

Enhancing Grassroots Entrepreneurship Development through Market Orientation

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Abstract: Grassroots innovation (GRI) is often cited as a key to entrepreneurship development; however, the factors of influence for prompting entrepreneurial actions at the grassroots level are often unclear. As the key challenges of grassroots innovators are limited understanding and accessibility of market information, market orientation plays a significant role by helping grassroots innovators relation to sources of important information and opportunities. In the grassroots context, market orientation serves to promote entrepreneurial activity by bridging the market information gap effectively and ensuring involvement from various communities in responding to market needs and demand. This study analyzes the role of market orientation on the connection between GRI and entrepreneurial orientation. It reveals that market orientation helps improve economic benefits from entrepreneurial activities.

Keywords: Grassroots Innovation, Customer Orientation, Competitive Orientation, Entrepreneurship Development, India

1. Introduction

Poverty continues to be one of the most pressing socio-economic issues in India, and the need to promote innovation practices targeting the development of poverty-stricken groups, is justified. In this context, the innovation created by grassroots communities to response grassroots issues are denoted to as grassroots innovation (Singh et al., 2021). In this context, innovations created by grassroots communities to respond their local problems are referred to as grassroots innovations (Singh et al., 2021). This form of innovation is deemed highly valuable because it addresses community-level problems while keeping in mind their interests and values. The National Innovation Foundation (NIF) has highlighted many examples of grassroots innovations and their potential to address grassroots issues, such as the Mitticool refrigerator built by Mansukhbhai Prajapati, the multipurpose axe developed by Mohd. Rafiqahangar, Areca nut polisher developed by Lalbiakzuala Ralte And Lalpiangliana Sailo, Automatic horse shaver developed by Mohammad Idris, the tree climbing instrument created by Mohammed Rafeeqe (NIF, 2026). These innovations indicate the potential of grassroots communities to generate innovative solutions for grassroots local challenges. Furthermore, GRIs have made remarkable contributions to the economic development of a nation (Gupta, 2013; Bhaduri and Kumar, 2011). Hence, building upon the bottom of the pyramid that cover the majority portion of the Indian populous as a fundamental building block for economic development and poverty alleviation is a valid and practical strategy. Despite limited economic resources, grassroots innovators are rich in creativity, innovation, traditional skills and indigenous knowledge. However, many grassroots communities lack the power of market knowledge, management skill and entrepreneurial skill, resulting in their working in isolation.

There are tremendous opportunities to unlock the innovation capabilities among grassroots innovators in terms of entrepreneurship development and employment creation. It is thereby important to bridge the market information gap and skill deficiency, while simultaneously creating sustainable forms of entrepreneurship at the grassroots level. Alternatives have been proposed in this regard but have not been given proper focus including, fostering an understanding of market trends, identifying critical factors influencing market demands, sharing the information with others and participating in activities tailored to address market needs (Kohli and Jaworski, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990; Pelham, 2000). Therefore, this research is designed to explore how market orientation connects the innovative capacity of grassroots innovators to entrepreneurial success.

2. Literature Review

Market orientation has been acknowledged as an effective entrepreneurial strategy developed by scholars and practitioners (Pelham, 2000; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). As stated by Han et al. (1998), innovation provides concrete support in converting market-oriented activities into superior firm performance. A few researchers have found that entrepreneurs' market orientation is meaningfully associated with firm innovativeness. (Han et al., 1998; Narver and Slater, 1990). Low et al. (2007) reported a significant association between innovation and market orientation in SME context; hence, it is important to examine the influence of market-oriented behavior

of grassroots innovators on their entrepreneurial activities. From a behavioral standpoint, Marketing orientation (MO) represents activities directed toward understanding and addressing market needs (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993). MO includes three dimensions such as market intelligence generation, market intelligence dissemination, and market intelligence responsiveness. In general, the market orientation concept has been classified into three elements such as customer focus, inter-functional synchronization, and profitability (Konopa and Calabro 1971; McNamara, 1972; Houston, 1986).

Marketing orientation is defined as creating market intelligence related to market demand, needs and trends (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Narver and Slater (1990) identified three elements of MP such as customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination. Within grassroots communities, most grassroots innovators work as small or micro entrepreneurs, and most of them work in the informal sector (Gupta, 1997). Hence, inter-functional coordination was excluded from the measure of MO. In this study, customer orientation and competitor orientation are included as elements of MO in the grassroots context. These elements emphasize the collection of market information on consumer behavior and competitive actions. In management literature, a few scholars have argued that MO serves as a vital driver for attracting new customers and enhancing sales performance, which in turn assists in achieving entrepreneurial success (Zahra and Covin, 1993; Low et al., 2007). A few researchers have also suggested that grassroots innovators require a better understanding of the market so that they can successfully commercialize GRI-based products (Gupta, 1997, Kumar et al., 2013). However, the association between GRI and market orientation remains unclear; based on this current status, it is imperative to understand the important role that market orientation plays, when it comes to transforming GRI into a successful enterprise.

3. Hypothesis Development

This study has considered two dimensions of market orientation such as customer orientation and competitor orientation. Following the conceptualization of Singh et al. (2021), this study considered the factors of GRI such as NLP: new grassroots learning practices, LS: local solutions, and NC: networking capabilities.

Earlier scholars have suggested that the learning approach enhances a firm performance when it is combined with market orientation (Mavondo and Farrell, 2000; Steinman et al., 2000). Baker and Sinkula (1999) asserted that learning is a mechanism that significantly influences an entrepreneur's ability to meet customer requirements through acquiring and using market information. Extant entrepreneurial literature shows that there is an association between innovation, learning and market orientation; however, the direction of this relationship is still not clear (Low et al., 2007). Customer orientation refers to entrepreneurial activities that respond to customer needs and demands, while learning is a process to create and use that knowledge to enhance performance. A strong customer orientation can promote innovators to absorb market knowledge; it is thereby certain that MO can enhance conversion of new grassroots learning practices into entrepreneurial activities. Grassroots innovators learn new skills and practices, which lead them to improve their performance. If grassroots innovators develop customer-oriented behavior, it helps them better understand customer requirements, and respond accordingly to capture new entrepreneurial opportunities. Customer orientation helps grassroots innovators enrich their knowledge and understanding of diverse customer demands. Furthermore, Mavondo and Farrell (2000) state that customer-oriented entrepreneurs are effective in producing market knowledge, and this practice of knowledge production, inevitably leads to enhance entrepreneurial activities. Hence, the proposed hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Customer orientation moderates the association between NLP and EB from entrepreneurial success.

Hypothesis 1b: Customer orientation moderates the association between NLP and NEB from entrepreneurial success.

GRI has been defined as a local solution that addresses to the problems of the grassroots community (Gupta, 2012). Since a local solution emphasizes local problems, it tends to ignore broader market needs and demands (Seyfang and Smith, 2005). In this context, customer orientation helps grassroots innovators to enhance their knowledge of a specific market scenario, and take appropriate actions to respond to these market needs (Low et al., 2007). Customer orientation therefore may be considered as a set of beliefs that regards customer needs and satisfaction as the most important action for entrepreneurship development (Steinman et al., 2000). According to Singh et al. (2021), an entrepreneur or innovator needs to understand customer needs and serve customers because it helps gain economic advantage and non-economic advantage from entrepreneurial activities. Han et al. (1998) recommend that market-oriented behavior helps nurture innovation for

entrepreneurial activities, which, in turn, leads to the generation of economic and non-economic benefits. Hence, this study proposes a moderating role of customer orientation on converting local solution into entrepreneurial success.

Hypothesis 2a: Customer orientation moderates the association between LS and EB from entrepreneurial success

Hypothesis 2b: Customer orientation moderates the association between LS and NEB from entrepreneurial success

Customer orientation promotes knowledge producing behavior, which improves performance through processing market information and implementing market strategies (Verhees and Meulenbergh, 2004). Networking capabilities of grassroots innovators help developing relationships with different organizations or institutes. If grassroots innovators develop market orientation, they can use their networking capabilities to generate and capture new market opportunities (Dion and Assimakopoulos, 2013). Networking capabilities, in turn, reflect the degree to which grassroots innovators are connected to external actors or organizations. Further, customer orientation among grassroots innovators lays the foundation for a desire to collect customer information and leverage marketing strategies for entrepreneurship development (Dobni and Luffman, 2000).

Hypothesis 3a: Customer orientation moderates the association between NC and EB from entrepreneurial success

Hypothesis 3b: Customer orientation moderates the association between NC and NEB from entrepreneurial success

Competitor orientation on the other hand, considers entrepreneurial activities that respond to information about competitors, while learning refers to a process of acquiring information and knowledge that improve performance. Competitor orientation helps in developing the ability to recognize, examine, and address competitors' activities (Narver and Slater 1990). Competitor orientation involves recognizing and leveraging specific functionalities to generate competitive advantages. Most successful innovative entrepreneurs develop innovative products as a function of market competitive characteristics (Cooper, 1984). A strong competitor orientation can stimulate an innovator to acquire market information and knowledge from competitors; so, it is certain that MO can promote transformation of new grassroots learning practices into entrepreneurial success.

Hypothesis 4a: Competitor orientation moderates the association between NLP and EB from entrepreneurial success

Hypothesis 4b: Competitor orientation moderates the association between NLP and NEB from entrepreneurial success

Competitor orientation helps grassroots innovators understand what their competitors are doing. Competitor orientation entails collecting and disseminating information regarding competitors operating in the target market (Kohli and Jaworski 1990). If grassroots innovators develop competitor orientation, they can develop innovative products that are better and more innovative than those of their competitors. By doing this, GRI generates competitive advantage by commercializing local innovative products or services. Competitor orientation provides exposure to a grassroots innovator as regards his/her existing competitors along with their entrepreneurial strategies. Furthermore, competitor orientation signifies that an innovator demonstrates insight into the competitive landscape, including rivals' strengths and weaknesses, and simultaneously develops new competitive strategies introduced by major current and prospective players (Day and Wensley, 1988). In the entrepreneurship context, grassroots innovators need a strong competitor-focused mindset that facilitates recognizing rival strengths and weaknesses, creating advantages, and anticipating competitive responses (Gatignon and Xuereb 1991; Kohli and Jaworski 1990). Competitive orientation in the grassroots domain encourages the development of innovative solutions that are economically viable and cost-effective, a central component of entrepreneurial success.

Hypothesis 5a: Competitor orientation moderates the association between LS and EB from entrepreneurial success

Hypothesis 5b: Competitor orientation moderates the association between LS and NEB from entrepreneurial success

Networking capabilities help grassroots innovators engage in entrepreneurial activities. Therefore, competitor orientation acts as an effective strategy because grassroots innovators are more likely to establish their own

connections for institutional support when they understand how and with whom their competitors conduct business. Furthermore, competitive orientation has thereby been considered as an effective entrepreneurial strategy (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990) for entrepreneurial success. Competitor orientation tends to promote the creation of both economic and non-economic benefits for entrepreneurs, as it gathers information on competitors' business practices, which help in capturing new entrepreneurial opportunities. The contingency view states that grassroots conditions that characterize GRI—especially pertaining to its innovation potential and competitive set—inevitably determine whether competitor intelligence has a greater influence on the grassroots innovators' ability to achieve competitive advantages. This study therefore hypothesizes that competitor orientation enhances the conversion of networking capabilities into entrepreneurial success, and proposes the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 6a: Competitor orientation moderates the association between NC and EB from entrepreneurial success

Hypothesis 6b: Competitor orientation moderates the association between NC and NEB from entrepreneurial success

4. Research Methodology

The sample for this study consists of grassroots innovators undertaking entrepreneurial activities and allied to the rural non-farming sector. The sample of this study includes grassroots innovator who engage in entrepreneurial activities. This study employed structural equation modeling to analyze the moderating effect of market orientation on the association between the factors of GRI and entrepreneurial success.

The regression equations used for moderating effect of customer orientation on the linkage between factors of GRI and entrepreneurial success.

$$EB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(NLP) + \beta_2(CustO) + \beta_3(NLP \times CustO) + \epsilon$$

$$EB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(LS) + \beta_2(CustO) + \beta_3(LS \times CustO) + \epsilon$$

$$EB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(NC) + \beta_2(CustO) + \beta_3(NC \times CustO) + \epsilon$$

$$NEB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(NLP) + \beta_2(CustO) + \beta_3(NLP \times CustO) + \epsilon$$

$$NEB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(LS) + \beta_2(CustO) + \beta_3(LS \times CustO) + \epsilon$$

$$NEB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(NC) + \beta_2(CustO) + \beta_3(NC \times CustO) + \epsilon$$

Where: EB: Economic benefits, NEB: Non-economic benefits, CustO: Customer Orientation, NLP: new grassroots learning practices, LS: local solutions, NC: networking capabilities, β_0 = Constant, β_1 , β_2 , and β_3 = Regression coefficients, ϵ = Error term

The regression equations used for moderating effect of competitor orientation on the linkage between factors of GRI and entrepreneurial success.

$$EB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(NLP) + \beta_2(CO) + \beta_3(NLP \times CO) + \epsilon$$

$$EB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(LS) + \beta_2(CO) + \beta_3(LS \times CO) + \epsilon$$

$$EB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(NC) + \beta_2(CO) + \beta_3(NC \times CO) + \epsilon$$

$$NEB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(NLP) + \beta_2(CO) + \beta_3(NLP \times CO) + \epsilon$$

$$NEB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(LS) + \beta_2(CO) + \beta_3(LS \times CO) + \epsilon$$

$$NEB = \beta_0 + \beta_1(NC) + \beta_2(CO) + \beta_3(NC \times CO) + \epsilon$$

Where: NEB: Non-economic benefits from entrepreneurial success, NLP: new grassroots learning practices, LS: local solutions, NC: networking capabilities, CO: competitor orientation, β_0 = Constant, β_1 , β_2 , and β_3 = Regression coefficients, ϵ = Error term

5. Results

This study considered new grassroots learning practices, local solution, and networking capability as independent factors (factors of GRI), whereas economic benefits and non-economic benefits from entrepreneurial activities were treated as dependent factors.

5.1 Analyzing the Moderation Effect of Customer Orientation on the Association Between GRI and ES

This section outlines the results of the analysis investigating the moderating role of customer orientation in the relationships between new grassroots learning practices (NLP), local solutions (LS), networking capabilities (NC), and entrepreneurial success.

Hypothesis 1a proposed that customer orientation (Cust) shapes the association between LP and EB. The results in Table 1 show that interaction coefficient for new learning practices and customer orientation was significant ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that moderation occurred. Hence, Hypothesis 1a is backed by the results, and is accepted. Furthermore, Hypothesis 1b proposed that customer orientation moderates the connection between new learning practices and non-economic benefits from entrepreneurial success. The results in Table 1 illustrate that the interaction coefficient for new learning practices and competitor orientation was not significant; therefore, moderation did not occur. Hypothesis 1b is not supported, as there is lack of statistical evidence.

Table 1: Regression Weight (Moderation effect of CustO on GRI-ES relationship)

Model 1	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Significance
NLP → EB	.068	.049	1.382	.167	No
NLP × CustO → EB	.232	.051	4.533	***	Yes
CustO → EB	.179	.049	3.663	***	Yes
NLP → NEB	-.063	.018	-3.611	***	Yes
NLP × CustO → NEB	-.053	.018	-2.915	.004	Yes
CustO → NEB	.949	.017	54.311	***	Yes
Model 2					
LS → EB	.279	.046	6.059	***	Yes
LS × CustO → EB	.227	.049	4.623	***	Yes
CustO → EB	.157	.046	3.408	***	Yes
LS → NEB	-.045	.017	-2.573	.010	Yes
LS × CustO → NEB	.048	.018	2.574	.010	Yes
CustO → NEB	.942	.017	54.376	***	Yes
Model 3					
NC → EB	-.034	.052	-.643	.520	No
NC × CustO → EB	.137	.056	2.453	.014	Yes
CustO → EB	.218	.053	4.149	***	Yes
NC → NEB	-.020	.019	-1.082	.279	No
NC × CustO → NEB	-.035	.020	-1.748	.081	No
CustO → NEB	.938	.019	49.923	***	Yes

Model 1: Moderation effect of CustO on LP-ES relationship, Model 2: Moderation effect of CustO on LS-ES relationship, Model 3: Moderation effect of CustO on NC-ES relationship

Hypothesis 2a proposed that customer orientation moderates the association between LS and EB from entrepreneurial success. Table 1 shows that interaction coefficient for new learning practices and customer orientation was not significant ($\beta = -0.23$, $p > 0.05$), indicating that moderation did not occur (in Table 1). Therefore, Hypothesis 13a is not recognized as no significant statistical evidence was observed. Furthermore,

Hypothesis 2b proposed that customer orientation moderates the relationship between LS and NEB from entrepreneurial success. The finding presented in Table 2 illustrates that the interaction coefficient for local solution and customer orientation was not significant ($\beta = 0.05$, $p > 0.05$), signifying that moderation did not occur. Hypothesis 2b is thus not supported, as it lacks statistical backing.

Hypothesis 3a proposed that customer orientation moderates the connection between NC and EB from entrepreneurial success. Table 1 shows that interaction coefficient for networking capabilities and customer orientation was significant ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that moderation was observed. Thus, Hypothesis 14a is acknowledged as it is well supported by the results. Furthermore, Hypothesis 3b proposed that customer orientation moderates the connection between NC and NEB from entrepreneurial success. The results of this study, depicted in Table 1, demonstrate that the interaction coefficient for localized solution and competitor orientation was not significant ($\beta = -0.03$, $p > 0.05$), signifying that moderation did not occur. Hypothesis 14b is therefore not recognized, as it lacks statistical backing.

5.2 Analyzing the Moderating Effect of Competitor Orientation on the Relationship Between GRI and ES

This section presents the results of the role of competitor orientation on the association of new learning practices, local solutions and networking capabilities with entrepreneurial success.

Hypothesis 4a proposed that competitor orientation acts as moderator in the connection between LP and EB from entrepreneurial success. Table 2 shows that the interaction coefficient between new learning practices and competitor orientation was significant ($\beta = -0.08$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that negative moderation was observed; therefore, Hypothesis 4a is not supported by the results, and it is not recognized. Furthermore, Hypothesis 4b proposed that competitor orientation moderates the association between new learning practices and non-economic benefits from entrepreneurial success. The findings presented in Table 2 demonstrate that the interaction coefficient for new learning practices and competitor orientation was not significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $p > 0.05$); this signifies that moderation was not observed. Hypothesis 4b is therefore not accepted, as it lacks statistical backing.

Hypothesis 5a proposed that competitor orientation moderates the connection between LS and EB derived from entrepreneurial success. The findings presented in Table 2 illustrate that the interaction coefficient for local solutions and competitor orientation was not significant ($\beta = -0.03$, $p > 0.05$), indicating that moderation did not occur. Hypothesis 5a is not recognized, as it lacks statistical backing. Furthermore, Hypothesis 5b proposed that competitor orientation moderates the relationship between LS and NEB from entrepreneurial success. The findings presented in Table 2 illustrate that the interaction coefficient for localized solution and competitor orientation was not significant ($\beta = 0.04$, $p > 0.05$), signifying that moderation was not observed. Hypothesis 5b is therefore not recognized, as it lacks statistical backing.

Table 2: Regression Weight (Moderation effect of CO on GRI-ES relationship)

Model 4	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Significance
NLP → EB	-.018	.042	-.422	.673	No
NLP × CO → EB	-.078	.033	-2.390	.017	Yes
CO → EB	.553	.044	12.637	***	Yes
NLP → NEB	.136	.051	2.649	.008	Yes
NLP × CO → NEB	.075	.040	1.879	.060	No
CO → NEB	.153	.054	2.862	.004	Yes
Model 5					
LS → EB	.100	.043	2.330	.020	Yes
LS × CO → EB	-.035	.034	-1.037	.300	No
CO → EB	.536	.047	11.484	***	Yes
LS → NEB	-.009	.053	-.173	.863	No

LS×CO→NEB	.044	.042	1.050	.294	No
CO→NEB	.172	.058	2.974	.003	Yes
Model 6					
NC→EB	.021	.040	.526	.599	No
NC×CO→EB	.145	.043	3.380	***	Yes
CO→EB	.570	.040	14.134	***	Yes
NC→NEB	.264	.048	5.536	***	Yes
NC×CO→NEB	-.098	.051	-1.923	.054	No
CO→NEB	.139	.048	2.888	.004	Yes

Model 4: Moderation effect of CO on LP-ES relationship, Model 5: Moderation effect of CO on LS-ES relationship, Model 6: Moderation effect of CO on NC-ES relationship

Hypothesis 6a proposed that competitor orientation moderates the association between networking capabilities and economic benefits from entrepreneurial success. Table 2 shows that the interaction coefficient for networking capabilities and competitor orientation was significant ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$), resulting in successful moderation, as one of the main effects was also significant. Since hypothesis 6a is supported by the results, it is accepted. Hypothesis 6b proposed that competitor orientation moderates the relationship between networking capabilities and non-economic benefits from entrepreneurial success. The findings presented in Table 2 demonstrate that the interaction coefficient for networking capabilities and competitor orientation was not significant ($\beta = -0.01$, $p > 0.05$), showing that moderation was not successful. Therefore, Hypothesis 13b is not acknowledged, as it lacks statistical backing.

6. Conclusion

This study proposed market orientation as a crucial intervening concept that drives the conversion of GRI into entrepreneurial activities. Several researchers in the entrepreneurship field suggest that market orientation comprises a set of specific behaviors and activities (Kohli and Jaworski 1990), a resource (Hunt and Kasynathan, 2001) and a basis for decision-making for entrepreneurship development. Furthermore, a market-oriented entrepreneur/innovator is well positioned to effectively respond to opportunities through value addition of innovative products and services. In extant literature, market orientation has three factors: customer orientation, competitive orientation, and inter-functional coordination (Gatignon and Xuereb, 1997). These dimensions may be appropriate to a firm, but are not applicable to grassroots innovators, who essentially lack knowledge and understanding of market orientation; for them, it is more of a concept than a strategic opinion. This compelled the researchers to implement the existing MO dimensions for grassroots innovators. Market orientation (MO) from the lens of GRI thus is part of market-driven activities comprising of customer orientation and competitor orientation. As grassroots innovators become oriented toward either customer demand or competitor status, this research makes significant contributions to existing market strategy literature by conceptualizing market orientation in the grassroots context. The findings of this research confirm the moderating role of customer orientation on the connection between grassroots new learning practices and economic benefits from entrepreneurial success. Customer orientation also moderates the relationship between networking capabilities and economic benefits from entrepreneurial success. In addition, competitor orientation negatively moderates the relationship between new grassroots learning practices and economic benefits from entrepreneurial success, while it moderates the relationship between networking capabilities and economic benefits from entrepreneurial success.

The strategy literature presents evidence on market orientation, as a market-driven activity is a significant influence on firm performance (Cooper, 1984; Narver and Slater, 1990; Slater and Narver, 2000). In the grassroots context, customer orientation helps stimulate economic benefits from local solutions and networking capabilities. Market orientation of grassroots innovators leads to high performance arising from innovations delivered to the market. Critical examination of extant literature on GRI reveals that the association between GRI and entrepreneurial success is much less explored and needs significant research attention. It thus makes a stronger claim that future research on GRI should employ a quantitative approach to empirically confirm the role of market orientation, yielding more generalized results supported by scientific statistics.

Ethics Declaration

This research did not include any physical experiments linking human members, and no sensitive personal information was gathered from the grassroots innovators participating in the study. The primary data were obtained through the voluntary involvement of grassroots innovators involved in entrepreneurial related activities, with all respondents providing informed consent to contribute in the study. Since the study depended completely on voluntary survey-based responses and maintained participant confidentiality, formal ethical approval was not required.

AI Declaration

This study did not rely on AI tools for the formation of original research content or the explanation of results. The authors independently reviewed and confirmed all materials to maintain the authenticity and academic rigor of the research.

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