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**Is the football fans’ violence influencing on the match attendance?**

**Abstract:** Even if it is a generally known (or suspected) relation, there are not many proofs about negative impact of the violence on the attitudes and eagerness to spend money on the tickets. The most known research of (Giulianotti & Robertson 2004) proves it, but not much research was done on the issue from a marketing and economic point of view. The importance of the paper is twofold. It contributes to the theory of consumer behavior, showing the unexpected evidence of weak or no relation between these factors. In this area results show the fans’ behavior far from being rational. It may also have significance to the managers, attendance levels factor affect the income of the club in every match day in two ways: the revenue from ticket sales and TV rights for the match sell to TV network. Of course the economic approach is only one of many dimension. The author is aware of the damaging effect of aggressive behavior, but in this case focuses on the pure economic relation.

**Keywords:** Sports Economics, Marketing, Measurement Model, Violence, Attendance.

**JEL Classification:** M31, Z29

**INTRODUCTION**

Unlike the conventional business world, the definition of football clubs' success is a relative term and the boundaries between a successful club and an unsuccessful one are unclear in many cases. Most clubs are driven mainly by athletic achievements and not by profit maximization to the shareholder and stakeholder's interests. It is assumed that usually these athletic achievements will drive themselves economic endurance and long term success, which can be further harnessed for the betterment of athletic abilities and future successes (Fløtnes 2011).

This article will focus on Israeli football fans. The factors studied were the fans attendance, and violence in Israeli football, and the analysis of the relation between them. Violence is a part of society and it is present in the life of the fans in some form and level, as with other factors in society like for example ethnic or religious views, violence probably also has an effect on the economic aspect of fans attitude, from that stems the importance of studying this factors.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The presented study explores the relationships between attendance levels and violence. The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of literature that is related to the background of those two factors. This chapter begins with a review of previous studies that analyze and explain the violence factor followed by influencers on attendance levels' factor.

The Violence Factor in Football

In difference from other factors that are more connected directly to the economics, the violence is usually approached from a more sociological point of view. When analyzing literature about violence in sport, one can conclude that the research approaches to the topic are addressed from different fields like: sociology, psychology, law, sport studies, public health, and journalism. Fields et al. (2007) examined hazing, brawling and foul play in sports in existing articles with the purpose of showing that this three forms of violence should *"be examined as interrelated examples of interpersonal violence and sports-related violence"* (Fields et al. 2007, 367).

Historically speaking violence appeared in sports already during the Middle-Ages and Renaissance, since then violence has been study in the literature from different angles. Elias (1971 and 1976) demonstrated the existence of violence in ancient games and competitions. Bourdieu (1980) showed the different forms of violence that may be observed in competitive sporting events (physical violence, verbal violence, psychological violence and cheating). This was widely researched trough literature (Brohm 1993) (Defrance 2000). Guilbert (2004) article looks at the different forms and levels of violence that appear in different sports.

More recently the level of violence increased in stadiums and outside of them. Some conflicts between fans are originated by a political history and some are based on sport history conflict, mainly between clubs in the same city like the case of Manchester United and Manchester City in England, Atletico Madrid and Real Madrid in Spain, Inter Milan and AC Milan in Italy, Fenerbahce and Galatasaray in Turkey or Boca Juniors and River Plate in Argentina, these are just some of the many examples of football city rivalries. In Israel the more known city rivalries are Maccabi Tel Aviv and Hapoel Tel Aviv or Maccabi Haifa and Hapoel Haifa. In his article “Soccer Fandom and Citizenship in Israel” Sorek (2007) explained the historic conflict between the fans of Bnei Sakhnin, the biggest and more successful Arab team in Israel, and Beitar Jerusalem that historically represents the right wing of the Israeli political map. This two fan groups bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the stadium mainly in the form of violence by chants with racist and hateful content. It seems that violence became an integral part of the football world, this problem is known all over the world and each country is trying to manage this issue in a way, some more successfully than others. Also the big entities of football like UEFA and FIFA have taken measures to try to minimize or eradicate the problem, this is done by fining the clubs involved with financial sanctions or other methods of punishment like closing stadiums. In recent years the individuals involved in violence in football are processed and punished either by the club itself or by the country legal system, but yet the problem is present and there is a long way to go, especially in Israel.

A study researching the case of Israeli football violence from an urban ecology demonstrates that besides the structural characteristics of the social system, that is affected by urban ecology and by the frame that teams operate that affect spectator violence, also the level of violence is influenced by the violence level of the players. In the same research four sociological reasons on how violence is systematically related to both the team's urban ecology and sports ecology are presented as a possible reasons and triggers for violent behavior. *"First, teams representing communities of subordinate ethnic minorities are more violent than others. Second, teams competing in higher level (professional) divisions and teams at either the bottom or top of their division (high levels of competition) are more violent. Third, teams characterized by violent players are more likely to have violent spectators. Finally, the causal relation between player and spectator violence is asymmetric: players affect spectators' violence but not vice versa"* (Semyonov & Farbstein 1989, 50). What the current research is aiming to achieve is to analyze the violence factor in a very similar way to the research by Semyonov and Faberstein. However it differs from it in the idea to test the violence factor from an economic point of view.

Few authors tried to measure the violence factor, see table 1.1 for the summarized methodology. It is possible to find studies dealing strictly with sports violence and different approaches that researchers used to study that. The evolution in sport violence research began with studies searching what factors have influence on violence. Afterwards researchers developed models that tried to predict violence and in more recent times articles go to a deeper understanding of violence types and present different forms of such violence.

Table 1.1. Comparison of the methodologies used in research of the violence factor

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Author (year)** | **Topic** | **Construct** | **Method** | **Questionnaire type** | **Factors** | **Number of items** |
| (Semyonov & Farbstein 1989) | Influence of urban ecology and sport ecology on players and spectators violence | Violence | Quantitative | Existing records | Community sizeLeague structure | 3 |
| (Mustonen 1996) | Violence in ice hockey in Canada and Finland | Violence | Quantitative | Questionnaire | Reasons for their attendance at the gameGroup sizeRecent history of fighting | 30 |
| Guilbert (2004) | Forms and levels of violence in 8 different sports | Violence | Quantitative | Questionnaire | Characterization of violenceAttitude towards violenceRulesSafety | 7 |

Source: own research

 Semyonov & Farbstein (1989) used a quantitative secondary research to study influence of urban ecology (community size) and sport ecology (the league structure) on players and spectators violence. They performed an analysis involving 297 Israeli soccer teams. The teams were characterized for purpose of this research by urban ecology, in other words type of community (large metropolitan centers, large cities, midsized towns, small urban localities, rural localities, urban (inner-city) neighborhoods, and Arab localities). The other indicator was sport ecology that was measured by two variables, a team's position in the hierarchy of divisions (from 1 being the top and 6 the bottom) and its relative position within the division (teams located at the top third of their division, teams at the bottom third of their division, and teams in the middle). With existing data and two main variables this article tests violence influenced by urban and sport ecology. This method, despite it is suitable for this research, is completely different from the one used in author’s article, as the data needed is different and does not exist as a data base from other existing sources.

 Mustonen (1996) research study violence in ice hockey in Canada and Finland to find the motives of the crowd to attend an ice-hockey match, where on pitch and off pitch violence presence is high. A survey was conducted in a form of a questionnaire filled by 178 hockey fans. At a hockey game participants filled a questionnaire before, during and after including 30 items. This research was inspired by the idea to test the motivation of attending a sport event despite the probability of violence, but the questions were adapted for the purposes of this research. The number of items are similar and were adapted to the needs of the study.

In a different approach for sports violence study, Guilbert (2004) examined forms and levels of violence in 8 different sports to demonstrate that forms of violence differ depending on the sporting area. For this purpose the author conducted a survey around 9 sporting activities with a questionnaire filled by 420 sport male competitors between the ages of 18 and 30. The primal indicator dealt with the characterization of violence in the sporting areas, and other indicators like attitude towards violence, the rules, safety, which are factors associated with violence were used to complete the research, using 7 items in total. The idea of testing what is consider as violence before testing levels of violence, came from this article and was implemented in the design of the questionnaire for this research.

Influencers on Attendance Levels' factor

When dealing with audience levels factors like opportunity cost, quality, outcome uncertainty, and supporter loyalty were widely examined in past studies. For the purpose of this article a different factor, violence, will be investigated to find how this violence affect football attendance.

In the research of audience it is possible to identify two main types of audiences. Direct audience consists of all the people attending to the stadium to watch the game directly from the pitch. The second type of audience, indirect, includes the people watching the game through mass media or the internet (Wann et al. 2001). In the field of TV spectators "*The beginning of audience studies can be traced to the 1920s and 1930s when the mass-culture thesis emerged*" (Gerhardt, 2006, 126). In his article Gerhardt (2006) uses the ATTAC model (Analyzing The Television Audience's Conversation) to better understand the level of involvement of people watching football on television. He reached the conclusion that people watching football on television desired to become part of the game and spectacle and tried to accomplish that by using the television as a bridge to the game itself.

At the beginning, the researchers presented the audience as passive. With the advance of technology, from media text through books to video games and TV many articles study the influences of the content transmitted to the helpless audience, captive by the new forms of the media. The change from thinking about the audience as passive victims to active ones occurred thanks to new British cultural studies like (Hall 1980) that studies the audience type of involvement while discussing the issue from four aspects:

1. The role of encoding and decoding from the vantage point of television production.
2. The process of television production as a series of codes and signs that are constructed in order to relay specific messages.
3. The role that television production plays in encouraging a “preferred meaning or reading” and the issue of misreading signs.
4. Finally he presents three types of codes, dominant or hegemonic, professional, and negotiated, and shows how they affect the viewer’s connotative meaning.

Many studies focus on levels of demand for sport. Through review of relevant literature Borland & MacDonald (2003) suggest lessons for decision-makers in both the professional sport industry and in government. They claim that there is still much to be learnt about demand for professional sport, and that there are no simple lessons to be drawn from existing literature. But important messages do emerge from studies of demand for attendance with regard to effects of uncertainty of outcome, quality of contest, and quality of viewing. Dietschy (2013) looks at attendance in a comparison examination of the relationship between a European-dominated FIFA and the rest of the football world. The conclusion of this study is that the history of the relations between FIFA and Latin American, Asian, and African football associations shows that FIFA’s construction of world football was no mere imperialistic operation. Others study attendance from different approaches, like Greenwell (2001) that examined levels of demand for sports with a conceptual framework that looked at the physical facility along with the core product and service processes, as they contributed to customer satisfaction and profitability. Or Giulianotti & Robertson (2004) that focused on the effect of globalization of football.

To better understand this factor, some data about attendance and audience will be presented next. Data of occupancy rates across Europe showed that the stadiums in England have a 96% occupancy that is the highest in the continent, followed by Germany with 92% and The Netherlands with 87%. Next is Belgium 74%, Spain and France very close with 68% and 67% respectively. In the low end of the list is Italy with 55% and last with the smallest attendance rate – Portugal with 26% (Schnater 2016), in Israel this percentage is 44.5% (Daskal 2016).

Table 1.2. Comparison of the methodologies used in studies with attendance as a factor

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Author (year)** | **Topic** | **Construct** | **Method** | **Questionnaire type** | **Factors** | **Number of items** |
| Sumida et al. (2014) | Team loyalty and attitude towards spectating behavior | Attitude | Quantitative | Questionnaire | LoyaltyAttitudes towards spectating behaviorIntention to re-attend | 8 |
| (Greenwell 2001) | The influence of spectator sports facilities on customer satisfaction and profitability | Attitude | Quantitative | Questionnaire | Perceptions of the core productPhysical facilityService personnelCustomer satisfactionTeam identification | 44 |
| Shank & Beasley (1998) | Understanding the involvement construct | Cognitive | Qualitative | Depth interviews | InvolvementMedia habitsAttendanceParticipation in sports | 8 |
| (Laverie & Arnett 2000) | Model of fan behavior development | Behavioral | Quantitative | Questionnaire | Situational involvementEnduring involvementAttachmentSatisfactionAttendance | 46 |

Source: own compilation

Sumida et al. (2014) presented in their paper a study of sports fans attitudes that the base of measurement was the team loyalty factor. The data consisted of 2068 questionnaires filled by fans of 5 teams from Japanese professional soccer league. The survey was conducted before the start of a match, with a fan intercept technique. The questionnaire asked about loyalty, attitudes and intention to re-attend. The downside of this research is that the attitude of the fan was measures by a single and only factor, in this case loyalty, from a wider perspective one can claim that using just one factor is not enough to fully represent the attitude as there are other factors that influence it. On the positive side it is clear that the loyalty factor was well covered from different angles and the sample is large. These two positive points where taken into consideration while designing the research for this research.

A more extended measure was done by Greenwell (2001) for the paper dealing with levels of demand for sport. The attitude in this case was based on attendance and audience factors. 218 usable questionnaires were collected randomly in two different professional minor league hockey games, with a self-report method. They checked for five factors, perceptions of the core product, service personnel, customer satisfaction, team identification and physical facility. From this article, two important aspects of the research methods were implemented in the current study, even though that study covered a relatively small sample. The first one is the self-report method, and the second one is the randomality of the participants, as those two are widely used in attitude researches.

Shank & Beasley (1998) suggested a scale to measure sports fan involvement constructs to better understand sports fans. By conducting a survey on a sample of 136 consumers they found two aspects of involvement - cognitive and affective. The two were related to viewing sports on television, reading about sports in magazines and newspapers, attending sporting events and participating in sports. The questionnaire was formed around 8 items regarding sports involvement, and 5 items for media habits, attendance and participation in sports. In addition, six in-depth interviews were conducted for the purpose of better understanding the involvement construct and to develop the survey instrument.

Laverie & Arnett (2000) decided for a mix of two main factors measuring the behavioral construct used in the previous studies: attendance and fan identity, which in other researches was referred as loyalty in wider terms. Authors developed a model of fan behavior based on two factors, attendance at a sport event and fan identity salience. They tested the model with a sample of 190 college students, fans of women's basketball team of a large university. The researchers used multiple items of a self-reporting nature for the collection of the data, and they used existing inventories of items from previous studies. The use of multiple items permits the author to test the suggested model, but because the sample is formed of a very specific participants that are fans of women's basketball of a large university, probably there are other factors that influence the behavior that origins from the characteristics of this population. So this fact maybe a problem when applying the model on other population. For this reason, in the design of the tool used in author’s research that used a wider participant's diversity, more items were used to measure the factors. This was to compensate the limitation of ignoring other factors that can affect the fan behavior.

**METHODS OF RESEARCH**

Background of the Israeli League and the Selected Clubs

The Israeli football league was officially established in 1931, but its beginnings goes back to 1928 when the Israeli Football Association (IFA) was created. In the first season 9 teams took part of the competition and the champions were the team of the British police. Since then changes have been made to the league format, and today the top Israeli league competition is called Ligat Winner or Ligat HaHal. 14 teams take part on a league system with 3 rounds and a total of 36 match days. The winner is the one standing on the top of the table at the end of the season. Apart from the league, two more cup competition are played, the “Toto Cup” at the beginning of the season and the State Cup (Gvia HaMedina) played over the season in a knockout system. The league winner gets a place in the second round of qualification to the UEFA Champions League competition. The winner of the State Cup, as well as the teams finishing the league in second and third place, gets a place in the second round of qualification to the UEFA Europa League.

The clubs chosen for the research are the ones that won a league title (championship) over the past ten years: Maccabi Tel-Aviv FC (3 championships, on seasons 2012/2013, 2013/2014, 2014/2015), Maccabi Haifa FC (3, 2005/2006, 2008/2009, 2010/2011), Beitar Jerusalem FC (2, 2006/2007, 2007/2008), Hapoel Tel-Aviv FC (1, 2009/2010) and Ironi Kiryat Shemona FC (1, 2011/2012).

Description of the Population and Sample

Due to the lack of proven structure of Israeli football fans’ population the reference data was obtained from a survey performed by an Israeli economic magazine regarding Israeli sports fans in general (Daskal 2015). The statistics from that study show that 70% of the fans are male, the predominant age of a fan is 35, when 45% are at the ages of 25 to 45, and they have an education higher than high school (72%). Regarding religion, 46% are secular, 43% religious in some level, and 11% are in the other category. The economic status is 47% above average, 20% average and 33% below average. Despite this, the average amount a regular fan (not avid or fanatic) spends on things related to the team (tickets, tv sports channels, merchandising and travel expenses) stands at 1030 NIS per year, while an avid or fanatic fan spends 2022 NIS per year, almost twice the expense of a regular fan. The same study reflects that 82% of the regular fans attend the stadium twice a year at most, while 59% of the fanatic fans attend the stadium at least once every two months (Daskal 2015).

For the current research the fan’s supported team was chosen as the leading variable. Only the statistics of the teams participating in this study were included. The structure is based on the attendance to the matches.

Table 2.1. Comparison of fan division by teams in previous studies and this study

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Team** | **Study 1** | **Study 2** | **Combined** | **This Study** |
| Maccabi Haifa | 38.4% | 39.7% | 39% | 37.7% |
| Maccabi Tel Aviv | 21.6% | 27.2% | 24.4% | 24.1% |
| Beitar Jerusalem | 18.4% | 16.9% | 17.7% | 20% |
| Hapoel Tel Aviv | 18.2% | 12.8% | 15.5 | 15.9% |
| Ironi Kiryat Shemona | 3.4% | 3.4% | 3.4% | 2.3% |

Source: own compilation based on (Sports n.d.) and (Editors 2015)

As can be observed on table 2.1 between study one and two there was not a lot of differences in the division of fans by teams between previous researches and the current one. The differences that appear between the percentages of the previous studies and author’s study steams from the fact, that in the previous studies the calculation of the percentages of fans of each team was made by using the attendance factor, while in author’s study the percentages were calculated from data collected in the survey with a specific question "Which one is your favorite team?".

Presentation of the Measurement Method

As seen before, each factor can be measured in different ways, and each factor can be measured by different items, this will depend on the goal of the research. For the purpose of this study the method used is a combination of previous methods, employed with the hope that with this method it will be possible to achieve a more accurate and deeper understanding of the relation violence and attendance.

The questionnaire used is part of larger study that was designed to measure the attitude constructs as well as six more factors and some additional demographic data. All were measured with a self-report method. Attendance and audience were considered as connected so they are measured together with 5 items, the violence factor was measured with 18 items, all this in addition to 8 items that gather demographics info of the participants as well as one more question asking for the participant favorite team from a list of 5 teams.

Used Procedures Review

There are two approaches to measure attitudes; the explicit process or the implicit process. In the first, the subject answers come from a conscious attention, subject is aware on how the attitude is being assessed. On the contrary, in the implicit, there is no requirement of conscious attention as the subject is unaware that the attitude is being assessed (Maio & Haddock 2010).

In this research an explicit process was implemented. Two methods that originally where developed with the purpose of measuring attitudes are the Thurstone scale and the Likert scale. The questionnaire was designed and written in Hebrew because the population target was football fans living in Israel, after having the final version it was translated to English for the purpose of this thesis presentation. Before conducting the research the tool was tested on 12 participants.

The online survey was conducted using an online survey platform (Google Forms), the link to the questionnaire was published on Facebook and several internet forums. 1264 responses were received from which 158 (12.5%) were discarded due to several errors or incomplete forms, thus, finally the total respondents were 1106 (87.5% of all questionnaires received).

The time frame of the data collection with the questionnaire was on a period of approximately four months, during the last phases of the Israeli league season 2015/2016. For clarification, because the planning of the research and the conduction of it was before the end of the league. It was not possible to include the champions of the league Hapoel Beer Sheva, which did not win a championship during the last ten years before this study.

**RESULTS**

With a question about types of violence that can influence the decision to attend the stadium and comparing it to the three constructs, the author check for each construct if what the fan consider as violence will cause him to stop attending matches. This question is an expansion of some questions addressing different types of violence that were part of a larger study conducted for a doctoral thesis (Guerstein 2017). The analysis was done with T-Test for three attitudinal constructs. The cognitive construct shows a stronger connection for those who answered no (meaning they will continue attending the matches despite the violence) than for those who answered yes, that is to say that this type of violence will cause the fan not to attend matches.

Table 3.1. T-Test of violence and attendance factors

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Factor 1** | **Construct** | **Factor 2** | **Significant** | **At** | **T-Test** |
| Would this type of violence cause you not to attend more matches | Cognitive | No-Yes | Yes | 0.0001 | **0.613** |
| Affective | No-Yes | Yes | 0.0001 | **0.5718** |
| Behavior | No-Yes | Yes | 0.0001 | 0.3905 |

Source: own research

Similar to the cognitive construct, the affective shows a stronger connection for those who answered no than for those who answered yes. In the behavior also it shows a stronger connection for those who answered no than for those who answered yes (see details in Table 3.1). The data prove that what the fan considers as violence will not cause him to stop going to matches. And more than that, those fans that will continue to attend matches despite the violence have a stronger attitude than the fans that violence will cause them to stop attending.

Table 3.2. T-Test for the attitude constructs and the motives that will cause the fan to stop attending the stadium

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Factor 1** | **Construct** | **Factor 2** | **Significant** | **At** | **T-Test** |
| Violence | Cognitive | No-Yes | Yes | 0.0001 | **0.4498** |
| Affective | No-Yes | Yes | 0.0001 | **0.4291** |
| Behavior | No-Yes | Yes | 0.0001 | 0.2669 |
| The Level of the football match | Cognitive | No-Yes | Yes | 0.0001 | **0.417** |
| Affective | No-Yes | Yes | 0.0001 | **0.4046** |
| Behavior | No-Yes | Yes | 0.0001 | 0.2738 |
| High ticket price | Behavior | No-Yes | Yes | 0.014 | 0.1215 |

Source: own research

With the question about reasons that may cause fans to hesitate whether to buy seasonal tickets and regularly attend team games and comparing it to the three constructs, the research tested the relation between the attitude of the fan and the motives that will cause him to stop attending the stadium. The option of "violence" was significant for the three constructs, the connection with the cognitive, affective and behavioral constructs for those fans who chose this option as a reason for stop attending the stadium, shows weaker results than for those for whom this is not a reason for stop attending matches (see details in Table 3.2). The interpretation is that the level of violence will affect less the decision to attend a match of a fan with a stronger attitude comparing to one with a weaker attitude.

The second option, the level of the football match, also was significant for the three constructs. The connection to the cognitive, affective and behavioral constructs for the fans who chose this option as a reason for stop attending the stadium show weaker results than for whom this is not a reason for stop attending matches (see details in Table 3.2). The conclusion is that the fans with stronger attitude are less affected by the level of the football match than fans with a weaker attitude.

The third option of reasons for stop attending are the high prices of the tickets, for this option only significant results were obtained for the behavioral construct. For the fans who chose this option as a reason for stop attending the stadium, it shows weaker results than for those for whom this is not a reason for stop attending matches (see details in Table 3.2). The meaning of this is that the fans that their behavioral construct of the attitude is stronger, are more affected by ticket prices than fans with a weaker attitude. The other two options, lack of public transport to the stadium and lack of parking places at the stadium did not give significant results.

Comparing these three reasons for stop attending matches it is possible to see that the results are quite similar, meaning that those different reasons affect fans in a similar way in relation to attendance.

**CONCLUSIONS**

From all the results presented above for the two factors used in this study, the author reach the conclusion the fans with a stronger attitude will continue to buy tickets and attending matches even if there is presence of violence. Moreover, a more strong attitude toward the team will lead to bigger attendance, fans will buy more individual tickets during a season if they have a stronger attitude, and what a fan consider as violence will not stop him to continue attending matches even if there is such violence. This conclusion stands in contrary to the conclusion reached by Giulianotti & Robertson (2004) that state that the presence of violence has a negative influence on attendance, meaning that the violence factor caused the attendance to decrease. In this study is showed that even in the presence of violence when the attitude of the fan is strong he will continue attending despite the violence. From the conclusions reached in the analysis of this article it will be recommended for clubs to focus his efforts to overcome the violence, by raising the fans attitude so they continue to attend despite the presence of violence. Of course the perfect solution would be to eliminate the violence phenomenon from football, for this reason the author suggest to expand this idea and study more deeply the possibilities to minimize violence and how to achieve this, followed by an analysis on how the eradication of violence will affect attendance.

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