

## Analyzing College Students' Ethics Perceptions: A Pilot Study at A Foundation University in Turkey<sup>1</sup>

Üniversite Öğrencilerinin İş Etiği Algısı: Bir Vakıf Üniversitesi Örneği

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the perspectives of students towards business ethics. A survey focusing on business ethics and the ethical perceptions has been conducted at a foundation university in Turkey. Turkish students and their perceptions on 20 specific ethical behaviors and the relationships with demographic and basic variables were detailed. Ethical crisis usually occurs directly related to disciplines such as law, finance and management etc. Therefore, this study is surveyed to summer school students across 6 departments in Mersin region (n=275 & N=796). The relationship between students' demographics and other related factors (such as age, gender, year in school, tobacco use, social media account usage, taking any business ethics course or lectures, time spent studying and being employed or trained before or current) were examined but no differences were found. After implementing a factor analysis on the retrieved data, 20 items were reduced to 13 items and classified under three factors entitled with business ethics, personal ethics and materiality ethics. The results show that students' departments with business ethics factor and the study period of students with personal and materiality ethics factor have significant differences.

**Keywords:** Business Ethics, Students, Ethical perceptions, Demographics, and Turkey

### ÖZ

Bu çalışmanın amacı üniversite öğrencilerinin iş etiği ve etik konusundaki görüşlerini belirlemektir. Bir vakıf üniversitenin öğrencilerinden eksiksiz ve geçerli olarak toplanan 275 adet anket formu ile ilgili analizler yapılmıştır. Faktör analizi ile 20 ifadeli ölçek üç boyutlu bir yapıda 13 ifadeye indirgenmiştir. Belirlenen üç faktör iş etiği, kişisel etik ve materyalist etik olarak önceki çalışmalara dayalı olarak isimlendirilmiştir. Genel olarak sonuçlar incelendiğinde, öğrencilerin öğrenim gördükleri bölümler ile iş etiği faktörü, öğrenim gördükleri yıl ile kişisel etik ve materyalistik etik ile anlamlı farklılıklar olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Ayrıca toplanan veriler ile öğrencilerin bazı demografik özellikleri (yaş, cinsiyet) ile tanımlayıcı özellikleri (kaçıncı sınıf öğrencisi oldukları, tütün kullanımı, sosyal medya kullanımı, etik ile ilgili aldıkları dersler v.b) arasındaki ilişkiler de incelenmiş olup, bunlar arasında anlamlı ilişkilerin çıkmadığı görülmüştür.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İş Etiği, Üniversite Öğrencileri, Etik Algısı, Demografik özellikler ve Türkiye

Tür: Araştırma makalesi

Gönderim tarihi: 25.10.2018

Kabul tarihi: 29.11.2018

<sup>1</sup> 15. International Marketing Trends Conferences, Venezia, Italy, January.19-22, 2016 konferansında sunulmuştur.

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## Introduction

Ethics is an important concept for all areas of Business (production, marketing, human resource, finance, et al) and also for other disciplines (law, psychology, teaching etc). Even though it has been more visible in research and in business world recently, it is not a new concept. There are lots of ethical crises, scandals & problems happened in the past. Business ethics has also been an important issue for academicians and their environment. Previous studies show the link between university students and their behavior in the workforce in terms of ethical views.

Nowadays, the role of ethics has been better understood by many institutions, such as higher education institutions and big corporates. They focus on ethics more than ever before. The business programs in higher education institutions started to mention ethics in their curriculum as a result of the dramatic crisis occurred due to unethical behaviors in the business area. All functions of business needs ethically behaving personel in order to comply with the necessities of today's business world today. In the communication age that we are living in, It is almost impossible for companies not to reveal any secrets or unethical business activities. For instance, marketing is the way that the companies represent themselves to the society (Ural, 2003). Hence by, the ethical scandals also create harmful impacts on the consumers end of the business. According to Laczniaak and Murphy (1993), ethics in marketing identified as, Marketing ethics is the systematic study of how moral standards are applied to marketing decisions, behaviors, and institutions (Murphy,2009).

After many corporate scandals, most of the members of the society believe that business people do not pay much attention to ethical considerations in their daily operations (Yazıcı and Kınıksaran, 2012). Several studies have shown a link between ethical views during college and behavior in the workforce (Ludlum, et al, 2013). Hence, these studies are important to investigate the moral climate of the future leaders (Freeman, 2009; Ludlum & Moskalionov, 2004). Current university students' perspectives regarding ethics will have an impact on their behavior during their business life in the future. Reiss and Mitra (1998) also claimed that, *in order to study the attitudes and behaviors of future organizational leaders one can look to current university students*. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine college students' perspectives on ethical issues in a foundation university. A pilot study was designed and implemented. So this study's sample was covering only summer term of a foundation university in Turkey. The sample of this study includes all students who were present on campus during summer period at a foundation university. In this study, we examined gender, departments, study period, tobacco use, taking business ethics class; time spent studying, being employed, being trained, and major variables with the identified ethical factors.

## Literature Review

Ethics term can be basically defined as standards for how people live and act and the roots of the word ethics comes from the Greek "ethike" or "ethos," it means custom or norm. The term tends to be used for abstract or theoretical applications and is

considered a branch of philosophy with the key question, "How should people live their lives?" (Roberts and Poper, 2015). Ethics is a requirement for human life, and "*it is our means of deciding a course of action, and it is accepted as without it, our actions would be random and aimless*" (Akram and Azad, 2011). The concepts of ethics and ethics studies are not new; Socrates was known as the first who vigorously approached to ethics 2,500 years ago when he questioned whether the *unexamined* life was worth living (Malloy, 2003). However, the fundamental ethical question, *What should I do?*, is still left unanswered in a definitive way. Business ethics has also been a concern in the academic environment. The study of business ethics began in the 1970s, heavily influenced by U.S. Catholic universities (Ludlum, et al, 2013).

Especially university education is accepted as the final stop for education and therefore, it has huge impacts on students' behavior when they join the work force. Averagely, an individual spends 20 years in the schools and so the schools have major roles to shape the personality and moral characteristics of individuals. Student's learning's and attitudes would shape their personality and working discipline. According to Hosmer (1991), Ethical problems are truly managerial dilemmas, because they represent a conflict between an organization's economic performance (measured by revenues, costs, and profits) and its social performance (stated in terms of obligations to persons both within and outside the organization (Roberts and Poper, 2015). Similarly to this fact, management education is seen as an important part of the process toward improved business ethics, and accepted as a key opportunity to equip students with values and capabilities to promote ethical awareness (Ashforth et al., 2008). Corruption is responsible for making less money in almost every country and it involves a capital deviation around US\$ 1 trillion per year worldwide and the spread of corrupt acts affects the financial results negatively and verifies to retreat institutions image (Pardini et al.,2014). Likely, in historical development, ethics has been undertaken with different functions and in the present time, "values ethics" are ensuring the connection of ethics with the life space and therefore, ethics is eventually being given importance (Deniz et al., 2005). However the rules and regulations are standard in many countries, this doesn't help to avoid ongoing crisis in many countries. Although, many studies dealing with the choices and attitudes of business practitioners and students towards ethical issues have been published since 1960's, many empirical studies sampling with students have been examined since mid-1980s (Yazıcı and Kınıksaran, 2012).

As it is defined by Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the major role of management education is directly related to *prepare students to contribute to their organization and the larger society and to grow personally and professionally throughout their careers*, (Sigurjonsson et al, 2015). It is also possible that, not all of the students will reach managerial positions in organizations; but they will certainly affect the future ethical climate where they work as a decision maker (Yazıcı and Sınıksaran 2012).

In the world, some schools arrange ethics and ethics related lectures in their curricula are compulsory whereas some of them are taught as elective and others have chosen to

integrate ethics discussions into many courses in the business core and major field of study (Cagle et al., 2008). The situation is similar in Turkey.

The popular ethical crisis is mostly happened with the financial departments, finance departments' sensitivity to this issue infinitely more. They are expected to deal with the topic in a professional manner, and yet few have formal training in how to teach such material. Dean and Beggs's (2006) interviews of faculty at a Catholic university in 1997 revealed that faculty did not feel that they had the proper training to teach ethics sufficiently (Cagle et al., 2008). Students are showing more interest in business ethics by signing up for elective courses and other related subjects (Wayne 2009). Generally the profile of business students among college students presents vulnerable to taking unethical actions (Lampe and Lampe, 2012). The previous studies show the ethical thoughts of the students differentiated based on the departments. In the study of Brown et al. (2010), business school students shows a correlation between increased narcissism and unethical decision making as well as lowered empathy levels in these students and the results show that, finance majors showed a marked and statistically significant tendency to be less empathetic and more narcissistic as compared to other business students. It has been well established that business students often cheat more and act in less cooperative ways than do students from other academic fields (Brown, and et al., 2010). Among fields of study, business students top the cheater's list at both undergraduate and graduate level and mainly on personality tests, finance students in particular, scored significantly higher on narcissism and lower on empathy, compared to other students, both traits which contribute to unethical decision making (Lampe and Lampe, 2012). Adding to these, also the same source (Lampe and Lampe, 2012) indicated that the most business students place high value on money and image, and follow these extrinsic values rather than the intrinsic ideals that would lead to greater ethical conduct. Scholars have not only conducted researches to determine ethical practices in the business communities, but also attempted to examine university students' perceptions based on their age, gender, classes, nationality, and culture (Lau, et al. 2012). Some previous studies indicated differences age based ethical behavior. Ruegger and King (1992) stated that older students (40 plus years age group were the most ethical, followed in order by the 31-40 group, the 22-30 group and those of 21 years of age and under) are more ethical comparing to students enrolled with under 40 ages, however, the results of Sikula and Costa's study (1994), shows that younger students (under 21 age) are more ethical than older students.

Education at the university also influences ethics perception of the students. Some studies also supported these results. Nagpal and Das (2013) stated in their study, students' ethics perceptions are related to the faculty members' behaviors to shape their ethical behaviors. Additionally, college students believe that they are living in an ethical campus environment where their faculty members are mostly ethical in nature and that it is never too late to learn about ethics. Adding to this study also Shurden et. al. (2010) claimed that students' perception of ethics has been changing over time and is also positively influenced by ethics education.

## Method

The data was gathered from students who were attending the summer school lectures in a foundation university in Mersin region, Turkey. Through the date of 20-31 July 2015 questionnaires were collected. This study's questionnaire was structured based on the previous studies' questionnaires including Ludlum, et al, (2013) Deshpande et, al. (2006), and Alayoğlu et al, (2012). The university which was chosen to be the research ground has approximately 5000 students and established 1997, have three different faculties (Fine & Art, Law, Economics and Administrative Sciences) and one higher vocational school. For academic year 2014-2015 796 students registered for summer school. Convenience sampling method was used to conduct the surveys. 330 questionnaires were spread out and 300 of them turned back and 275 of them were found sufficient to be analyzed. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire during class time voluntarily. The questionnaire form have totally 6 questions related to their demographics (gender, age, department, school years, business ethics lessons and internship) and 20 ethical behavior items based on 4 point scale (1 = Very Unethical 2 Unethical 3 = Ethical 4 Very Ethical). To analyze the data, factor analysis, descriptive analysis (means, frequencies, percentages) and reliability analysis Anova and- tests were implemented with SPSS programs. Hypotheses are structured based on the previous studies and shown below:

**H1:** Students' perceptions of business ethic about business life show differences according to the students' departments.

**H2:** Students' perceptions of personal ethic about business life show differences according to the students' departments.

**H3:** Students' perceptions of materiality ethic about business life show differences according to the students' departments.

**H4:** Students' perceptions of business ethic about business life show differences according to the students' years at the school.

**H5:** Students' perceptions of personal ethic about business life show differences according to the students' years at the school.

**H6:** Students' perceptions of materiality ethic about business life show differences according to the students' years at the school.

**H7:** Students' perceptions of business ethic about business life show differences according to the students' internship situation.

**H8:** Students' perceptions of personal ethic about business life shows differences according to the students' internship situation.

**H9:** Students' perceptions of materiality ethic about business life shows differences according to the students' internship situation.

**H10:** Students' perceptions of business ethic about business life shows differences according to take business ethic lesson.

**H11:** Students' perceptions of personal ethic about business life shows differences according to take business ethic lesson.

**H12:** Students' perceptions of materiality ethic about business life shows differences according to take business ethic lesson.

### Results

The results of the study are shown on the following tables below. Table 1 figured out the results of the demographic characteristics and profile of the participants, and Table 2 indicates the reliability scores. 20 variables were classified by factor analysis and shown in table 3. The following tables (from Table 4 to7) indicated the results of the relations through the factors with departments and school years, internship and business ethics lectures.

**Table 1 The Demographic Characteristics and profile of the Participants**

Gender	Frequency	%	Department	Frequency	%
Female	135	49,1	International Finance	66	24,0
Male	140	50,9	Law	50	18,2
Total	275	100	Int. Management	57	20,7
Age	Frequency	%	Int. Trade And Logistics	41	14,9
18-20	65	23,6	Tourism	11	4,0
21-23	164	59,6	International Relationship	23	8,4
24-26	37	13,5	Higher Vocational School	14	5,1
27 and More	9	3,3	Total	262	95,3
Total	275	100	Missing Value	13	4,7
School Years	Frequency	%	Total	275	100
1	80	29,1	Business Ethics Lectures	Frequency	%
2	60	21,8	Yes	67	24,4
3	60	21,8	No	208	75,6
4	41	14,9	Total	275	100
5	14	5,1	Internship	Frequency	%
6	4	1,5	Yes	77	28
7	5	1,8	No	198	72
Total	264	96,0	Total	275	100
Missing Value	11	4,0			
Total	275	100,0			

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the sample, approximately 50,9 % of the students are male; more than the half of them ( 59,6 %) are at the age interval of 21 and 23. The sampling students are in Preparatory school , 29,1%; in both sophomore and freshmen classes have the same percentage as 21,8% and in the junior classes 14,9 % and the remaining part represents the students in the sample who have in

senior classes and also repeat classes. As it seen on the Table 1, 24 % of the students were enrolled in the Department of international finance, and secondly, international management (20, 2 %) and thirdly law department (18, 2%) students were enrolled for the summer term. Students (75,6 %) claimed that they have not gotten any lectures related to ethics and 72 % of them have not been trained at any companies before.

**Table 2 Reliability of the Items on the Scale**

Statements	Alfa
For The First Half of The Scale	,781
For The Second Half of The Scale	,780
For All Scale	,865

Analyzing the reliability of the scale in the study, reliability analysis was done for both full of the items first. Then the scale was divided into two parts and each part's reliabilities were calculated. Results showed that in Table 2. The scale was used in this study is highly reliable.

**Table 3 the Results of Factor Analysis**

	Communalities	Component	Eigenvalues	E. Variance	ean	C. Alpha
<b>1.Business Ethics About Business Life (4 statements)</b>			<b>2,712</b>	<b>20,862</b>	<b>1,40</b>	<b>,815</b>
5. Divulging confidential information	,643	,774				
10. Falsifying time/quality/quantity reports	,685	,763				
8. Passing blame for your errors to an innocent co-worker	,579	,707				
9. Claiming credit for someone else's work	,655	,703				

<b>2. Personal Ethics About Business Life (6 statements)</b>			<b>2,584</b>	<b>19,877</b>	<b>1,91</b>	<b>,749</b>
13. Falling asleep at work	,576	,728				
15. Pilfering (taking) organization materials and supplies	,472	,654				
12. Call in sick to take a day off work	,463	,636				
14. Authorizing a subordinate to violate organization rules	,408	,612				
6. Doing personal business on organization time	,484	,540				
20. Not reporting others' violations of organization policies and rules	,484	,523				
<b>3. Materiality Ethics About Business Life (3 statements)</b>			<b>1,868</b>	<b>14,367</b>	<b>1,95</b>	<b>,649</b>
3. Giving gifts/favors in exchange for preferential treatment.	,682	,789				
17. Accepting gifts/favors in exchange for preferential treatment	,569	,699				
2. Padding (increasing) an expense account up more than 10%	,464	,508				

This data's sampling adequacy was efficient for factor analysis based on the results of Kaiser- Meyer Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy and Barlett Sphericity tests. KMO value was equal to 0,864 which provided an efficient sampling adequacy and the efficient results of Barlett Sphericity tests indicated the calculated Chi-square value ( $\chi^2=1077,962$ ;  $p=0,000$ ) and it suggests that the variables are appropriate for factor analysis. Variables are analyzed and classified in terms of the reliability scores (If the item deleted or not how the alpha score changes), relevant correlations with the scale, being overlapped, number of variables which are expressing under the same factor (s), under equal root values. The statement of first, fourth, eleven and nineteen were overlapped; seventh, sixth and eighteenth of the variables were expressing under the same factors. For that reasons, these items were omitted from the scale. Finally 13 of the statements were accepted under three factors. These factors explained 55,1% of the total variances. According to Scherer (1988), variance explanations between 40 and 60 % are accepted as an ideal proportion for social science factor analysis.



**Table 4 Factors and Their Relations to Students' Departments**

Factors	Symbol	Depts.	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	F Val.	P Val.	Diff.
Business Ethics About Business Life	A	Int. Finance	65	1,38	,52669	3,734	0,006	D>E E>A A>B B>C
	B	Law	50	1,34	,46536			
	C	Int. Management	57	1,25	,33728			
	D	Int. Trade and Logistics	40	1,67	,71656			
	E	Others (Psychology, et al)	48	1,42	,64238			
Personal Ethics About Business Life	A	Int. Finance	66	1,81	,56122	1,412	,230	None
	B	Law	50	2,02	,57672			
	C	Int. Management	57	1,83	,49997			
	D	Int. Trade and Logistics	41	1,96	,66928			
	E	Psychology and others	66	1,81	,56122			
Materiality Ethics About Business Life	A	Int. Finance	65	1,81	,69214	2,091	,082	None
	B	Law	49	2,01	,74833			
	C	Int. Management	56	1,87	,61484			
	D	Int. Trade and Logistics	41	2,10	,79735			
	E	Others	48	2,13	,74294			

According to the results are shown in Table 4, the first factor has only a significant difference based on the departments of the students. The students enrolled in international management have more ethical perceptions on business related ethical values. The lowest ethical perceptions are belonging to international trade and logistics department's students. Thereby, H1 hypothesis is supported however H2 and H3 hypothesis are not supported

**Table 5 Factors and their relations to Students' school years**

Factors	Symb ol	School Years	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	F Value	P Value	Difference
<b>Business Ethics About Business Life</b>	A	1	7 9	1,32	,41245	2,108	,100	None
	B	2	6 0	1,55	,72311			
	C	3	6 0	1,39	,50708			
	D	4 and above	6 3	1,36	,53290			
<b>Personal Ethics About Business Life</b>	A	1	8 0	1,77	,49808	3,060	<b>,029</b>	D>C C>B B>A
	B	2	5 9	1,91	,63830			
	C	3	6 0	1,92	,54924			
	D	4 and above	6 4	2,06	,58465			
<b>Materialit y Ethics About Business Life</b>	A	1	79	1,78	,71390	2,013	<b>,035</b>	B>C C>D D>A
	B	2	59	2,11	,70197			
	C	3	59	2,04	,71507			
	D	4 and above	64	2,00	,72373			

Table 5 shows the results of the years students spent in the university and their business ethics perceptions through identified factors. As it seen in the table, there is a significant difference between their school years and personal ethics and school years and materiality ethics. Therefore it is seen that there is a significant difference between years spend in school with students' perceptions about ethical personality and financial issues. For both subjects the students that are in the first year at the school have more ethical perceptions comparing to the remaining years. In terms of personal ethics about business life the students who spend four and more years in the campus, have significant differences and adversely with the respect to materiality ethics about business life factor and students who spend two years at the campus have less ethical perceptions. Therefore, H5 and H6 are supported and H4 is not supported.

**Table 6 Relations of Students' Internship and Three Ethical Factors**

Factors	Internship	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t Value	p Value
Business Ethic About Business Life	Yes	76	1,38	,54387	-,427	,670
	No	196	1,41	,56114		
Personal Ethic About Business Life	Yes	75	1,89	,56794	-,357	,722
	No	198	1,92	,57089		
Materiality Ethic About Business Life	Yes	76	1,91	,66472	-,587	,560
	No	195	1,97	,74363		

In Table 6, as the results indicates that, No differences were found between the relations of students' Internship and three ethical factors. Hence, H7, H8 and H9 hypothesis are not supported.

**Table 7 Relations of Students' Business Ethics Lectures and Three Ethical Factors**

Factors	Business Ethics Lesson	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t Value	p Value
Business Ethic About Business Life	Yes	64	1,4766	,70107	1,150	,252
	No	207	1,3853	,50224		
Personal Ethic About Business Life	Yes	65	1,8795	,64785	-,553	,581
	No	207	1,9243	,54334		
Materiality Ethic About Business Life	Yes	64	1,9115	,76346	-,496	,621
	No	206	1,9628	,71090		

Table 7 shows that, three factors have no significant relations with students' enrolling into the business ethics lectures. Therefore, H10, H11 and H12 hypothesis are not supported.

### Conclusion & Discussion

Developing ethical perspectives of students will influence their both social and workplace relations. Through this fact, ethics education lectures and methods have impulsive action for shaping attitudes and perspectives of the individuals. When in doubt, each member of the society is expected to behave in the way in which she or he would hope that all others would behave as stated in the Golden Rule (Pittela and Rotstein, 2015). Professors of ethics considering introducing ethical discussions into their course material, it should be encouraging to know that discussing ethics cases in class can improve students' impressions of the ethical standards of the typical businessperson (Cagle, et al., 2010) At the same time, business scandals from Enron and WorldCom to Martha Stewart focused the media spotlight on business schools, demanding that graduates be sent to the workplace with knowledge of and sensitivity

for the impact their business decisions have on their stakeholders and a more socially oriented approach to managing ethically (Robert and Roper, 2015). This study highlights the importance and the necessity of having ethics related topics and courses in the curriculum of undergraduate programs.

Briefly, 275 students responded to the survey. Nearly, 25% of them have business ethics lecture and 28% of them have the experience of Internship. At the university where this study carried out, the ethics lectures have been added to the curriculum before the survey is done. Business Ethics course is a compulsory course for the fourth year International Management department. For Law School and School of Psychology the courses related to ethics taught first year and fourth year of the curriculum. The 13 items were classified under three factors entitled with business ethics, personal ethics and materiality ethics. The results showed that students' departments have significant differences with business ethics factor also study period of the students have significant differences with personal and materiality ethics. Although ethical crisis influence all disciplines, given that many scandals have involved financial impropriety, finance faculty have been at the center of the debate about whether ethics should be integrated into the curriculum (Cagle, et al.,2010). This study indicates that finance students show lower sensitivity level to ethical issues. The results are shown similarities except gender differences through the literature. No differences were found in terms of ethical sensitivity levels between genders for this study.

Business schools and other higher education institutions have been under that they do not play an active role in shaping the leaders of the future therefore it is imperative for educators to incorporate ethical decision-making into their curricula to broaden their perspectives with tools or strategies (Robert and Roper, 2015).

### **Limitations & Suggestions**

In every study has, this study has similar limitations. Firstly the data was gathered from the perceptions of one university students in Turkey therefore it would not be possible to generalize the results for Turkey and the rest of the world. By reason of limited time, the sampling was occurred from a foundation university's enrolled students of summer term. For the reason the sampling covering just the students enrolled to summer term, the students that have business ethics lectures could not be specified, well. If the further research is enlarged with the formal terms (fall and spring) and after teaching these courses, results will be verified.

In the further research, the sampling size would be larger to increase the reliability and validity of the studies. Data would be gathered from different universities' different departments and compare cultural differences based on Hofstede's or other related perspectives with other countries. In the literacy some studies related to this issue accomplished with two perspectives as also the employers and current employees' perspectives can be searched.

Based on this and related results, managers and companies can benefit a lot and develop their strategies on providing ethical climate at their teams more effectively. Y generations attitudes and preferences varies compare to the previous generations. Therefore establishing ethical climate at the workplace becomes a bit difficult. Since the beginning of the century, companies are carrying out lots of solutions to increase Y generation workers commitment to their companies. Dependently, their ethical dilemmas are changed. Understanding their perspectives would help them to write up manager's leading strategies in a positive way.

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