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EXAMINING THE ANTECEDENTS OF EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT IN COMMERCIAL BANKS IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Employee performance is a critical driver of productivity, customer satisfaction, and competitiveness within commercial banks. Despite its importance, evidence indicates that employee performance in commercial banks in Kenya, particularly in Nairobi City County, remains inconsistent and below optimal levels. Many banks continue to face challenges such as low motivation, work-related stress, poor teamwork, and limited managerial support, which negatively impact service quality and operational efficiency therefore, the study sought to examine the influence of social support on employee performance in commercial banks in Nairobi City County. The study was anchored on the Socio-Technical System (STS) Theory. The study applied a descriptive research design and grounded on the pragmatic viewpoint. The target population consisted of 1,317 Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB) employees. These employees comprised 26 policy makers in Job Group H and G, 295 staff in senior management (Job Group E and D), 412 middle management staff (Job Group C and B), and 648 lower management and clerical staff (Job Group A). The research employed stratified proportionate random sampling procedures, where the bank's staff cadres served as the strata to ensure representation of all levels. The number of respondents in each cadre was determined using Slovin's (1960) formula, resulting in a sample size of 307 employees. Data was collected using structured questionnaires designed on a five-point Likert scale. A pilot test was conducted



among staff at KCB branches in Thika, Kiambu, and Machakos to test the reliability and validity of the research instruments, as these branches were not part of the main study. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, including F-statistic and ANOVA, were employed to test hypotheses. The study concluded that social support had a statistically significant effect on employee performance among staff of commercial banks in the Nairobi region. In light of the findings, the study recommended that the management of commercial banks should strengthen workplace social support systems by fostering teamwork, mentorship, and open communication channels across all departments. Other financial institutions should also implement these practices for improved performance.

Keywords: Social Support, Employee Performance, Commercial Banks, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Social support in the workplace refers to the emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance that employees receive from their supervisors, colleagues, and organizational systems to help them cope with work-related challenges and enhance their overall performance (House, 2021). In modern organizations, particularly in the financial sector, social support has emerged as a critical determinant of employee well-being, motivation, and productivity. Effective social support systems encompass aspects such as mentorship, teamwork, open communication, and a positive organizational culture that fosters mutual respect and collaboration among staff (Saks & Gruman, 2020). Through such mechanisms, organizations can enhance employees' sense of belonging, reduce stress, and improve job satisfaction, which collectively lead to higher levels of performance and organizational commitment (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2021).

Globally, commercial banks have increasingly recognized the importance of fostering supportive work environments as a means to enhance employee performance and maintain competitiveness. In developed economies such as the United States and the United Kingdom, banks including JPMorgan Chase and Barclays have implemented comprehensive social support programs that include peer mentoring, employee assistance programs, and team-building initiatives aimed at strengthening collaboration and reducing workplace burnout (Thompson & Becker, 2022). These interventions have been linked to improved employee morale, customer service delivery, and overall productivity. Similarly, in Canada and Australia, banks have adopted hybrid support structures that combine psychological well-being programs

and performance coaching to promote a culture of inclusivity and high engagement among employees (Davis & Lee, 2021).

In Africa, social support practices within banking institutions are gaining momentum as organizations acknowledge the role of human capital in achieving competitive advantage. In South Africa, institutions such as Standard Bank and ABSA have invested in social support initiatives that promote teamwork, diversity, and wellness, leading to lower turnover and higher performance levels (Mabaso & Dlamini, 2022). Nigerian banks such as Zenith and Access Bank have also implemented employee recognition and mentoring systems that enhance job satisfaction and performance (Okafor & Ume, 2023). However, challenges such as limited managerial empathy, high work pressure, and poor communication channels continue to hinder the full realization of the benefits of social support systems in many African banking institutions (Chukwuma & Obi, 2022).

In Kenya, the banking sector has undergone significant transformation characterized by increased competition, technological innovation, and regulatory reforms. Commercial banks such as Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB), Equity Bank, and Co-operative Bank have adopted employee-centered management practices that emphasize workplace support, continuous training, and mentorship to enhance employee efficiency and service delivery (Kariuki & Omondi, 2022). According to the Kenya Bankers Association (KBA, 2023), social support structures such as peer collaboration, supervisor guidance, and employee welfare programs have contributed to improved morale, reduced turnover intentions, and enhanced customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, studies have reported that employees in some commercial banks still face challenges such as inadequate managerial support, stressful work environments, and limited communication, which adversely affect their performance (Wambua & Njoroge, 2023).

Within Nairobi City County the financial hub of Kenya commercial banks operate in a highly competitive and demanding environment that requires optimal employee performance for sustained growth and service quality. The dynamic nature of banking operations, coupled with high customer expectations and technological disruptions, necessitates strong social support systems to buffer employees against stress and burnout. Despite efforts by banks to foster supportive workplace cultures, evidence suggests persistent gaps in managerial engagement, interpersonal relations, and organizational support structures (Mutuku & Githinji, 2024). These gaps raise concerns about the adequacy of social support mechanisms in promoting employee performance and organizational effectiveness.

Social support is intrinsically linked to employee performance through its capacity to enhance psychological well-being, motivation, and job satisfaction. Supportive environments foster collaboration, trust, and open communication, enabling employees to share knowledge

and seek assistance when facing challenges (House, 2021). Supervisory support, in particular, provides employees with guidance, feedback, and encouragement that strengthen their confidence and work commitment. Peer support enhances teamwork and innovation, while organizational support ensures the availability of resources and fair treatment that motivate employees to deliver high-quality outcomes (Saks & Gruman, 2020). This aligns with the Karongo, (2024) study that maps social support as either intramural or extramural activities to support the welfare of employees.

Employee performance is a critical factor that determines the success and competitiveness of commercial banks in today's dynamic financial environment. It refers to the efficiency, effectiveness, and quality with which employees execute their assigned tasks to achieve organizational goals. In the banking industry, employee performance encompasses dimensions such as customer service delivery, accuracy in financial transactions, adherence to regulations, and achievement of sales and productivity targets. Although Joseph and Muli (2024) examined the effect of Psychosocial wellbeing of flower farm employees in Kenya, the research utilized the safety compliance and staff turnover rates as the tenets of performance. High-performing employees contribute to improved profitability, enhanced customer satisfaction, and stronger institutional reputation. Conversely, poor performance can lead to operational inefficiencies, customer dissatisfaction, and loss of market share. As such, maintaining optimal employee performance is central to the sustainability and growth of commercial banks (Kamau & Wambugu, 2021).

Employee performance in commercial banks can be measured through several key indicators that reflect both qualitative and quantitative outcomes. One important measure is task efficiency, which assesses how effectively employees complete their assigned duties within set timeframes while maintaining accuracy and compliance with banking policies (Muturi & Kariuki, 2020). Service quality is another vital measure that focuses on how employees handle customer interactions, resolve complaints, and build long-term client relationships (Omondi & Gichuhi, 2022). Additionally, goal achievement which involves meeting sales targets, cross-selling financial products, and contributing to branch profitability serves as a clear performance indicator (Njoroge & Kihara, 2021). Innovation and adaptability also measure how employees respond to technological changes and adopt new banking systems or procedures to improve service delivery (Wachira & Mwangi, 2023).

Another set of measures used to evaluate employee performance includes teamwork and collaboration, attendance and punctuality, and customer satisfaction ratings. Teamwork assesses an employee's ability to work harmoniously with colleagues to achieve common goals, while attendance and punctuality reflect reliability and commitment to the job (Maina & Waweru,

2022). Customer satisfaction ratings provide feedback on how clients perceive the service quality and professionalism of banking staff (Chege & Njenga, 2023). Furthermore, compliance with ethical and regulatory standards is an essential performance measure, especially in the financial sector where integrity and accountability are paramount (Mwangi & Mutua, 2020). Overall, these measures provide management with a comprehensive view of employee performance, enabling commercial banks to identify strengths, address weaknesses, and enhance productivity across all operational levels.

Statement of the Problem

Employee performance is a critical driver of productivity, customer satisfaction, and competitiveness within commercial banks. It determines the efficiency with which banks deliver financial services, meet regulatory requirements, and achieve profitability targets. Despite its importance, evidence indicates that employee performance in commercial banks in Kenya, particularly in Nairobi City County, remains inconsistent and below optimal levels. Many banks continue to face challenges such as low motivation, work-related stress, poor teamwork, and limited managerial support, which negatively impact service quality and operational efficiency (Kamau & Wambugu, 2021). High workloads, demanding performance targets, and limited recognition further contribute to burnout and job dissatisfaction among banking staff.

While commercial banks such as KCB, Equity, and Co-operative Bank have introduced employee support initiatives, performance appraisal systems, and training programs, the outcomes have not always translated into consistent improvement in performance metrics such as task efficiency, service quality, and customer satisfaction (Chege & Njenga, 2023). Studies show that employees often struggle to meet organizational goals due to inadequate social support from supervisors and peers, which reduces their engagement and overall output (Maina & Waweru, 2022). This gap suggests that structural and interpersonal factors within the work environment may hinder optimal employee performance.

Furthermore, limited empirical research has examined the role of social support including supervisory guidance, peer collaboration, and organizational welfare programs in enhancing employee performance among commercial banks in Nairobi City County. Given the increasing complexity of banking operations and the rising demands for digital and customer-centered services, the absence of strong social support systems could exacerbate stress and reduce productivity. Therefore, this study sought to examine the influence of social support on employee performance in commercial banks in Nairobi City County, addressing the gap in understanding how supportive work relationships and structures contribute to improved task efficiency, innovation, and customer satisfaction in Kenya's banking sector.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on the Socio-Technical System (STS) Theory, which was originally developed by Emery and Trist (1960) to explain the interdependence between social and technical subsystems within an organization. The theory posits that organizational performance is optimized when there is a harmonious alignment between the social components such as people, culture, communication, and teamwork and the technical components such as systems, tools, and work processes (Trist, 1981). According to STS theory, organizations function as integrated systems where technological structures and human relationships must be jointly designed to enhance both efficiency and employee satisfaction (Pasmore et al., 2019). This dual focus ensures that improvements in technology are complemented by supportive social systems that encourage collaboration, motivation, and adaptability.

Socio-Technical System Theory emphasizes that organizational success is not solely dependent on advanced technology or efficient processes but also on the human element that interacts with those systems. In the context of commercial banks in Nairobi City County, the theory is relevant because banking operations are increasingly technology-driven, involving digital platforms, automated systems, and data analytics. However, the effectiveness of these systems largely depends on the employees who operate them. For instance, when banks implement new technologies or performance monitoring systems without fostering adequate social support such as communication, peer assistance, and managerial guidance employees may experience stress, reduced morale, and lower productivity (Mumford, 2020). Thus, STS theory provides a framework for understanding how technical efficiency and social support mechanisms jointly influence employee performance in dynamic banking environments.

The theory is crucial in explaining how social support contributes to employee performance by enhancing the social subsystem of the organization. When commercial banks establish supportive work environments characterized by open communication, teamwork, mentoring, and recognition they create conditions that align the social and technical aspects of work. This integration promotes higher job satisfaction, innovation, and commitment, which are essential for superior performance outcomes (Cherns, 2019). Applying the Socio-Technical System Theory, the study highlights that employee performance in commercial banks can be strengthened when social support systems are effectively integrated with technical processes such as digital service delivery, workflow automation, and performance appraisal mechanisms. Therefore, the theory underscores the importance of balancing human and technical factors to achieve sustainable organizational effectiveness in Kenya's banking sector.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Yıldırım and Darıcan (2024) evaluated the influence of perceived social support on WLB and engagement of bank employees in Istanbul, Turkey. The relationships were analyzed using SEM and the outcome showed that a higher degree of perceived social support predicts reduced WLB and increased workplace engagement. On the other hand, in Indonesia, Oguegbe, Iloke, Ezisi and Ofoma (2021) found that social support improves employees' work life balance. Multiple Linear Regression were deployed in analysis and findings were that jointly, social support and locus of control improve WLB and stimulate engagement among employees.

The researchers Mmakwe and Ukoha (2018) also found a positive association between supervisory support and workplace engagement within banks. The study collected data from five banks and correlation coefficients used in analysis. Findings were that there is a strong effect of WLB, administrative and colleague support, and the indicators of employee performance. Recommendations were for firms to formulate strategies to reduce employees' dissatisfaction and burnout.

Salari Esker, Bahrololoum and Biglari (2020) evaluated the influence of social support and work-family conflict, on the productivity of professionals at youth departments in Iran, collecting data from 157 employees in the department. Data analysis involved Pearson correlation, Sobel test equation and path analysis and results were that while family conflict negatively impacts employees' performance, social support improves employee performance and also helps alleviate the harm caused by family conflict.

Mwaisaka, Ouma, and K'Aol (2019) employed a descriptive correlational research design in assessment of the influence of supportive and directive leadership on employees satisfaction in Kenyan banks. Multiple linear regression models were used in analysis and findings were that directive and supportive leadership approaches improve employees' job satisfaction and engagement. Moreover, environmental contingency factors moderated the relationship between path-goal leadership approaches and job satisfaction.

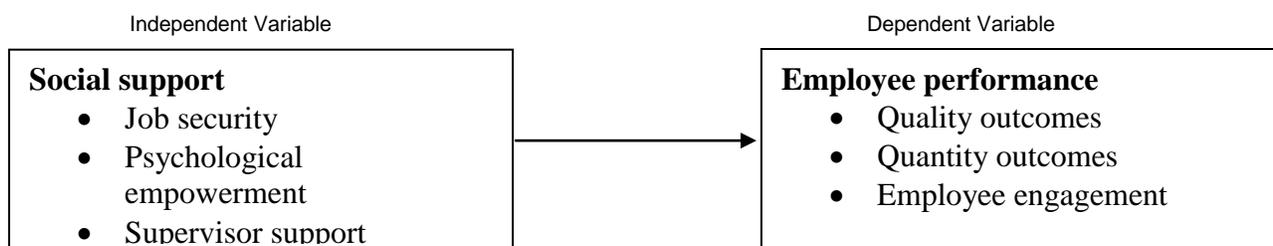


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The study applied a descriptive research design since it is appropriate where a correlation between variables is desired. The study was grounded on the pragmatic viewpoint, which allows for the integration of both objective and subjective perspectives in addressing the research problem. The target population consisted of 1,317 employees working with KCB in the Nairobi region as of 31st December 2022. These employees comprised 26 policy makers in Job Group H and G, 295 staff in senior management (Job Group E and D), 412 middle management staff (Job Group C and B), and 648 lower management and clerical staff (Job Group A). The research employed stratified proportionate random sampling procedures, where the bank's staff cadres served as the strata to ensure representation of all levels. The number of respondents in each cadre was determined using Slovin's (1960) formula, resulting in a sample size of 307 employees.

Data was collected using structured questionnaires designed on a five-point Likert scale to capture respondents' perceptions and attitudes in a standardized format. The 'drop and pick' method was used during data collection, where questionnaires were delivered to respondents, who were given approximately one week to complete them before being collected. A pilot test was conducted among staff at KCB branches in Thika, Kiambu, and Machakos to test the reliability and validity of the research instruments, as these branches were not part of the main study. The study conducted content validity and face validity. To establish content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts in the field of study. These experts assessed whether the items adequately cover the constructs being measured. Their feedback helped refine the questionnaire to ensure it comprehensively addresses the research objectives. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha at 0.7 threshold. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.7 or higher was considered acceptable, indicating that the items consistently measure the same construct.

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics such as mean, range, variance, standard deviation, percentages, and frequency distributions were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, including F-statistic and ANOVA, were employed to test hypotheses and determine relationships between the study variables. The analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Approval was obtained from the graduate school, the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), and KCB's Human Resource Department before data collection commenced. This formal procedure ensured credibility, reduced respondent anxiety, and enhanced the authenticity of the responses.

RESULTS

Response Rate

The sample size for the study was 307 participants sourced from employees in policy making position, senior management, middle management and union employees within the Kenya Commercial Bank. The research was conducted between March to May 2025 and received 264 responses translating to 86% response rate. The 14% of the non-participants were unable to return their physical/google forms within the provide time frame thus were excluded in the final research respondents.

Profile of Respondents

The respondents were asked to identify their employment status, management level and years of employment and summary of the analysis is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Employment status	Permanent with pension benefits	250	94.7
	Time bound contract	14	5.3
	Total	264	100.0
Management Level	Senior Management	15	5.7
	Middle Level Management	99	37.5
	Lower Management	150	56.8
	Total	264	100.0
Years of employment	Below 5 years	41	15.5
	6 -10 years	45	17.0
	11 - 15 years	118	44.7
	15+ years	60	22.7
	Total	264	100.0

The analysis demonstrated that 95% of respondents were permanent and pensionable employees in the firm with 5% being under time-bound contracts. The results show that study responses were obtained from a diverse team within the institution thus can be relied on in answering the research question. Results show that 57% were lower management employees, 38% middle level management and 6% senior level managers indicating that main management levels were presented in providing responses to the study. The study further revealed that a majority of the respondents (45%) have worked for 11-15 years, 23% for 15 years and above,

16% for below 5 years which was indicative of the different experience levels among the employees in the institution thus they hold relevant information that was key to the study.

Descriptive Statistics

Social Support

The analysis further showed the summary of the results on the social support of employees provided by the financial institution. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Analysis of Social Support

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am not worried of my job security	264	3.0038	1.17806
I sense strong support from my colleagues	264	3.7500	.90520
Support from my Supervisor is always guaranteed	264	3.7045	.98459
The bank offers family-oriented resources	264	3.1212	.99833
I am confident I will get help whenever I need it.	264	3.4053	.98589
My supervisors are willing to eliminate any inefficiencies in the work system	264	3.4848	.88918
Same-career couples are allowed to work in the same workplace	264	2.0795	1.40792
Average		3.2213	1.0498

The study further showed to a large extent (mean = 3.750) that sense strong support from the colleagues. The results revealed that support from supervisor is always guaranteed (mean = 3.7045). The respondents noted to a moderate extent (mean = 3.484) the supervisors are willing to eliminate any inefficiencies in the work system. Results also show that to a low extent (mean = 2.079) same-career couples are allowed to work in the same workplace within the institution. A high overall mean score was recorded, showing that employees recognize the role of supportive colleagues, managers, and systems in enhancing their work output and emotional wellbeing. Karatepe, Ozturk, and Kim (2019) confirmed this view finding that family support activates employee engagement and boosts in-role and extra-role performance. Yıldırım and Darıcan (2024) also found that higher perceived social support increases engagement, which supports the positive perceptions held by KCB employees in the current study. Mmakwe and Ukoha (2018) also discovered that administrative and colleague support are vital components of workplace engagement and performance matching the current findings that employees are aware of and value these forms of support. Similarly, Salari Esker et al.

(2020) found that social support improves productivity, even in the presence of work-family conflict, reinforcing the strong employee perceptions of social support

Employee Performance

The study focused on the performance of the employees within the banking institution and the results are summarized as shown in the Table 3.

Table 3 Employee Performance

	N	Mean	Std Dev.
Work life balance practices have reduced incidences of employees working slowly	264	3.2045	1.27413
More employees are reporting to work on time	264	3.8030	.97839
The company has realized less absenteeism among employees	264	3.6591	.96580
There has been a significant reduction in theft cases within the organisation	264	3.5227	.88042
Employees are reporting reduced mental strain owing to mental health programs	264	3.0871	1.28607
Employees are delivering higher quantity of work output	264	3.6061	.96129
Employees are more motivated at work	264	3.4735	.93884
Our employees are producing higher work output as compared to competitors	264	3.6098	.86945
Work life balance practices have increased employees' job safety	264	3.4205	1.03242
The working conditions have improved significantly since the introduction of work life balance practices	264	3.5606	1.08398
Employees report increased autonomy at work	264	3.4394	.90000
Employees are receiving higher commensurate pay	264	2.5682	1.08704
Employees are reporting fruitful relationship with co-workers	264	3.5000	1.02812
Average		3.41957	1.0219

To a great extent (mean = 3.803) respondents noted that more employees are reporting to work on time; further a mean of 3.659 confirmed that the company has realized less absenteeism among employees. Findings reveal to a great extent the working conditions have improved significantly since the introduction of work life balance practices (mean = 3.5606). Participants further to a moderate extent (mean = 3.2045) found out that work life balance practices have reduced incidences of employees working slowly. Respondent also moderately acknowledged (mean = 2.568) the employees are receiving higher commensurate pay.

Inferential Statistics

Under inferential statistics the study conducted both correlation and regression analysis. The findings are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4 Correlation Test

		Employee Performance
Social Support	Pearson Correlation	.646**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	264

The study revealed a strong and positive statistically significant relationship between social support and employee performance among commercial banks staff in the Nairobi region ($r = 0.646$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that increased social support within the workplace through teamwork, mentorship, and management encouragement significantly enhances employees' motivation, job satisfaction, and overall performance. These findings align with those of Njoroge and Wambugu (2022), who emphasized that supportive workplace environments foster collaboration, reduce stress, and promote higher levels of productivity and commitment among employees.

Table 5 Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.071	.230		.307	.759
	Social Support	.605	.062	.515	9.780	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

From the findings, social support exhibited a strong positive effect on employee performance, with an unstandardized coefficient of $\beta = 0.605$ and a standardized beta of 0.515. The highly significant p-value (0.000) indicated that social support significantly influences employee performance, likely by fostering collaboration, enhancing motivation, and reducing workplace stress through supportive interactions among colleagues and supervisors. From the findings, the following regression model was derived from the coefficients:

$$Y = 0.071 + 0.605X_1$$

Where: Y = Employee Performance, X_1 = Social Support

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that social support had a statistically significant effect on employee performance among staff of commercial banks in the Nairobi region. Enhanced social support within the workplace through teamwork, mentorship, and management encouragement was found to strengthen employee motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity. This form of support fosters a positive work environment that promotes collaboration and reduces job-related stress, leading to improved individual and organizational outcomes. Moreover, the findings confirm that social support is a key driver of employee performance in commercial banks. Mutheu (2023) affirms these results by noting that WLB is necessary to create a high-performance culture that prioritizes growth, customer service, productivity and quality. By cultivating a supportive organizational culture where employees feel valued and connected, banks can enhance commitment, reduce turnover, and achieve superior performance levels. These results align with Wambua (2021), who noted that strong social support systems in the workplace significantly boost morale, engagement, and overall job effectiveness among employees in the banking sector.

The findings therefore support the efforts of the commercial banks in providing social support to their employees where there is likely increase in job satisfaction, a culture of collaboration and teamwork, increased productivity experienced through effective handling of customers and also efficient processes and systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings, the study recommended that the management of commercial bank should strengthen workplace social support systems by fostering teamwork, mentorship, and open communication channels across all departments. This can be achieved by instituting formal mentorship programs, regular team-building activities, and peer-support initiatives that enhance interpersonal relationships among employees. In addition, the bank should establish a policy framework that encourages managers to provide continuous emotional and professional support to their subordinates through regular feedback, recognition, and counseling sessions. Standardized procedures for monitoring employee well-being and support effectiveness should also be implemented to ensure sustained improvement in employee morale, job satisfaction, and overall performance. In conclusion, other financial institutions should borrow these practices to enhance their employee engagement for better performance.

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