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Pricing Practices on Digital Platforms from the Perspective of Islamic Business Ethics: A Study of Marketplace Operators in Indonesia

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to analyze the pricing mechanisms on digital platforms, identify the factors influencing price volatility, and examine these mechanisms from the perspective of Islamic business ethics.
Method: This study employs a qualitative field case study approach in Indonesia. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with *marketplace* business operators selected via *purposive sampling*. Data analysis applied the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña.
Results: Research findings indicate that pricing on digital platforms is dynamic (*dynamic pricing*) and highly responsive to platform structure, moving beyond the conventional *cost-plus pricing* method. Prices are determined through real-time interactions between internal cost calculations, competitive strategies among stores, platform algorithms, promotional momentum (such as *flash sales* or date-matching promotions), and consumer perceptions of value. This strategy is crucial for sellers to maintain product visibility and competitiveness. However, this pricing structure is often not fully understood by buyers, leading to information asymmetry.
Implications: Ethically, price flexibility aligns with the principle of *al-'adl* and free-market mechanisms. However, this paper emphasizes the need for transparency (*bayān*), mutual consent (*tarāḍin*), and trustworthiness; thus, psychological manipulation such as raising prices before applying a discount is deemed ethically flawed. Accountable platform governance and the strengthening of consumer digital literacy are required.
Novelty: This study lies in a shift in the focus of academic analysis from a previous tendency to treat price solely as a static economic variable influencing purchasing decisions to an analysis of socio-technological processes. This study examines how digital prices are constructed as the result of complex negotiations mediated by socio-economic technologies (algorithms and platform interface design) and are empirically evaluated using the substantive principles of Islamic muamalah ethics.

Introduction

The development of the digital economy has changed this relationship fundamentally, transforming contemporary trading. (Alam & Ali, 2020). Activities previously sold through direct interaction are now moving to a digital platform that brings together sellers, consumers, payment systems, logistics, and algorithmic recommendations into a single integrated transaction environment. (Schiliro, 2022). In this context, digital platforms not only function as market intermediaries but also participate in shaping the behavior of the actors by arranging visibility of products, systems, promotions, search rankings, and determining prices. (Kumari & S, 2023). According to Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller, digital transformation has pushed the shift from a market-based interaction perspective towards a data-driven and behavioral market, where prices become increasingly sophisticated instruments, dynamic, and responsive to changes in the market environment. (Kotler & Keller, 2021). Changing the show that prices in digital trade do not, again, can be understood solely as a result of calculating costs, production, and profit margins, but also as a product of interactions between technology, data, and market structure.

In Indonesia, the development of platforms such as Tokopedia, Shopee, and Lazada has expanded market access for micro, small, and medium-sized business enterprises. (Andriyani, 2025; Husin Lubis, 2026). However, the openness of the market at the same time gave birth to increasingly high prices and intense competition. (Abdulsalam et al., 2024). Recent studies show that low obstacle entry and height transparency prices in the marketplace are pushing competition between actors' businesses to become more aggressive. Research on digital market saturation in Indonesia found that an increasing number of sellers and transparent information prices make it more difficult for businesses to adapt prices quickly to stay competitive, even though conditions often squeeze profit margins and encourage unsustainable business practices. (Hartawati et al., 2023; SAPUTRI et al., 2023; Widodo et al., 2024).

In a way, social change is seen in behavioral consumption in a digital society. Consumers no longer solely buy goods based on need functionality, but also based on promotional momentum, price, and the perceived value formed by the platform interface (Rakib et al., 2022; Ummah, 2019; Zhemma et al., 2018). Features such as flash sales, price strikethrough, time-limited discounts, automatic vouchers, and free shipping have become part of the everyday consumption experience. Based on the initial observations, the writer observed that prices of certain products can change multiple times in one day, especially during busy hours, traffic jams, or approaching a monthly campaign promotion (Hasiloglu & Kaya, 2021). One of the perpetrators of the business being interviewed in a way introduction states that "price often adapts to platform market movements, not solely follows the cost of capital". This statement shows that the value in the digital ecosystem is increasingly shaped by the logic of the mediated real-time market technology (Rofiudin, 2025).

Findings at the beginning also show that the pressure is competitive enough and strong on the perpetrator's business. Some informants conveyed that adjustment prices are often done in response to price competitors, not solely based on internal cost structure. The seller states that when other stores lower their prices, other businesses tend to follow suit so as not to lose visibility of their products on the search page. Another informant explained that prices are sometimes raised; moreover, formerly, before the period of discount, to make it seem interesting when the system displays a price promotion. This shows that prices in digital platforms are not only influenced by the economy, but also by competitive strategies shaped by platform design, perceptions of consumers, and psychological mechanisms of digital marketing.

In the international literature, the practice is known as *dynamic pricing.* PK Kannan and Praveen K. Kopalle explain that the online environment allows changing prices in a way that is faster because cost-adjusted prices can become far lower compared to conventional markets. (Kannan & Kopalle, 2001). Prices can change based on time, demand, consumer behavior, and response to price competitors. Research has confirmed that digitalization speeds up the flexibility of prices, at the same time enlarging the complexity perception of consumers to justify the price. (Faehnle & Guidolin, 2021; Widyastuti et al., 2020).

However, in the academic realm, there appears to be a debate about the legitimacy of the practice mentioned. Some of the literature looks at dynamic pricing as a form of efficiency in modern markets because it allows allocation sources to have more power (Anggraeni et al., 2025; Husin Lubis, 2026), adaptive to changing demand and supply conditions. In contrast, research by Nawel Ayadi, Corina Paraschiv, and Xavier Rousset shows that consumers often evaluate changes in digital prices as problematic, especially when the mechanism for former prices is not fully transparent (Elmaghraby & Keskinocak, 2003; Faehnle & Guidolin, 2021; Togar Mulia Sirait et al., 2024). The study confirms that perception of injustice, confusion about information, and ambiguous reasoning change prices become the main problem in ethics in the digital market.

From the perspective of Islamic Business Ethics, the issue becomes more relevant. Islam recognizes market mechanisms; the formation price must be in the corridor of al-*adl* (justice), *bayān* (openness), information, *tarā ḍin* (the willingness of the parties), trust, and freedom from *gharar*. The classicists (Taymiyyah, 2001) assert that prices can be formed naturally through market interactions, but interventions that cause injustice, manipulation, or exploitation must be avoided. In the context of digital platforms, the academic issue lies in the question of whether the price formed through algorithms, techniques that promote psychological, and mechanisms that fix platform visibility, reflect the principles of openness and fairness in transactions in Islam.

Previously, in Indonesia, many studies discussed the influence of price on purchase decisions, consumer loyalty, and the effectiveness of digital promotions. Research on *dynamic pricing* for Generation Z consumers finds that changing digital prices and reviews significantly influence consumers' own influence on trend displacement choice of a brand. (Juniantara & Sukawati, 2018). Another study on the regulation *of predatory pricing in digital business from the perspective of Islamic law shows that competition, too high a price, and aggressive potential can cause market distortions and issues with justice between actors' efforts.* (Nurfitriani & Nugroho, 2023). Although some big studies put price as a variable to measure the economy through the behavioral output of consumers. There is little research that examines how prices are formed in practice every day, how perpetrator businesses interpret the process, and how they practice the negotiation in an ethical way, based on empirical data from digital market actors.

Based on the condition mentioned, there are important gaps in academics. Until now, this is still limited research that examines the determination of prices on digital platforms as a practice mediated by socio-economic technology and interpreted through the framework of Islamic business ethics. Therefore, this research aims to analyze how prices are formed by perpetrator businesses on digital platforms, factors that influence price changes, and how perpetrators interpret justice, openness, and responsibility in practice, and the implications. This study is expected to not only enrich the development of contemporary Islamic Economic studies but also provide practical contributions for perpetrator businesses, platform managers, and regulators in building governance with higher digital prices, fair, transparent, and oriented towards the public interest.

Research Methodology

This type of study uses field *research* with a qualitative approach and a case study design. Election approach. This is based on objective research that is not test-oriented, a connection between variables, but rather on an in-depth understanding of the process, considerations, experiences, and meanings that are constructed by perpetrators in business practice, determining prices on digital platforms. This study put the determination of price as a practice of socio-economic impacts interaction between business strategy, platform mechanisms, consumer behavior, and normative values in Islamic Business Ethics. Research location focused on the perpetrator's active business using a digital marketplace platform in Indonesia, with an analysis unit in the form of practice, determining the price of products in daily trading activities.

Determination of informants was done by purposive sampling, namely, choosing subjects based on their relevance to the study. The informant's main business consists of a perpetrator actively selling on at least one digital platform for a year, routinely carrying out price adjustments, ever using platform promotion features, and having stable transaction activity. To enrich the perspective, research also involves informant supporters, including consumer active marketplace participants and academics or practitioners in Islamic economics and digital business. Primary data is obtained through in-depth interviews and observations, directly to practice change price on the page products. In contrast, secondary data is obtained from digital documents, captures screen prices, platform policies, reports industry, scientific articles, as well as relevant literature on price mechanisms and Islamic business ethics. Thus, research is conducted using two types of data, namely primary data sourced from experience and empirical data from informants and secondary data originating from document sources.

Data collection was carried out through three main methods. First, semi-structured interviews for detailed information about the mechanism of determining price, factors that influence the change in price, considerations for using promotions, as well as the meaning of the perpetrator's business to draft justice and openness price. Second, non-participatory digital observation, namely, observing in a way to directly change the price of a product, uses a feature discount, price cross-out, vouchers, and price adjustment patterns in a period of promotion. Third, documentation, in the form of visual and textual data collection, like the catch screen page, product history, promotions, documents, and platform policy. Collected data, furthermore, were analyzed using the interactive model of Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and withdrawal conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The analysis process is done in a way that is simultaneous since stage data collection, so that researchers can identify emerging themes, patterns, relations between findings, and the meaning of social practice and price determination.

The validity of the data in the study was tested through triangulation sources, triangulation techniques, and member checking. Triangulation source is done by comparing information from perpetrator businesses, consumers, and an expert informant. The triangulation technique was done with the comparison of results, interviews, observations, and digital documentation. Meanwhile, member checking was done with confirmed return results interpretation, beginning with a number of informants, so that the data obtained is still in accordance with empirical experience. To guard against consistency analysis, researchers also use an audit trail, namely, a systematic recording of the entire process of collecting, processing, and interpreting data. This procedure is expected to produce credible, traceable, and analytically accurate findings that explain the practice of determining prices on digital platforms from an Islamic business ethics perspective.

Results and Discussion

Mechanism for Pricing on Digital Platforms

Findings of the study show that the determination of prices on digital platforms does not fully follow a cost-plus pricing model that places production costs and profit margins as the main basis. The perpetrator's business generally starts with the cost of the main product, operational costs, platform services, and the expected minimum margin. However, the price begins with the experience adjustment after considering digital market conditions. Informant mentions that the price of the product is often compared with competitor store prices that appear on the page search before being published to consumers.

In practice, every day, the price nature is relatively dynamic. Some informants confessed to adjusting prices periodically, especially during periods of promotions, monthly flash sales, and high traffic times. One of the informants stated that "if competitors downprice, usually we follow suit so that the product doesn't drown". This shows that price is formed through the interaction between the internal calculation of effort and the external pressure from the platform environment. In other words, determining prices in digital trade is taking place in a real-time, market data-based competition.

Findings. This is in line with the draft *dynamic pricing* proposed by PK Kannan and Praveen K. Kopalle. They explain that the internet makes it possible to change prices in a way that is fast because the cost of adjusting prices becomes low, and market information is available directly. (Kannan & Kopalle, 2001). Research suggests that this flexibility looks to be real in practice, particularly in businesses that actively monitor the prices of competitors and adapt prices in response to market changes. This means that prices on digital platforms will move from cost-based pricing to *platform-responsive pricing.*

Factors that Influence Price Changes

Research results show that there are two main influencing factors that change price, namely internal factors and external factors. Internal factors include profit targets, speed of rotation of stock, need for cash flow, and strategies for maintaining sustainable business. In certain conditions, perpetrators' businesses are willing to lower profit margins to maintain sales volume or speed up the rotation of supplies. Some informants confess that the price decision is often determined by the need to guard daily cash flow, especially in small businesses with limited capital.

Temporarily, the external factor is more dominant in the form of price dynamics. These factors cover platform algorithms, marketplace promotional programs, intense competition between stores, changes in consumer behavior, as well as seasonal momentum like campaign date twins and period day big. Some informants state that prices of closely related products are closely related to the positioning of products on the page search. The more competitive the price displayed, the bigger the possibility that the product gets clicks and exposure. Findings: This shows that platform algorithms in the non-direct form of the behavior economy perpetrator business.

In a way, theoretically, conditions can be explained through the approach of *platform economics.* Digital platforms not only become a room for meeting sellers and buyers, but also act as an architectural institutional arrangement for the incentive economy. Through search ranking, the system recommendations and design promotion, platform formation orientation decision perpetrator business. Thus, the price in the marketplace not just results from the interaction between supply and demand, but also from the results of mediation institutions built by digital platforms.

Promotion and Construction Strategy Perception of Value

Findings of the field also show that promotional strategy has a big influence on the formation of perceived price. Some informants confess that prices are sometimes raised; moreover, formerly, during the promotion period, to remain seen as interesting when the system displays a price strikethrough. Other practices found include declining prices temporarily to increase store traffic, then adjusting returns after the period of promotion ends. For the perpetrator's effort, steps are viewed as a strategy to increase the visual appeal of the product to the eyes of consumers.

From the perspective of the behavior of digital consumers, findings are related to the draft *Price framing* and *anchoring effect.* Crossed-out prices, discounts, limited-time promotions, and notification of promotions form a framework of certain things that affect the perceived value. Consumers do not always evaluate price based on the market intrinsic goods, but rather based on visual comparison between the price start and the price promotion. This is in line with research by Nawel Ayadi and colleagues, which shows that the perception of ethical consumers of digital prices is greatly influenced by the level of transparency and understanding of the mechanism of price changes. When the reason for the change in price is unclear, consumers tend to evaluate the practice as unfair.

Analysis from an Islamic Business Ethics Perspective

From the perspective of Islamic Business Ethics, the problem price is not solely understood as an economic instrument to get benefits, but also as part of the value system muamalah that demands justice, openness, responsibility, moral responsibility, and public welfare together. In traditional Islamic economics, prices have normative dimensions because they are directly related to the connection rights and obligations between sellers and buyers. (Lestari & Jubaedah, 2023; Triwibowo & Adam, 2023). Therefore, the formation price is not only seen from market efficiency, but also must be analyzed from what the process guard balances the interests of the parties and avoids potential harm.

The principle of *al-'adl* (justice) occupies a central position in this analysis. Justice price in Islam is not always interpreted as nominal uniformity, but rather as proportionality between market goods, available information, costs incurred, and benefits received by the parties. Research results show that a big perpetrator business sets a price that considers the cost principal, platform fees, minimum margin, and dynamic market price. With this in mind, there was no substantive indication that the seller was in any way aware that it was setting a price with objective exploitation in mind. Adjustment of price for more Lots done as a form of adaptation to competition and changes in the digital market environment. Within this framework, a change in price can be understood as part of market mechanisms that are generally justified as still within reasonable limits.

However, justice in Islamic business ethics does not stop at the nominal price aspect. (Choirun Nisak, 2023). Justice also includes procedural justice, namely, how the price is formed, communicated, and understood by the transacting parties. At this point, the findings of the study show that there is a problem that is important. Although the price is clearly seen on the platform screen, consumers often do not get a complete understanding of the structure of the former price. The price shown on the page product can be influenced by costs services, platform cuts, discounts temporary, automatic voucher, subsidy fare send, and adjustment algorithmic that is not always readable in a way explicit. As a result, consumers only come face-to-face with the final nominal price without understanding how the price is formed in perspective on ethical transactions and situations. This can lead to an asymmetry in information between perpetrator businesses, platforms, and consumers.

Aspects related to the principle of *bayān* (openness). In Islamic transactions, transparency does not just mean displaying the price, but rather ensuring that relevant information is available in a way sufficient for the parties to make decisions in an aware way. (Shofiyah & Faishol, 2024). From the results interview known that a number of consumers tend to focus more on the display price promotion, price strikethrough, and discount label, compared understand structure price in a way overall. In general, empirical things. This shows that visibility information is not always identical to understanding information. In a digital environment, platform interfaces are often designed to highlight visual elements that influence the attention and perception of consumers. As a result, formally, the information available is not fully understood by the buyer substantively.

Consequently, more carry on from limitations, openness, the touch principle *tarā ḍ in* (willingness of the parties). In Islamic business ethics, willingness is not only interpreted as formal approval of transactions, but also as born agreement from sufficient knowledge. When the decision to purchase happens under conditions where the consumer does not fully understand how the price is formed, then the willingness to experience a reduction in quality. In other words, the transaction is still formally legitimate, but in a way, the ethical quality of the agreement becomes weaker. This is where the difference lies in the compliance procedures of the platform system with quality ethical transactions according to the Islamic perspective.

Ibn Taymiyyah's view provides a framework highly relevant to analysts for reading this problem. In *Al-Hisbah fi al-Islam,* Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that price is basically formed through the natural interaction between demand and supply. He rejects intervention in arbitrary prices, but at the same time rejects market practices that contain fraud, manipulation, hoarding, and exploitation. Thus, the changes in price that appear because of market dynamics, in essence, can be accepted in the Sharia framework. In the context of digital platforms, flexible pricing that responds to changing demand, intense competition, and promotional momentum is not automatically contradictory with Islamic principles.

However, the reading against Ibn Taymiyyah also confirmed that legitimate market mechanisms require the existence of honesty, openness, and welfare. At this point, the problem lies in the change in price, not in the change itself, but rather in the way the change in price is constructed and perceived. When the pricing strategy is directed to form a perception of urgency or a perception of profit in an artificial way without sufficient explanation about the base formation price, then there is potential tension with principal trust. For example, the practice of raising prices, moreover formerly before discounts, to look more interesting visually, cannot always be categorized as fraud in a way that law is positive, but in an ethical way, still raises questions about the honesty of representation of marks to consumers.

Thus, the findings of the study show that the ethical problem of Islamic business on digital platforms is not especially on the existence of flexibility, price, but rather on the quality and transparency of the formation process. In the digital market, price becomes the result of an interaction between calculation costs, promotional strategies, platform algorithms, and design interface. Complexity: This makes the formation price not fully transparent for consumers. Therefore, analysis of Islamic business demands attention not only on the nominal price, but also on the structural relationship information that forms the decision economy.

Dialectics of Digital Markets and the Ethics of Muamalah

The findings of the study show sufficient dialectic strength between logic, digital market efficiency, and principles of ethics *muamalah*. From the perspective of the digital economy, flexibility of prices is viewed as a form of adaptation rational to market changes. Actors in the business must be capable of responding to changing behavior of consumers, intense competition, as well as promotional momentum to remain enduring in a very dynamic platform ecosystem. In this context, price functions as an instrument of efficiency, power, competitiveness, and risk management effort. The ability to adapt prices quickly has become part of a defensive strategy in the digital market.

However, from the corner view of normative, logical efficiency, the No can stand by itself. Ethics of transactions put the activity of the economy as part of not quite enough moral responsibility that must consider justice, openness, and welfare. This means that even though the digital market encourages flexibility in price, the process still requires ethical boundaries so as not to give birth to distorted information or practices that reduce the quality of agreements with consumers. Thus, there is a tension between the instrumental rationality of the market and the normative rationality, which places the transaction as a room for social accountability.

The dilemma looks real in the perpetrator's business. A number of informants confess that declining to aggressively set too high a price can increase traffic and sales volume, but at the same time, it can also squeeze profit margins and disrupt the sustainability of the business. One of the informants conveyed that " if we follow the war price of goods, of course, we behave, but profit is getting thinner." Statement This shows that the decision price is not only related to the relationship between sellers and consumers, but also related to the ability of the business to endure in a sustainable way. From the perspective of Islamic ethics, the sustainability of business is also part of welfare because it is related to the protection of business, income, and the stability of the economy.

In a higher-level area of research, this shows that prices on digital platforms are a construction-mediated socio-economic technology. Prices do not solely result from the classic interaction between supply and demand, but rather result from negotiations involving platform algorithms, data governance, design promotion, competitive strategy of business perpetrators, as well as consumer perception. This means that the formation of price is ongoing in a structured institutional environment that is not fully neutral. The platform plays a role in forming mediator orientation behavior in the economy of market actors.

Findings: This expands the discussion about pricing in the digital economy in a way that is academic. Many studies previously put price as a variable that influences purchase decisions or consumer loyalty research. This shows that the focus of analysis needs to be shifted from just "impact" price" towards "the social process of forming price." Shift. This is important because in the digital space, price is the result of a relation between technology, institutions, market behavior, and ethical values. Thus, the price must be understood as a negotiation arena socially containing economic as well as moral dimensions.

The implication is that the development ecosystem is healthy with digital trade. Not enough, only efficiency-oriented technology and market competition. Better platform governance is needed, transparent, practice more business responsible answers, and strengthen consumer literacy to structure digital prices. Within the framework of Islamic business ethics, goals finally do not reject market innovation, but rather ensure that innovation is still in line with the principles of justice, trust, openness, and benefit to society.

Conclusion

Study This shows that the practice of determining prices on digital platforms has experienced a shift from a conventional pattern that relies on calculations of cost, production, and profit margins to more dynamic, adaptive, and responsive mechanisms to the digital platform structure. Prices in the marketplace are not solely formed by the internal considerations of the perpetrator's effort, but also influenced by the platform algorithm, intense competition between stores, promotional momentum, visibility of products, and consumer behavior. Thus, prices on digital platforms are the result of interactions between market logic, technology, and ongoing competitive strategies in real time.

Findings of the study show that changing prices is basically viewed by the perpetrator business as a rational strategy for maintaining power, competitiveness, and sustainability of the business. Within the framework of the digital market, flexibility of price is a form of adaptation to the dynamics of demand, pressure of competition, and mechanisms of platform promotion. However, research has also found that the main problem lies in the changes in price itself, but at the level of transparency of the formation process. Structured digital pricing often involves platform discounts, vouchers, fee-for-service, promotions that are temporary, and algorithmic adjustments that are not at all understood by consumers. Conditions: This can cause room asymmetry, potentially influencing quality agreement awareness in transactions.

From the perspective of Islamic Business Ethics, the practice of determining prices on digital platforms in principle can be accepted, as long as it is ongoing in a way that is proportional, open, and does not contain elements of manipulation and exploitation. Principle *al -' adl, bayān, tarā ḍ in,* and amanah become of normative importance in evaluating the legitimacy of digital prices. Therefore, flexibility of price is not contradictory with the ethics of Islamic business; the change of price still reflects honest information, transparency mechanisms, and the benefit of the parties. On the other hand, when the pricing strategy is directed to form a perception mark in an artificial way without adequate information, then ethical problems appear that require attention.

Academically, research confirms that pricing on digital platforms must be understood as a construction mediated by socio - economic technology, and not solely as variable economic factors that influence the decision to purchase. Contribution of the main study. This lies in the effort to place the formation process of prices as a negotiation arena between digital market rationality, structural institutional platforms, and values, ethics, and transactions. Practical implications from findings. This shows the need to strengthen governance, improve price transparency, improve consumer literacy about the structure of digital prices, and develop more platform policies accountable for the ecosystem, so that digital trade can grow in an efficient way, at the same time fair, open, and oriented towards the welfare of the ecosystem.

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Author Contributions Statement

FSI conceptualized the qualitative case study design, conducted the in-depth field interviews with marketplace operators, and MH structured the dynamic pricing analytical framework, aligned the empirical findings with Islamic business ethics principles.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this study. This research was conducted independently without any commercial involvement from digital platform institutions or any other external parties that could compromise the objectivity of the analysis and manuscript.

AI Usage Statement

In the process of drafting this manuscript, the authors used a generative artificial intelligence system based on Large Language Models to assist with exploring initial ideas, developing the writing structure, and linguistic editing. The entire conceptualization process, research data collection, empirical analysis, academic interpretation, reference verification, and scientific argumentation remain the full responsibility of the authors, who critically reviewed, verified, and edited the final content prior to submission.

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