

## SHIFTING ECHOES: RE-EVALUATING THREE GENERATIONS' PERSPECTIVES ON NICKNAMES TOWARD BULLYING

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**Received:** 27<sup>th</sup> September 2024/ **Revised:** 5<sup>th</sup> December 2024/ **Accepted:** 9<sup>th</sup> December 2024

**How to Cite:** Tur, A. P. A., Daulay, R., & Farida, H. (2024). Shifting echoes: Re-evaluating three generations' perspectives on nicknames toward bullying. *Humaniora*, 15(2), 141-147. <https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v15i2.12261>

### ABSTRACT

*Within the Mandailing community in Rokan Hulu, as the novelty, the research investigated the diverse viewpoints on nicknames that had developed throughout three generations (older people, millennials, and Generation Z), with a specific emphasis on the links between nicknames and bullying. These nicknames, which could be affectionate or insulting, could fuel or stop bullying. The researchers conducted an interview and a survey at Rokan Hulu, a suburban region in Sumatra, to gather qualitative data for the research. A survey was distributed to 40 individuals in Rokan Hulu. It is evident from the findings that attitudes have changed over time. Many individuals from older generations view nicknames as a form of endearment due to their perceived innocence and strong cultural heritage roots. On the other hand, younger generations, notably millennials and Generation Z, are becoming more aware of the potentially harmful effects that certain nicknames can have, particularly in connection with bullying and inclusion in social groups. People interpret and use language in a way that mirrors the broader societal and cultural changes occurring. By re-evaluating how different generations perceive nicknames, the research contributes significantly to a more in-depth comprehension of how shifting cultural norms influence linguistic practices and the social repercussions of those practices, particularly in the context of bullying.*

**Keywords:** shifting perception, bullying, nicknames, millennial, Generation Z, suburban

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the study of nicknames, particularly in linguistics and interdisciplinary studies (Imayo et al., 2022). The research objective is to examine the practice of intergenerational nicknames among individuals from three different generations in Rokan Hulu, Riau. Most studies on nicknames talk about the sociolinguistic impact on bearers and features, functions, or patterns on nicknames. The research contributes to determining the impact of these nicknames on the perception of the bearers among the three generations in Rokan Hulu toward bullying. Rokan Hulu, Riau boasts a profound cultural heritage and deep-rooted traditions. Amidst the abundant biodiversity and verdant terrains, the inhabitants of Rokan Hulu have cultivated distinctive customs and rituals transmitted from one generation

to the next. One such practice is the use of implicit nicknaming, which greatly shapes social bonds and the collective identity of the community (Lam, 2020; Zhou et al., 2021).

Designating or referring to something is important, particularly for humans, as it distinguishes one thing from another. It is the same with humans and the inherent name for every object, creature, or thing (Sari & Tur, 2019). The term may be employed in an implicit manner that is broader in scope, particularly in names whose meanings are not readily apparent (Jalil et al., 2021). Names have a multifaceted role beyond being symbols. They symbolize an individual's social status, accomplishments, and rights and play a role in shaping the societal framework for representing their ethnic heritage, social position, and overall social standing (Gündüz, 2017). These aspects are considered to have social importance (Dianitami et al., 2023).

Naming custom is a significant cultural tradition that serves not only to identify individuals but also to carry cultural and religious meaning, closely linked to family and community identities (Persulessy et al., 2023).

Numerous civilizations have long employed nicknames as a means of identifying individuals (Artemova & Ivanenko, 2022; Ibrahim, 2022). These symbols are frequently employed to distinguish individuals within a group, while simultaneously representing ethnicity, social standing, or social reputation, all of which are considered to have social significance (Tur et al., 2023a). It has been emphasized that nicknames promote intimacy and familiarity among individuals, serving various social functions in specific sociolinguistic fields and cultural contexts (Dianitami et al., 2023). These nicknames can be examined from structural, functional, psychodynamic, or socio-historical viewpoints. Within the context of Rokan Hulu, these nicknames possess a more profound meaning and carry connotations beyond their mere function of distinguishing individuals from one another.

Frequently, these nicknames serve as indicators of an individual's character, profession, or even lineage. Commonly inherited between generations, these nicknames are crucial in connecting the past with the present (Ibrahim, 2022; Tur et al., 2023b). In Indonesia, there are several instances of such occurrences, such as *Raden* in Javanese culture, which can denote a degree originating from *kesultanan*, or *La Ode* and *Wa Ode* from Muna and Buton communities in South Sulawesi, which can signify heroic degrees or serve as a revered prayer to be performed in the name of their child (Jalil et al., 2021).

Heritage and traditional appellations and practices hold great importance (Dzhumamukhambetova et al., 2024). They exhibit significant variations across different cultures, religions, and periods and can be shaped by cultural identification, historical context, family traditions, and religious convictions (Persulessy et al., 2023). Rokan Hulu is characterized by a profound integration of nicknames inside its social and cultural fabric. Nicknames are commonly employed in informal contexts such as social events and everyday communication (Moore et al., 2020). They function as a means of establishing mutual understanding and cultivating a feeling of inclusion within the community. Furthermore, these names can also serve as a means to express reverence or esteem for an individual's accomplishments or attributes (Archer, 2019).

According to Dianitami et al. (2023), nicknames, especially from East Java, have varied sources like appearance, such as *ndut*, which represents a person with unideal body weight, or *jemblug*, which represents an individual with puffy cheeks. It also comes from characteristics such as lines that represent picky and princess-like characters. It can show their relation as a family member, such as *ler*, derived from the word '*dulur*' meaning bro/brother. Even it can be

a real name such as *enji* that comes from the name 'Angelica'. The nicknames can function as a sort of intimacy or a way to ridicule or bully others if the nicknames do not indicate or depict the reality of the individuals.

Furthermore, according to Matfunjwa et al. (2024), nicknames, particularly those originating from Swati clans, may stem from household duties, an individual's behavior or habitual patterns, and physical attributes. Certain monikers are derived from the names or surnames of prominent people, important historical events, and the names and surnames of their wearers. Certain monikers derived from people's conduct and physical attributes may be deemed disagreeable and offensive.

Another research conducted by Mensah and Ndimele (2022) reveals that the nicknames students assign to their teachers may have positive or negative communicative connotations. It is contingent upon the students' rapport with the lecturers. Favorable or neutral nicknames are bestowed onto someone based on their intellectual prowess, physical appearance, outstanding presentation skills, and other personal attributes that enhance the social bond and network between students and their teachers. In contrast, negative or pejorative nicknames are generally held in contempt and are attributed to somebody based on their perceived lack of ability, as well as physical or behavioral flaws. The research aims to uncover the nicknames used by three generations of individuals in Rokan Hulu, Riau and the corresponding perceptions conveyed by their carriers.

## METHODS

The research applies a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate and comprehend the significance of the problem assigned to social or human difficulties (Tur et al., 2023a; Nurazizah et al., 2024). The investigation progresses with a literature analysis of nicknames. It particularly analyzes previous studies and reveals the limitations of the latest research. The data are collected via a Google Form questionnaire, which includes question items such as date of birth, nicknames, the significance of such nicknames, and the rationale behind them. A survey is distributed to 40 individuals in Rokan Hulu. Following that, the data are classified according to the birth years and segregated into three distinct groups: the 1980s, 1990–2000s, and 2000–2010s. Then, 27 of 40 individuals are qualified for interviews to identify their feedback or response towards their nicknames. Researchers analyze the data to identify the linguistic characteristics that are present in nicknames and determine the answers given by the individuals associated with the nicknames to ascertain the presence of verbal bullying or intimidation. The data are also determined by the approach of Symbolic Interactionism to uncover the motivation behind the bearers' utterances. Last, the data are documented and analyzed to reach conclusions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The next part presents a comprehensive study and scrutiny of the data. The compiled data indicates that the nicknames exhibit distinct characteristics and motivations for their usage. Two primary nicknames denote both genders: *ucok* for males, consisting of 13 data points, and *utet* for girls, consisting of 14 data points. These nicknames carry different connotations depending on the context. The dataset consists of 27 data points, distributed as follows: 9 data points from individuals born in the 1980s, 11 data points from individuals born in the 1990s–2000s, and 7 data points from individuals born in the 2000s–2010s, as summarized in Table 1. The widespread use of nicknames in every culture throughout history indicates that the practice of giving specific individuals nicknames is a pervasive tradition (Matfunjwa et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2024). Furthermore, according to Matfunjwa et al. (2024), relatives, acquaintances, colleagues, or associates can acquire and bestow these nicknames during an individual's career. That idea suggests that nearly everyone possesses nickname (Tur, 2022). The practice of assigning nicknames throughout generations seems to be a common occurrence, particularly among those residing in rural areas (Pais, 2018).

The researchers collect the data from individuals born in the 1990s–2000s, the most extensive chronological grouping among the three generations, followed by the 1980s and the 2000s–2010s. There are four distinct characteristics associated with the nicknames: physical, habitual, attitude, and place. The most notable characteristics utilized as nicknames are the physical attributes, which account for 16 data in the entire dataset. The others are seven data for behavioral characteristics, two for habitual characteristics, and two for geographical characteristics. Physical characteristics, such as skin tone, body shape, physical injury, or any associated physical disorders, determine the classification of physical features. The

researchers classify behavioral characteristics based on the person's pattern of behavior or event associated with the given nicknames. Moreover, the researchers classify habitual traits based on the individual's or their family members' regular or everyday actions, establishing them as such. Lastly, place features refer to a specific location that is strongly associated with the person who bears the mentioned nickname.

The data show that the custom of nicknaming has continued across three generations. The only difference found is that in the 2010s generation, nicknames based on place and habits do not exist. Almost all the data from the 2000s–2010s are based on physical appearances. It is about six out of seven data, with only one nickname based on behavioral features. The datum indicates that people from the 2010s generation are more prone to create derogatory nicknames. They use physical appearances as their base. Using the data as the basis indicates that the latest generation of Rokan Hulu people is more likely to use nicknames as a form of rejecting, insulting, and even belittling other people who show undesired physical or behavioral features.

In the context of nicknames, “features” refer to any elements that serve as the foundation for the creation of nicknames. In the past, these features primarily functioned as a means to differentiate one individual from another. Nonetheless, the nicknames remain associated with the bearers until they reach adulthood (Tur et al., 2023a). First, physical features pertain to the utilization of an individual's physical appearance or bodily traits to formulate or evoke a nickname. Conspicuous or unusual characteristics like stature, mass, hair pigmentation, complexion, or other salient physical features frequently inspire these nicknames (Dianitami et al., 2023).

Individuals commonly use nicknames as informal words in conversation to identify themselves, and these designations can shape their interpersonal identities (Pais, 2018; Zhang & Patrick, 2021). Individuals acquire nicknames from their immediate

Table 1 Nicknames and Their Correlated Features

1980s		1990s-2000s		2000s-2010s	
Nicknames	Features	Nicknames	Features	Nickname	Features
<i>Utet Lebar</i>	Physical	<i>Utet Tayap</i>	Physical	<i>Utet Tiang</i>	Physical
<i>Utet Gappual</i>	Physical	<i>Utet Rata</i>	Physical	<i>Utet Mosok</i>	Physical
<i>Utet Sayur</i>	Habitual	<i>Utet Randap</i>	Behavioral	<i>Utet Pano</i>	Physical
<i>Ucok Biru</i>	Physical	<i>Utet Raning</i>	Behavioral	<i>Utet Dayak</i>	Behavioral
<i>Ucok Pangkalan</i>	Place	<i>Utet Katak</i>	Behavioral	<i>Ucok Lolom</i>	Physical
<i>Ucok Ruso</i>	Habitual	<i>Utet Layap</i>	Behavioral	<i>Ucok Mancis</i>	Physical
<i>Ucok Singso</i>	Physical	<i>Utet Pusot</i>	Physical	<i>Ucok Rara</i>	Physical
<i>Ucok Gayo</i>	Physical	<i>Ucok Kote</i>	Behavioral		
<i>Ucok Tanding</i>	Physical	<i>Ucok Goni</i>	Physical		
		<i>Ucok Bange</i>	Behavioral		
		<i>Ucok Bengkel</i>	Place		

social environment, encompassing family, friends, and colleagues. These nicknames frequently encapsulate significant societal roles by concisely reflecting an individual's personality traits, physical attributes, or remarkable life experiences (Dianitami et al., 2023). Giving an individual a nickname distinguishes them from others and makes them the center of attention (Marcondes et al., 2020). People may attribute this nickname to their behavior or actions, which in turn may reflect their social status or physical appearance (Nikolenko, 2023). According to Mensah (2016), a specific set of contextual characteristics allows for the comprehension of a wide range of interpretive possibilities that nicknames can convey.

Table 2 Physical Features and Their References

Nicknames	References
<i>Utet Lebar</i>	Large and fat body
<i>Utet Gappual</i>	Black and white <i>Gappual</i> fish
<i>Utet Tayap</i>	Very thin person like a flat board
<i>Utet Tiang</i>	Very tall person like an electric pole
<i>Utet Mosok</i>	Dark skin that is almost like a charcoal
<i>Utet Rata</i>	Very dark skin person
<i>Ucok Gayo</i>	Resembling a crab
<i>Ucok Tanding</i>	A fish-head like
<i>Utet Pano</i>	A lot of fungi skin infection
<i>Utet Pusot</i>	Having many hair whirls
<i>Ucok Biru</i>	Having bluish skin
<i>Ucok Lolom</i>	Tar-like skin
<i>Ucok Mancis</i>	Body and head resembling a fire match
<i>Ucok Singso</i>	Scar caused by saw machine
<i>Ucok Goni</i>	Big and spacious like a sack
<i>Ucok Rara</i>	Very light skin getting red under the sun

The most common physical features, referred to as nicknames in Table 2, indicate that the most distinctive characteristic of an individual is their physical appearance. Nicknaming can serve as a means to reflect how others perceive and develop opinions about each other (Dianitami et al., 2023) or to associate a person with their physical attributes (Matfunjwa et al., 2024). Formally, empirical evidence indicates that the monikers or nicknames most frequently employed are those related to physical or anatomical features (Pais, 2018).

The skin complexion appears to be a distinguishing factor in establishing a moniker. *Utet rata*, *utet mosok*, and *ucok lolom* are monikers utilized to describe individuals of both genders with dark complexion. Additional physical feature nicknames include *utet tiang*, which precisely translates to a woman with the height of an electric pole, *ucok goni* for a man resembling a sack, or *ucok mancis*, indicating a male with a body and head resembling a fire match. Another set of nicknames uses animals to represent other people: *utet Gappual* denotes a fish called

*Gappual*, characterized by its black-and-white scale. Then, *ucok gayo* denotes an individual who bears a resemblance to a crab, and *ucok tanding* shows a fish's cranial shape. Examples of physical deformities manifest as a type of moniker. The character of *ucok singso*, who bears a scar resulting from a saw machine, exemplifies how the unfortunate experiences of others can lead to the acquisition of a moniker and serve as a form of personal identification.

Most of these nicknames signify disrespectful or insulting behavior towards the person they refer to, serving as a means of ridicule. Most people devise these nicknames primarily as a derogatory or offensive method to openly or covertly criticize or offend someone (Matfunjwa et al., 2024). The physical appearances of individuals have played a crucial role in the development and evolution of numerous positive and negative nicknames. This situation has led society to be inclined to draw judgments about others based on their physical appearance characteristics (Mensah, 2020; Dianitami et al., 2023).

Second, behavioral features in nicknames pertain to an individual's traits, habits, or activities that influence or define a nickname. These nicknames derive from an individual's conduct, personality traits, or distinctive activities that are noticeable to others. Such nicknames can emphasize positive or negative actions (Zhou et al., 2021). Similar to those based on physical attributes, they may be light-hearted, friendly, or occasionally critical, depending on the circumstances.

Table 3 Behavioral Features and Their References

Nicknames	References
<i>Utet Randap</i>	Poisonous substance to committing suicide
<i>Utet Raning</i>	Rich and love to buy new clothes
<i>Utet Katak</i>	Likely to sit like a frog
<i>Ucok Kote</i>	Muscular and strong person
<i>Ucok Bange</i>	Being used to like to eat dirt known as <i>bange</i>
<i>Utet Dayak</i>	Like to lie down in almost every situation
<i>Utet Layap</i>	Like to go out and seldomly go home

Data analysis in Table 3 reveals that certain nicknames used in Rokan Hulu are strongly associated with a specific behavioral characteristic or originate from an incident that serves as a reminder of the person's identity to others. Certain nicknames are disgraceful and even explicitly offend the person associated with them, while others are bestowed as a gesture of contempt or reverence for the bearer. The mentioned nicknames serve as a means of conveying emotions, and it is customary to assign an individual a nickname that aligns with their behavioral tendencies (Khetoa & Mokala, 2022).

*Utet randap* for a former suicidal individual,

*utet raning* for a woman who recently acquires wealth and professes a penchant for shopping, and *utet bange* for an individual who has previously indulged in the consumption of feces are nicknames that are intimately associated with a disgraceful history or the bearer's abhorrent conduct. The nicknames serve as a means to scrutinize and mock the individuals who carry them. Therefore, the nicknames indicate a negative perception (Matfunjwa et al., 2024). Furthermore, individuals who display undesirable and repugnant behaviors often face labeling, contempt, and even condemnation as toxic (Khetoa & Mokala, 2022).

People bestow additional monikers upon the bearers, such as *utet katak* for a tendency to sit like a frog, *utet dayak* for a tendency to flatten on nearly every occasion, *utet layap* for a woman who enjoys socializing and rarely returns home, and *ucok kote* for a very robust individual in terms of physical prowess. Those nicknames are based on their consistent integration into daily life, which appears to reflect a remarkable similarity in appearance. People bestow these monikers to ridicule or express admiration for the bearers. Others may give nicknames to these idiosyncrasies, which are considered inherently distinctive or peculiar. These nicknames can indicate feelings of embarrassment or serve to mock the individuals who wear them (Mensah & Ndimele, 2022). The research demonstrates that nicknames can serve as references employed in communication to convey an individual's desirable, disagreeable, and condemnatory characteristics as perceived by society (Matfunjwa et al., 2024). Indeed, a nickname effectively communicates a significant amount of information about the individual who wears it. Depending on the circumstances, a nickname can express cultural concepts or attitudes or represent societal norms and expectations toward a person (Khetoa & Mokala, 2022). Certain expectations take the form of nicknames, implying that individuals with poor mannerisms may receive a negative nickname that is deeply embedded in their identity, stigmatizing them as socially rejected or unsuccessful.

Third, habitual features in nicknames pertain to an individual's consistent behaviors or practices that motivate the designation. These habits encompass actions, behaviors, routines, or mannerisms that an individual regularly performs, leading others to associate the individual with these actions (Zhou et al., 2021; Dianitami et al., 2023). These monikers signify observable patterns or behaviors recognized by others over time, and they may be employed endearingly, hilariously, or critically, contingent upon the situation.

The nicknames shown in Table 4 serve solely as identifiers. *Ucok ruso*, indicating that the boy is the son of a deer hunter, and *utet sayur*, indicating that the lady is the vegetable seller, provide examples of how certain nicknames function to identify individuals with unconventional or distinctive characteristics. People employ nicknames to convey precise and meaningful information about their possessor (Khetoa & Mokala, 2022). Additionally, duties, chores, and daily habits

can serve as the foundation for these nicknames (Matfunjwa et al., 2024).

Table 4 Behavioral Features and Their References

Nicknames	References
<i>Ucok Ruso</i>	Having a father who is used to hunting deer
<i>Utet Sayur</i>	Selling vegetables despite having another main profession

Fourth, place features in nicknames denote marks derived from an individual's connection to a specific location, including their origin, residence, or regularly visited sites. These monikers frequently signify a geographical affiliation or regional identity (Zhou et al., 2021; Dianitami et al., 2023). These nicknames emphasize an individual's association with a location and may convey pride, familiarity, or amusement based on the situation.

Table 5 Place Features and Their References

Nicknames	Meaning
<i>Ucok Pangkalan</i>	Place to hang out around the corner of the street with many people
<i>Ucok Bengkel</i>	Place to work as a mechanic in a motorcycle workshop

The terms *ucok pangkalan* and *ucok bengkel* in Table 5 signify a street corner and a workshop, respectively. They suggest that certain nicknames originate from a well-known location that the individual frequently visits. Data show that only men use this particular nickname, with no available data on female nicknames that incorporate place as a characteristic. This type of nickname suggests that males in Rokan Hulu primarily socialize with their friends, and the location serves as their designated identity, making it rare to observe the carriers outside of that specific region.

The mentioned nicknames elicit distinct interpretations among their individuals (Sabrina & Tur, 2023). Certain bearers have a sense of devaluation associated with the nicknames bestowed upon them, but others readily embrace and even commemorate them (Shih & Rudin, 2020; Borrelli, 2020). These reactions vary both within and across generations. It appears that individuals belonging to the 1980s generation readily embrace and freely use the nicknames bestowed upon them. The 1980s generation appears to perceive these nicknames as their identities rather than as a means of ridicule or offense, suggesting that individuals from this generation are more readily embracing their nicknames as representative of their identity. The appellation "*Gappual*" is very pejorative when used as a nickname; it is highly offensive to tag an individual, particularly a fish, with such a name. Furthermore,

the moniker “*singso*” originates from the individual’s unfortunate circumstances, indicating their acceptance of their scars as an integral part of their identity. Despite this, the bearers willingly embrace these nicknames and incorporate them into their daily lives.

Individuals from the 1990s–2000s generation retain distinct interpretations of their nicknames. Certain individuals who use nicknames willingly adopt them as their identity and actively incorporate them into their daily lives. Besides them, others seem to view these nicknames as satire, disregarding them as part of their identity. They always experience offense when others, including their loved ones, use them.

Moreover, persons from the 2000s–2010s generation hold distinct views regarding their nicknames. Given that the majority of nicknames stem from physical appearance, individuals who adopt these nicknames perceive them as a form of mockery and interpret them as instances of bullying. It suggests that individuals from the 2000s–2010s generation possess a higher level of awareness regarding bullying than those from the 1980s and 1990s–2000s generations. They employ this knowledge as a means of self-defense and consider these nicknames to be disgraceful and insulting. Particularly, when the individuals making the accusations are not their closest friends, they refuse to accept them.

Others’ continued use of these nicknames compels the bearers to accept them and respond when called upon reluctantly. For example, a lady bearing the name *tiang*, which denotes a height resembling an electric pole, is characterized by her superior stature exceeding that of ordinary women and occasionally even surpassing men. In addition to the difficulty taller women face in forming relationships with individuals of the opposite gender, the bearer often harbors a strong disdain for her name. Furthermore, those closest to the bearers exacerbate the situation by bestowing these names on them.

Nevertheless, the rejection experienced by individuals who have adopted nicknames from the 2000s to 2010s varies in intensity depending on the individuals who call them with these nicknames. For instance, if the callers are emotionally close to them or family members, the rejection seems somewhat less severe than when they are not emotionally close to them (Nick, 2020). It implies that their nicknames become part of their identity, which is unsettling, especially for Dayak nickname holders. They believe that these nicknames are not entirely accurate and inadequately reflect their true identity.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research findings indicate that nicknaming practices in the Mandailing community in Roka Hulu, Riau, throughout three generations exhibit a range of associated features. These qualities include physical, behavioral, habitual, and place characteristics. These monikers elicit distinct interpretations from the people

who bear them, and they vary across generations. Individuals from older ages seem to adopt the nicknames wholeheartedly and even incorporate them into their sense of self. On the other hand, the researchers can categorize millennials into two main groups: those who embrace their nicknames and those who strongly dislike them. Moreover, Generation Z seems to share similar views on their nicknames, viewing them as a kind of ridicule or a personal affront.

Future research may investigate the changing views towards nicknaming practices within the Mandailing community by analyzing the socio-cultural elements and psychological factors affecting the choice of nicknaming that affect generational variations in nickname perception. It is essential to examine the influence of contemporary communication technology, social media, and globalization on the perceptions of millennials and Generation Z about nicknames. Moreover, subsequent research can explore the influence of nicknaming practices on identity development, social relationships, and self-esteem among various age demographics. Comparative analyses involving diverse ethnic groups or communities may yield insights into the overarching cultural transformations influencing modern nicknaming traditions.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Directorate of Research, Technology, and Community Service of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Republic of Indonesia provided financial support for the research through the grant No. 0609.12/LL5-INT/AL.04/2024 and 004/PFR/LPPM-UAD/VI/2024.

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