

Perspective of Criminology Students on Social Media Exposure of Crime: A Quantitative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The spread of social media has significantly shaped the landscape of crime awareness and perception, especially among criminology students. This study examines the perceptions of criminology students at the University of the Visayas regarding the role of social media in the exposure and discussion of crime. Utilizing a quantitative survey design, approximately 240 students were sampled from a total enrollment of 1,189 in the College of Criminal Justice Education. The research aims to elucidate how social media influences perceptions of community safety and the narrative surrounding crime. Preliminary findings suggest that students view social media as a dual-edge sword, providing real-time crime information while simultaneously amplifying fear and anxiety. Sensationalized posts can overshadow factual reporting, leading to distorted perceptions of crime rates and safety in their communities.

Additionally, this study addresses ethical concerns related to privacy, the reinforcement of negative stereotypes, and the impact of misinformation on public consciousness. As local police departments increasingly employ social media for community engagement, criminology students are becoming acutely aware of its implications on law enforcement practices and public policy. This research highlights the importance of a critical examination of narratives surrounding crime on social media platforms and advocates for increased media literacy among students. The insights gained from this study may inform future educational strategies, ensuring that aspiring criminologists are equipped to navigate the complexities of media influence on crime perception and community dynamics. Through this investigation, the research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on crime, media, and societal implications in the context of the digital age.

Keywords: Social Media Exposure of Crime, Perception of Criminology Students, Personal Awareness

BACKGROUND

The Social media exposure of crime refers to the way crime related content is shared, discussed, and highlighted on social media platforms. Social media is now a major tool for the people in knowing what is happening around them. It is now a necessary part of everyone's life, even for students (Chen and Xiao, 2022). As the use of social media as a platform for gathering information continues, individuals will encounter posts that are related to crime incidents. People will have their own insights based on the topic which might affect them in some ways. Social media networks make it simple to spread both positive and negative emotions among individuals (Chukwuere and Chukwuere, 2017).

Criminology students often recognize that social media can serve as an educational tool. By exposing users to real-time information about crime trends and safety issues, social media can enhance public awareness. Research indicates that platforms like Twitter and Facebook facilitate the rapid dissemination of crime-related information, potentially empowering communities to take preventative measures (Möser, 2018). Exposure to crime on social media can distort public perception, leading to fear and anxiety. This phenomenon raises concerns about the societal impact of crime narratives on social media and the potential for stigma against certain communities.

Given social media's dual role in influencing public opinion and policy, criminology students are becoming more and more interested in the national ramifications of criminal exposure on social media. Approximately 88% of police departments in the US use social media platforms to improve community involvement and spread crime information, making them vital tools for law enforcement (IACP, 2018). However, given that negative narratives may disproportionately impact underprivileged populations, students also draw attention to the ethical issues regarding privacy and potential biases in enforcement methods (Harris, 2019). Additionally, social media exposure to crime can intensify public worry and panic, creating a distorted sense of safety throughout the country (Gerbner et al., 1986).

The widespread nature of social media magnifies the psychological fear of crime, as sensationalized materials usually amplify public anxiety (Choi 2020). It has been said that repeated exposure to crime-related messages in fact distorts the perception of safety, evoking a state of fear in crime areas registered as very low in crime levels (Wallace 2021). Moreover, the rapid transmission of unverified information favors, within the context of misinformation, reckless posting or sharing by whoever the user may be (Tandoc et al. 2018). Somehow this double-edged effect shows the considerable need to closely scrutinize how criminology students, as future professionals, recognize the influence of social media on crime reporting and crime awareness. Criminology students are increasingly utilizing social media to stay informed on crime incidents, leading to a skewed perception of crime. This reliance on sensationalized posts often overshadows factual reporting, creating a climate of fear and anxiety among students. Discussions within the criminology department reveal concerns about the ethical implications of social media narratives, as they can reinforce negative stereotypes about certain communities, particularly those with higher crime rates. The tendency for viral crime stories to dominate online discourse diverts attention from broader societal issues like systemic inequality and the root causes of crime. Students are also aware of the role social media plays in shaping public policy and law enforcement practices, with local police departments actively engaging with the community through social media. This emerging discourse underscores the need for further analysis of how social media impacts individual perceptions of crime and broader societal narratives.

The researchers aim to know how criminology students at this institution perceive about the social media exposure of crime. This study intends to uncover their insights regarding the impact of social media on community safety, and the propagation of crime-related narratives.

Theoretical Background

The study is anchored on the cultivation theory by (Gerbner, 1969) and later elaborated by other scholars. This indicates that extended exposure to media content can influence how people perceive reality, especially regarding their views on crime in society. As noted by Vinney (2024), those who frequently encounter violent or crime-related material in media, including social media, may form distorted perceptions of crime, often believing that the world is more perilous than it truly is. For criminology students who already have a grasp of crime and justice concepts, their interaction with social media content related to crime can still shape their views on criminal behavior, crime trends, and societal safety. In this context, social media exposure to crime acts as the independent variable. This encompasses the frequency, intensity, and types of crime-related content that these students encounter on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Such content may include crime reports, videos of violent incidents, and sensationalized crime stories, all of which can influence their understanding of crime beyond what they learn in academic settings.

The mediating variable here is the level of engagement that criminology students have with crime-related content on social media. For instance, students who actively engage with crime news or participate in discussions about criminal justice online may perceive crime differently than those who consume content in a more passive or infrequent manner. Lastly, the dependent variable is the students' perception of crime, which reflects how they view the prevalence, severity, and nature of crime in society. According to Cultivation Theory, individuals who consume more crime-related media may come to see crime as more widespread or severe than it actually is, potentially resulting in increased fear or an exaggerated sense of risk.

This study seeks to investigate how exposure to crime content on social media influences these students' perceptions of crime, which may not always correspond with objective crime statistics (Vinney, 2024). The

framework indicates that social media exposure could significantly affect how criminology students comprehend and engage with crime and safety issues in their academic and professional pursuits.

General Objective

This study aims to see the perception of criminology students on social media posts with regards to crime related incidents in the University of the Visayas main campus.

This specifically seeks to answer the following problems;

1. What is the profile of respondents in terms of;
 - 1.1 Age;
 - 1.2 Gender;
 - 1.3 Year Level;
2. What is the perception of criminology students at the University of the Visayas about crimes on social media?
 - 2.1 Public Perception of Crime:
 - 2.2 Public Awareness:
 - 2.3 Credibility of Information:
3. Is there a significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and their perception of social media posts about crime?
4. What proposal may be designed based on the findings of the study?

Method

Design. This study utilizes the quantitative research method specifically the survey design utilized, where the study will be carried out, the number and makeup of respondents, the researcher tool, the sampling strategies, the data collection methods, the statistical statement to be used, and its ethical considerations.

Research Environment. This study was conducted at the University of the Visayas Main Campus, located on Colon Street in Cebu City, Philippines. In 1948, Cebu's first university, the Visayan Institute, changed its name to the University of the Visayas (UV) after being granted university status by the then-Bureau of Private Schools. Since then, it has quickly increased the number of undergraduate, graduate, and basic education programs it offers.

Research Respondents. The respondents for this study will be Criminology students enrolled in the College of Criminal Justice Education (CCJE) at the University of Visayas (UV). With a total enrollment of 1,189 students in the CCJE, the study aims to interview approximately 240 students, which represents around 20% of the total student population. This sample size is intended to ensure a representative cross-section while providing the opportunity for detailed insights

To capture a range of experiences and perspectives, the sample will include students from all four year levels (1st year to 4th year), allowing for a comprehensive view of the student body across different stages of their academic journey. Inclusion criteria will require respondents to be enrolled in the criminology program at UV, aged 18 or older, and regularly using social media. Participants will be invited to participate voluntarily, with informed consent obtained before data collection.

Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling method will be used to ensure that students from diverse demographics, including age, gender, and academic year, are represented. This approach will help in understanding how different groups of criminology students perceive crime-related content on social media.

Instruments

This research utilizes self-made questionnaires in a survey form. The questionnaire consists of structured questions that measure respondents' perceptions related to crime-related content on social media platforms.

The questionnaire consists of 14 items measured using a four-point Likert scale (4 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree) to evaluate respondents' perceptions related to crime-related content on social media platforms. To ensure clarity, validity, and reliability, a dry run was conducted with 50 respondents. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.771, indicating a high level of internal consistency. No items were eliminated throughout the analysis, validating the questionnaire's strength in assessing the intended constructs.

Data Gathering Procedure

Pre-data gathering. The data gathering process for this study begins with finalizing the self-made survey questionnaire. The transmittal letter to the offices of the Dean of the College of Criminal Justice of Education for approval. A dry run was conducted with 50 students at the University of the Visayas to ensure clarity, validity, and reliability. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's ethics board before initiating the full data collection. The instrument's reliability was confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha (0.771), indicating a high level of internal consistency. After the dry run, the study will be submitted to the Internal Review Board and will gain the Certificate of the Notice to Proceed (NTP). Once all of these procedures are done, the researchers will be ready to continue with their collection of research data.

Actual data gathering. Upon receiving the Certificate of the Notice to Proceed (NTP), researchers will commence the gathering of data and will take place according to the availability of the respondents. The researchers will administer survey questionnaires to the respondents, within 10 – 20 minutes, which includes a conversation about their consent and a summary of the study.

Post data gathering. The responses from the survey and the collected secondary data will be kept confidential, ensuring that once tabulated, the completed questionnaires will be sent to the Office of Criminal Justice Education for secure storage. The data will be tabulated by employing frequency and percentage. Results will be presented along with discussions and implications. To verify the statistical tool employed, the researchers will present the findings to the Centre for Research and Development for Statistical Evaluation. Subsequently, consolidated results, discussions, and implications will be outlined in Chapter IV of the study and will serve as the foundation for the summary of findings, conclusion, and recommendations.

Ethical Considerations In the study "Perspective of Criminology Students on Social Media Exposure of Crime: A Quantitative Analysis," several ethical considerations must be addressed before gathering data to ensure the research's integrity and ethical standards.

Beneficence. The study provides benefits by giving criminology students more insights about social media posts that are related to crime incidents, enhancing their awareness regarding this issue, in order for them to become more professional in handling this matter.

Respect. The researchers were given permission to conduct this study, especially with regard to the respondents and other participants involved. By ensuring that respondents receive the proper treatment, this method enables their voluntary participation. Respecting people requires an interactive system in which one side ensures the other has the freedom to make decisions based on knowledge.

Justice. The researchers followed ethical guidelines to guarantee that subjects were treated fairly. It is required of the researchers to respect people's autonomy by recognizing and respecting their choices. Participants are offered the option to take part in the study or not, and they are free to leave at any time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the statistical results as well as the interpretation of data collected from the respondents in order to meet the research questions. The discussion includes descriptive and inferential statistics concerning the criminology students' perceptions of crime exposure through social media, which relates to the aims of the study.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

	AGE	GENDER	YEAR LEVEL
Valid	246	246	246
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	20.854	1.264	2.337
Std. Deviation	1.592	0.442	1.020
Minimum	18.000	1.000	1.000
Maximum	28.000	2.000	4.000

The profile of respondents revealed the following characteristics: the mean age was 20.85 years, with a standard deviation of 1.59. Gender was distributed with a mean of 1.26 (closer to male-coded responses), and the mean year level was 2.34, showing even distribution across academic years.

Figure 1 Distribution plot by Age

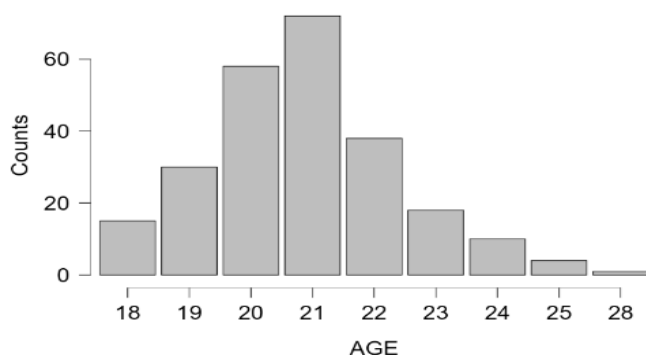


Figure 2 Distribution Plot distribution by Gender

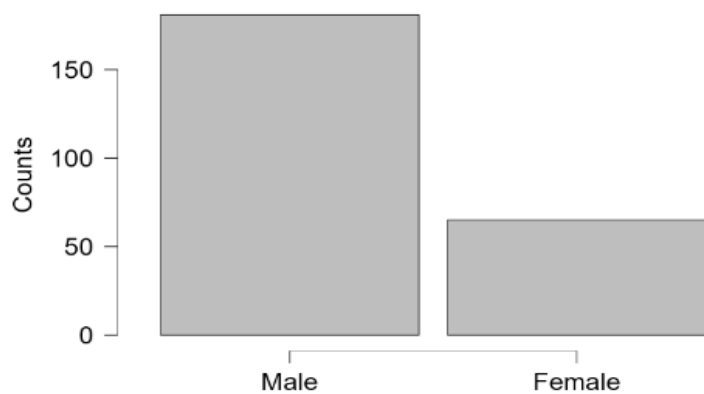


Figure 3 Distribution plot by Year level

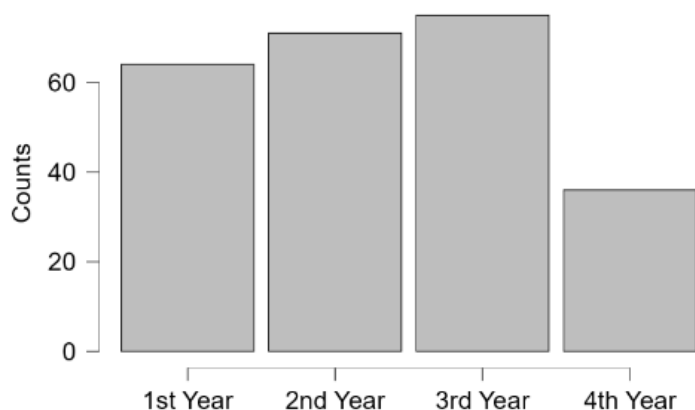


Table 2 Mean Scale interpretation (Alkharusi, 2022)

Weight	Mean Score	Interpretation	Further interpretation
4	3.41-4.00	Strongly Agree	Positive
3	2.61-3.40	Agree	Slight Positive
2	1.81-2.60	Disagree	Negative
1	1.00-1.80	Strongly Disagree	Very Negative

Table 3 Perception of Crime on Social Media statistical interpretation of Mean

VARIABLES	SD	Mean	Interpretation
1. Social media made me think that crime is more frequent than it actually is.	0.619	3.325	Slight positive
2. I believe that social media exaggerates the seriousness of certain crimes.	0.644	3.415	Positive
3. Exposure to crime-related content on social media makes me feel unsafe in my community.	0.680	3.297	Slight Positive
4. I am more likely to assume someone is guilty based on information shared on social media.	0.724	3.102	Slight Positive
PERCEPTION OF CRIMES IN SOCIAL MEDIA	0.503	3.285	Slight Positive

Respondents slightly agreed that social media made them feel that crime is more frequent than it actually is ($M = 3.325$), and that it exaggerated the seriousness of some crimes ($M = 3.415$). These findings align with studies from Surette (2015), Callanan (2012), and Dowler (2003), which suggest media exposure heightens perceived crime frequency and fear.

Table 4 Personal Awareness statistical interpretation of Mean

VARIABLES	SD	Mean	Interpretation
1. Social media has increased my awareness of crimes happening in other areas.	0.663	3.346	Slight positive
2. I believe social media is an effective platform for sharing information about crimes.	0.705	3.280	Slight positive
3. Social media helps me stay informed about crime trends in my locality.	0.637	3.484	Positive
4. I actively share or discuss crime-related posts to raise awareness among others.	0.775	3.138	Slight positive
5. I am more vigilant about my personal safety due to crime-related posts on social media.	0.645	3.248	Slight positive
PERSONAL AWARENESS	0.499	3.299	Slight positive

Results show that students slightly agreed that social media has improved their awareness of crimes, especially in other areas ($M = 3.346$). They also believe social media is effective in spreading information ($M = 3.280$), and they stay informed about local crime trends ($M = 3.484$). Similar findings were reported by Walsh & O'Connor (2017), Choi (2018), and Tandoc (2019), highlighting social media's role in increasing community vigilance.

Table 5 Credibility of Information statistical interpretation of Mean

VARIABLES	SD	Mean	Interpretation
1. I trust the accuracy of crime-related information shared on social media.	0.735	2.947	Slight Positive
2. Social media often shares misinformation or unverified details about crimes.	0.624	3.500	Positive
3. I consider the source of crime-related posts before believing or sharing them.	0.670	3.378	Slight Positive
4. Crime-related information on social media is often biased or sensationalized.	0.644	3.215	Slight Positive
5. I cross-check crime-related information from social media with other reliable sources.	0.652	3.285	Slight Positive
CREDIBILITY OF INFORMATION	0.432	3.265	Slight Positive

Although respondents slightly agreed that they trust crime information on social media ($M = 2.947$), they also believe misinformation is common ($M = 3.500$). They reported evaluating sources and cross-checking information. This reflects the findings of Metzger & Flanagan (2013), Tandoc et al. (2018), and Karlova & Fisher (2013), which emphasize the importance of evaluating source credibility online.

Table 6 Frequentist Scale Reliability Statistics

Coefficient	Estimate	Std. Error	95% CI	
			Lower	Upper
Coefficient α	0.864	0.018	0.830	0.899

The Cronbach's alpha for the perception items was 0.864. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011), a value above 0.80 indicates high reliability, confirming the questionnaire's internal consistency.

Table 7 Shapiro-Wilk Test for Multivariate Normality

Shapiro-Wilk	p
0.917	< .001

The multivariate normality test yielded a Shapiro-Wilk p-value < .001, indicating that the dataset did not meet the assumptions of normality. Therefore, the use of non-parametric methods like Spearman's Rho was appropriate.

Table 8 Spearman's rank correlations

VARIABLES	Spearman Rho	p-value
Age & Gender	-0.180*	0.005
Age & Year Level	0.777*	< .001
Age & Perception of Crimes	0.042	0.512
Age & Personal Awareness	-0.033	0.610
Age & Credibility of Information	-0.022	0.734
Gender & Year level	-0.094	0.141
Gender & Perception of Crimes	-0.027	0.675
Gender & Personal Awareness	-0.028	0.657
Gender & Credibility of Information	-0.057	0.371
Year Level & Perception of crimes	0.032	0.619
Year level & Personal Awareness	-0.060	0.351
Year level & Credibility of information	-0.043	0.507
Perception of Crimes & Personal Awareness	0.546*	< .001
Perception of Crimes & Credibility of Information	0.545*	< .001
Personal Awareness & Credibility of Information	0.513*	< .001

The correlation analysis revealed several significant findings based on the Spearman's Rank Correlation test. here were significant correlations among the variables related to perception of crime, personal awareness, and credibility of information. Each of these correlations had a coefficient greater than 0.5 and p-values less than 0.001, indicating strong positive associations. These results imply that students who perceive crimes on social media as frequent or serious are also more likely to feel personally aware and consider the credibility of the information they consume.

These findings are consistent with those reported by Field (2013), McDonald (2014), and Laerd Statistics (2020), who highlighted the relevance and effectiveness of Spearman's Rank Correlation in measuring associations in non-normally distributed datasets. Conversely, the analysis did not reveal any significant correlations between gender and perception-related variables. This suggests that students' gender does not significantly influence how they perceive crime-related content on social media platforms.

Table 9 Summary of correlations

VARIABLES	Rho	p	Decision	Interpretation
Age & Gender	-0.180*	0.005	Reject the null hypothesis	Significant
Age & Year Level	0.777*	< .001	Reject the null hypothesis	Significant
Age & Perception of Crimes	0.042	0.512	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	Not significant
Age & Personal Awareness	-0.033	0.610	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	Not significant
Age & Credibility of Information	-0.022	0.734	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	Not significant
Gender & Year level	-0.094	0.141	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	Not significant
Gender & Perception of Crimes	-0.027	0.675	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	Not significant
Gender & Personal Awareness	-0.028	0.657	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	Not significant
Gender & Credibility of Information	-0.057	0.371	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	Not significant
Year Level & Perception of crimes	0.032	0.619	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	Not significant
Year level & Personal Awareness	-0.060	0.351	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	Not significant
Year level & Credibility of information	-0.043	0.507	Fail to reject the null hypothesis	Not significant
Perception of Crimes & Personal Awareness	0.546*	< .001	Reject the null hypothesis	Significant
Perception of Crimes & Credibility of Information	0.545*	< .001	Reject the null hypothesis	Significant
Personal Awareness & Credibility of Information	0.513*	< .001	Reject the null hypothesis	Significant

The analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between age and gender ($Rho = -0.180$, $p = .005$), indicating an inverse relationship between these two variables. Additionally, there was a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between age and year level ($Rho = 0.777$, $p < .001$), suggesting that older students are generally enrolled in higher academic years.

On the other hand, the correlations between age and perception of crimes ($Rho = 0.042$, $p = 0.512$), age and personal awareness ($Rho = -0.033$, $p = 0.610$), and age and credibility of information ($Rho = -0.022$, $p = 0.734$) were not statistically significant. This implies that age does not appear to influence students' perceptions, awareness, or trust in crime-related information on social media.

Similarly, gender was not significantly correlated with year level, perception of crimes, personal awareness, or credibility of information, as all p-values were above the 0.05 threshold. Year level also showed no significant relationships with any of the three perception variables.

However, there were significant positive correlations among the perception-based variables themselves. Specifically, perception of crimes was positively correlated with personal awareness ($Rho = 0.546$, $p < .001$) and credibility of information ($Rho = 0.545$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, personal awareness was also significantly correlated with credibility of information ($Rho = 0.513$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that as students perceive more crime-related content on social media, they also report higher awareness and a stronger tendency to evaluate the credibility of such information.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

This study found how criminology students at the University of the Visayas perceive crime-related content on social media. Based on the responses of 246 students, guided by the Cultivation theory (Vinney, 2024), participants generally agreed that social media contributes to an increased perception of crime frequency and seriousness. Additionally, the results show that students have become more personally aware of crime, especially in areas beyond their immediate communities, due to their exposure to social media. Despite recognizing the prevalence of misinformation online, students still displayed a moderate level of trust in the credibility of crime-related content. Also found that there is no significant relationship between age, gender, and year level to the Perception of Crimes, Personal Awareness, and Credibility of Information.

Conclusions

The study concludes that social media significantly influences criminology students' perceptions of crime. Students acknowledge perceptions of caution and awareness, yet the platform can be both educational and misleading. The students seem to have more awareness and skepticism about what they see, which shows that exposure has been moderated. The results represent evidence of cultivation theory that sustained exposure tends to shape a distortion in how people see reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed. First, educational institutions should incorporate media literacy programs into the criminology curriculum to enhance students' ability to critically assess crime-related content found on social media platforms. These interventions would empower future professionals with the skills to discern credible information from misinformation.

Secondly, it is important to engage students in policy advocacy by creating platforms for dialogue about how media representations of crime influence public perceptions and justice policies. Facilitating critical discussions in academic and community spaces can help students develop a broader understanding of media's role in shaping societal narratives.

Furthermore, the study recommends that future research investigate the differential impact of various social media platforms on crime perception. Each platform's unique features may affect how content is interpreted and internalized, thus shaping distinct attitudes among users.

Additionally, community awareness campaigns should be encouraged to promote responsible sharing practices. Students can play an active role in combating the spread of misinformation by participating in fact-based discussions and promoting verified sources.

Lastly, there is a need for increased collaboration between educators and online platforms to advocate for stronger fact-checking systems and content regulation. This could include encouraging students to become digital literacy ambassadors who promote ethical social media behavior in both academic and community settings.

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