks, the relationship between intermediaries and art producers, the economic and cultural contexts. This paper analyses the selection criteria of artworks from the perspective of art consumers. The analysed data were obtained through a survey with two waves carried out in the period preceding the COVID-19 pandemic and during the pandemic. The results show that the most important criterion in choosing an artwork is the subjective connexion that is created between the consumer and the artwork, and that this connexion is defined mainly by the emotions and feelings the artwork generates.

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1. Introduction

Lafrenz (2013) defines works of art as having in common the fact that they are products of an intentional activity. He identifies a series of necessary and sufficient conditions for an object to be considered a work of art. According to this definition for an object x , if x is a work of art, then (1) it is an artifact that (2) was intentionally created to serve a cultural role which it represents over time, (3) has style, and (4) is interpretable.

To define art, Davies (1991) starts from two main approaches: functional and procedural. The functional approach considers an object to be a work of art if it fulfils a certain function, which is usually to provide an aesthetic experience. By contrast, the procedural approach considers that an object could be a work of art only if it was created according to certain rules and procedures.

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Defining art is an ongoing process. Every generation, every art movement, every philosophy of art tried to establish a definition that was succeeded by a new theory, born, at least in part, from the denial of previous theories (Weitz, 1956).

The acquisition criteria taken into consideration by the art consumers at the moment of acquisition represent a topic less approached by researchers. The effort of artwork identification during the decision process of artwork acquisition has been researched to a lesser extent. The art forms that were mostly analysed are cinematography, theatre, literature, music, and visual arts. These art forms have been researched because they are most common in the contemporary society.

The main objective of this research is to investigate the criteria used by consumers in their decision process of artwork acquisition. The paper offers an analysis of the influences that consumers' convictions regarding art manifest on the selection criteria. The paper aims also to be an invitation for further research on the evaluation criteria of artworks.

The main aim of this study is to research the selection criteria for works of art during the acquisition process. The survey was the method chosen for data collection. Due to the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic, it was decided to also capture the differences that may occur in the acquisition behaviour before and after the pandemic. Therefore, a two-wave survey was implemented. The objectives of the survey were to identify the selection criteria and the beliefs related to the influences that art has on the individual and society. The first data collection wave was conducted in September 2018, and the second data collection wave was conducted in May 2020.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 includes a review of the published analyses regarding the evaluation of artworks, followed by a section presenting the art consumption in Romania before and during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Section 4 includes the methodology and Section 5 shows the results of the research, highlighting the criteria in the decision-making process of artwork acquisition, and the analysis of the influences of the convictions regarding the art on the selection criteria. The last section concludes.

2. Literature Review

Brown (1996) formulates the definition of art in terms of the necessary and sufficient properties that an object must have to be called a work of art, but concludes that art is not the kind of concept that requires or allows to be defined as such, and considers art as an open concept that will always generate situations in which it will be necessary to evaluate unforeseen cases.

Lamarque (1993) reminds that the discussions about the Marcell Duchamp's Fountain - an overturned urinal, complied to the definition of art in XX century. Often the discourse about the Fountain becomes a criterion that reflect the perception about art. Although art historians recognize the importance of Duchamp in the development of art, they do not consider it a work of art. Exhibiting the Fountain, together with the intellectual rationalization of this act by Duchamp, participated to the creation of the context which allow today new types of works that deserve the label of "art".

Mandel (2009) brings a new dimension to works of art as investment vehicles. By adding artistic value to utility, art objects retain their value over time, and being used become a sign of wealth.

DiMaggio (1987) presents a framework for analysing the relationship between social structure, patterns of consumption and artistic production, and the ways in which artistic genres are classified. The classification systems of works of arts are influenced by the fact that artistic production is achieved through commercial, professional, or bureaucratic means as well as by the formal characteristics of the social structure, the organization of educational systems and the internal relations between cultural organizations.

Uusitalo (2008) identifies several trends that manifest themselves in the behaviour of art consumers, more precisely of museum visitors. These include the desire to mix cultural and commercial experiences, the construction of new models of socialization in public spaces, which stimulate the private space of individual interaction, the demand for experience and immediate, individual communication instead of the media.

In recent years, the context in which organizations from artistic fields operate has changed in response to changes in funding, governance, and the competitive market. Cray *et al.* (2007) showed how for some art institutions government subsidies have been reduced, increasing dependence on donations from individuals and corporations, income from shows and exhibitions, or volunteer efforts. These new conditions have required a greater attention from the management of art institutions. The pressure for greater transparency and accountability has also increased.

Daellenbach (2012) analysed the implications of the relationship between sponsors and non-profit organizations in the field of art. The study highlights the importance of existing relationships and compatibility between the two parties. The orientation of companies towards philanthropic goals is a key element that determines the decision-making, and the role of the non-profit organization is crucial from the perspective of how it presents its events to the business sector.

Despite the growing economic and cultural importance of artistic institutions, relatively little is known about how art is influenced by aesthetic concerns and customer requirements. Cray and Inglis (2011) investigated the strategic decision-making process within Canadian art organizations but focused on the issues facing the organization in the decision-making process. The research shows that consumer requirements are just one of the factors influencing these decisions of organizations.

Ahlkvist and Faulkner (2002) analysed the decision-making criteria for radio stations regarding the music included in radio programs. A multitude of methods have been created for radio stations to answer this question, the decision being mainly influenced by the relationship with the record companies and the audience of the radio stations. The repertoire of radio stations is also defined according to the target segments of each radio station, which ultimately have implications in defining the cultural production in the commercial radio industry.

Mauws (2000) showed that aesthetic judgments can be subordinated to the institutionalized practices of the domains in which culture is produced. It cannot be said whether this mechanism works for or against artists, but the particular social practices through which the evaluation process takes place in the case of decision-makers play a critical role in determining what is broadcast on radio stations. Some of these may favour art, and others may favour trade: but as long as both exist, the range of cultural offerings we face will continue to be unpredictable.

Ronald and McKinney (2008) showed that one can expect a dynamic, evolving system, a variety of factors that can generate change, some of which being oriented towards adaptation while others towards radical innovation, some of which being oriented towards

orderly development, based on rules, while others favouring free improvisation and thus acting as generators of new tendencies. Trying to get a clear and complete theory of a such dynamic process can not only be difficult but also wrong. At the same time, such an attempt seems necessary if we are trying to evaluate the changes that are taking place in the world of art consumers.

Demographic change and cultural changes in recent years have influenced the behaviour of art consumers. The generation of millennials on the consumer market and the disappearance of the baby boom generation are eloquent examples in this regard. Colbert and Dantas (2019) analyse these new types of consumers, along with recent technological advances, which bring new forms of consumption. The ubiquity of mobile phones at concerts, the use of digital notebooks in operas, and the role of social media during performances are aspects of contemporary society that change the behaviour of organizations and consumers. These new technologies affect art consumption habits, and the existence of new customers implies a new way of communication. With the proliferation of media platforms, especially those in the social media field, decisions on communicating with potential customers are becoming increasingly complex.

3. Methodology

The data collection tool was the semi-structured questionnaire. This data collection instrument offers the possibility to obtain information on the works of art acquisition process and to analyze the influences that are manifested among art consumers. The questionnaire included 11 questions, 7 demographic questions, and 9 study variables. A market research company that specializes in online interviews was commissioned for data collection. The first wave ran in September 2018, before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the second wave ran in May 2020, during the pandemic.

Data collection for the cross-sectional survey was conducted using non-probability convenience sampling. The sample of the first wave comprised of 120 people from Romania, while the sample of the second wave comprised of 200 people from the same country. The structure of the two samples is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Surveys' Sample Structure

Gender	Wave 1 - September 2018			Wave 2- May 2020		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Age						
18-30	1	10	11	6	12	18
31-40	23	20	43	37	33	70
41-50	20	36	56	44	50	94
51-100	5	5	10	13	5	18
Education						
Postgraduate studies	17	24	41			
University	27	38	65	23	36	59
High School or similar	5	9	14	77	64	141
Total	49	71	120	100	100	200

The samples included individuals with at least the high school level of education for ensuring a consistent exposure of the respondents to art. A more detailed analysis of the impact of art in the life of individuals and the life of society was run. The education's influence on the behaviour of art consumers was also highlighted by the Cultural Barometer 2017 and 2018 (Croitoru and Becuț Marinescu, 2019).

Data analysis techniques include the coefficient of association Yule and Onicescu Informational Correlation according to the methodology proposed by Mihaita and Stanciu-Capota (2005). Both indicators allow to identify the associations and the intensity of associations and were used in social analysis by Oprea (2017) and Rizescu and Avram (2014).

4. Findings

4.1. Criteria in the decision process of acquisition of the work of art

This paper analyses the criteria considered in the purchasing decision from the period preceding the COVID-19 pandemic (wave 1 of data collection) and during the pandemic (wave 2 of data collection). The criteria used in making decisions to purchase works of art changed over the investigated period. The questionnaire included an open-ended question in which the respondents were asked to mention the most important criteria in deciding to purchase a work of art. The answers were grouped into 8 categories, shown by Table 2.

Table 2. Works of art selection criteria (%)

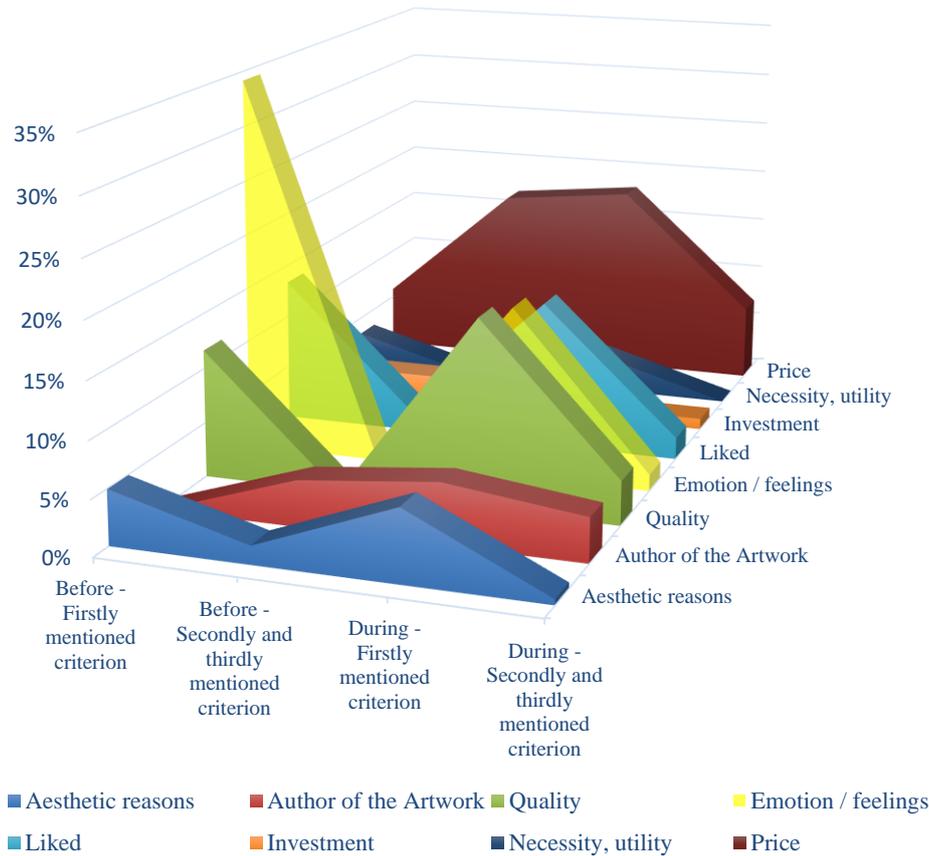
Criterion	Wave 1- September 2018		Wave 2- May 2020	
	First mentioned criterion	Second or third mentioned criterion	First mentioned criterion	Second or third mentioned criterion
1. Aesthetic reasons	5	2	7	1
2. Author of the Artwork	0	4	6	4
3. Quality	12	0	17	4
4. Emotion / feelings	34	0	16	2
5. Liked	13	2	14	2
6. Investment	3	3	1	1
7. Necessity, utility	3	0	4	0
8. Price	6	17	18	7

Source: author own research

The first category entitled “Aesthetic reasons” included answers such as: visual impact, beauty, need for beauty, aesthetics. In the second group: “Author of the artwork” were included the answers that mentioned the author as a selection criterion of the work of art. In the category “Quality” were included answers that included the word quality, as well as answers such as: reviews, value, age. In the category “Emotion / feelings” were included answers such as: *The emotion it conveys, How I feel, the feeling it transmits*. In the category “Liked” were included the answers that mentioned that the fact that they liked the work of art was the selection criterion. In the “Investment” category answers were included such as: have the potential of increased price, the value, and the market share. In the category “Necessity, utility” were included answers such as: the need for that object of art, utility. And in the criterion “Price” were included the answers that mentioned price as a selection criterion of the work of art.

In order to highlight the evolution of the selection criteria, the first answer mentioned by the respondent, and the second or third answer mentioned by the respondent were taken into account, then they were highlighted both in the first wave, from the period before the pandemic, and in the second wave of the survey, the one carried out during the pandemic. Figure 1 shows the evolution of the identified selection criteria during the two waves of the study.

Figure 1. Evolution of work of art selection criteria before and during the pandemic



Source: own research

The main criterion in the period before the pandemic crisis was the “Emotion / feelings”. 34% of respondents in the first wave mentioned firstly this criterion. The second first criterion mentioned by the respondents in the first wave was “Liked”, for 13% of the respondents this criterion was the first mentioned, and for 2% of the respondents in the first wave this criterion was the second mentioned. The third first criterion mentioned by respondents in the first wave was “Quality” (12% of respondents). The fourth first mentioned criterion was the price, 6% of the respondents mentioned firstly the price, and 17% mentioned the price as the second or third criterion in the first wave. The next criterion mentioned was “Aesthetic reasons”. 5% of the respondents mentioned firstly this criterion and 2% mentioned it as the second or third criterion. “Investment” and “Necessity, utility” were mentioned as the first criterion by 3% of the respondents in the first wave. The “Investment” criterion was mentioned as the second or third criterion by 3% of the respondents in the first wave.

Going to the second wave the image is different. The most often mentioned selection criterion was the “Price”. 18% of the respondents from the second wave firstly mentioned

the price as a selection criterion, and 7% of the respondents mentioned the price after another selection criterion. The second most common first criterion in the second wave was “The quality”, 17% of respondents mentioned it as the first criterion and 4% as the second or third mention. In the first wave of the survey, “Quality” was the third most common selection criterion. The third most common criterion during the crisis was “Emotion / feelings”. This criterion, in the first wave, was the most frequently mentioned criterion. In the second wave it was mentioned as the first criterion of 16% of the respondents and as the second criterion of 2% of the respondents. The fourth most common criterion in the second wave was “Liked”. It ranks second in frequency in the first wave. In the second it is mentioned as the first criterion by 14% of the respondents and by 2% of the respondents as the second or third criterion. The following criteria were “Aesthetic reasons”, for 7% of respondents was the first criterion mentioned, “Author of the Artwork”, for 6% of respondents was the first criterion mentioned, “Necessity, utility” for 4% of respondents was the first criterion mentioned, and “Investment” for only 1% of the respondents was the firstly mentioned criterion. In the second wave of the survey, conducted during the pandemic, “Emotion / Feelings” decreased in the top of the importance, and “Price” and “Quality” increased compared to the first wave of the survey.

4.2. Analysis of the influences of the convictions regarding the art on the selection criteria

During the two waves, respondents' convictions regarding the usefulness of art, the presence of art in the life of the respondents, the ability of art to influence the life of the individual and society were collected, and further, analysed. Table 3 shows the frequency of beliefs of the respondents in the two waves regarding the presence of art, the usefulness of art, and the ability of art to influence the lives of respondents and society.

Table 3. Respondents' beliefs about art (%)

Conviction		Total disagreement	Partial disagreement	Neither agreement nor disagreement	Partial agreement	Total agreement
1 st Wave	Art influences the life of society	2	7	6	33	53
	Art influences the life of the respondent	3	4	5	24	64
	Art is useful	4	0	3	11	82
	Art was present in the respondent's life	2	4	15	39	40
2 nd Wave	Art influences the life of society	1	3	12	31	55
	Art influences the life of the respondent	1	3	9	38	50
	Art is useful	1	1	5	22	72
	Art was present in the life of respondent	2	3	24	47	25

Source: own research

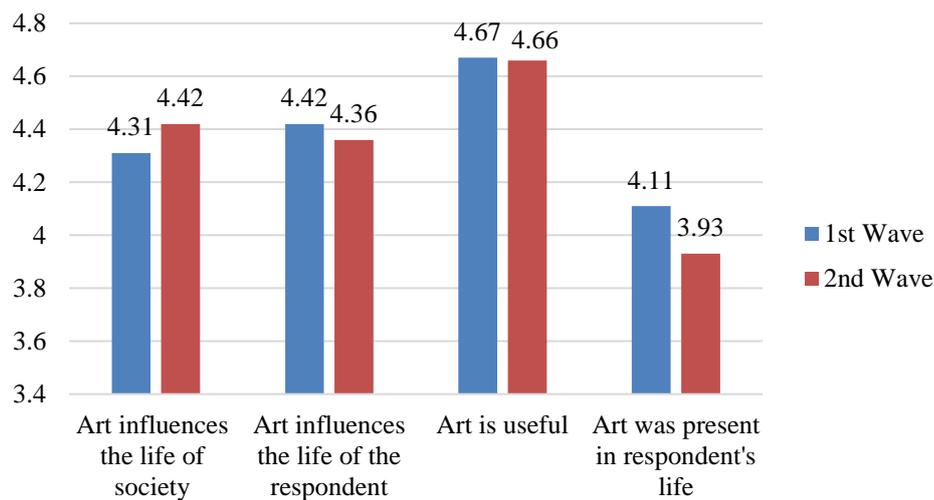
In the pre-pandemic wave, most respondents, over 79% of respondents, agreed on the presence of art in their lives, the usefulness of art, and the ability of art to influence the lives of respondents and society. The largest number of respondents expressed *Total agreement* on all four beliefs. The conviction for which the highest number of respondents

expressed firm agreement in the first wave of the survey was “Art was present in the respondent life.” *Partial disagreement* and *Total disagreement* over beliefs about the impact of art amounted to less than 10% of the number of responses for each of the four convictions. Most respondents in the first wave considered that art was present in their lives, the art is useful, and it has the ability to influence the life of respondents and society.

Going to the answers of the respondents from the second wave of the survey, we find a similar situation. The highest number of respondents was registered in the case of total agreement on the four beliefs. The only belief that the number of responses received for the total agreement was lower compared to the number of responses received for the partial agreement was in the case of the presence of art in the respondents' life. And in the second wave, the number of those who expressed their total or partial disagreement about the influences of art on the individual and society was the smallest, below 10% for any of the four beliefs analysed.

In order to evaluate the evolution of the agreements from the two periods, before and during the pandemic, the average score registered by each of the convictions was calculated (from 1 = *Total disagreement* to 5 = *Total agreement*). The image of the evolution of beliefs is reflected in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Evolution of respondents' convictions regarding art



Source: own research

The conviction regarding the influence of art on society is the one that has grown the most during the crisis. On the other hand, the conviction that fell the most in the crisis period is that of the presence of art in the lives of the respondents. The context generated by the COVID-19 crisis may explain the focus more on society, and thus the emphasis on the ability of art to influence society and thus participate in community consolidation. On the other hand, the decrease in the presence of art in the respondents' lives can be explained by the orientation towards finding solutions for the difficulties generated by the crisis period.

Analysing the association between the beliefs regarding art and the decision criteria, it was observed weak influences or lack of influences on the selection criteria.

For the analysis of the influences, the selection criteria were grouped into two groups. The “**Subjective connection**” criterion included the decisive factors with a subjective component of the evaluation: “Emotion, the feeling it conveys to me”, “I like it”, “Necessity, utility”, “Aesthetic reasons”. The other group was “**Rational Criteria**” which included the other criteria mentioned by respondents, decisive factors with a more objective

component of evaluation: “Author of the Artwork”, “The Quality”, “Investment”, and “Price”.

The analysed factors of influence were convictions about art, demographic factors, life fulfilment, and material comfort. The synthesis of the analysis regarding the influence of convictions about art upon selection criteria during the first and the second waves of the survey was included in Table 4.

Table 4. Influence of convictions regarding art on selection criteria

	1 st Wave		2 nd Wave	
	Yule Coefficient	Onicescu Informational Correlation	Yule Coefficient	Onicescu Informational Correlation
Art is useful	44%	0.99	-10%	1.00
Art influences the life of the respondent	39%	0.99	-14%	0.99
Art influences the life of society	19%	1.00	-11%	0.99
Art was present in life	-6%	1.00	0%	1.00
You have a fulfilled life	-27%	0.99	-5%	1.00
You have a comfortable life	-58%	0.98	-19%	0.98
Average monthly income	-5%	1.00	-12%	0.99
Age	-10%	1.00	-16%	0.99
Education	9%	1.00	10%	1.00
Gender	37%	0.99	-2%	1.00

Source: own research

The Yule Coefficient and the Onicescu Informational Correlation reveal the existence, lack, or intensity of existing connections. Thus, if Yule Coefficient tends to 0, the lack of association is indicated, and if the Onicescu Informational Correlation tends to 1, the lack of association is indicated.

Convictions regarding art had a small impact on the selection criteria of the work of art. In the period preceding the COVID-19 crisis, the belief regarding the usefulness of art and the one regarding the capacity of art to influence the respondent's life had a weak influence on the selection criteria, and in the crisis period, the beliefs regarding the capacity of art to influence the respondent's life and society had a very weak influence on respondents.

From the second group of analysed factors, it is observed that the material comfort had a weak influence on the selection criteria before the crisis, as well as a very weak influence during the crisis. Going further, the income had a very weak influence on the selection criteria in the crisis period. In the same situation is the age, with a slight influence on the criteria in the crisis period but did not show influence in the pre-crisis period. Gender showed a weak influence on the selection criteria in the period preceding the crisis period and did not influence the selection criteria in the crisis period. Among the analysed factors, the conviction regarding the art's capacity to influence the respondent's life and the material comfort influenced the selection criteria both in the crisis period and in the period preceding the COVID 19 crisis.

The influences manifested by beliefs or demographic factors, such as sex, age, or gender, cannot change the selection criteria. The respondent's connection with the work of art is the most important criterion in choosing a work of art. Although there are influences of different factors, such as beliefs about the art, income, or gender of the person, these influences are very weak, or at most weak on the selection criteria.

The study regarding the selection criteria in the decision process of acquisition of the work of art aims to be an invitation for discussions on this topic, an invitation that emphasizes the role of art in the life of society. The surveys have not statistical guarantees, the research offered just an image regarding the behaviour of the respondents included in the sample.

5. Conclusions

Art was a constant presence in the human history, taking a wide variety of forms, and being in a continuous change, that generates an increasing complexity of the system of creation, development, and distribution of the work of art. These changes bring with them an increase in the complexity of the process of choosing the work of art. The rapports between art organizations, sponsors, governments, or volunteers, as well as the relationship between production houses and radio stations, as well as the cultural, economic, or social context - all these components influence the selection process of works of art. The connection between the context, the producer of the work of art and the consumer of the work of art, the birth of new generations with new behaviours, as well as the technological evolution also participate in the evolution of the selection system of the work of art. Referring to the relationship consumer - work of art, following the survey conducted for this research, it was observed that the most important criterion in selecting the work of art is the subjective connexion between the consumer and the artwork. The emotions and feelings which the work of art generates on the consumers and how the consumer finds himself in the work of art are the main criteria in the decision process of acquisition of the work of art. Analysing the various influences that are manifested by demographic variables, such as gender, income, education, or beliefs about the usefulness and influence of art on society, on the selection criteria of the work of art have resulted in weak influences or lack of influence. The subjective connection with the work of art remains the most important criterion in the evaluation of the work of art in the acquisition process.

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