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CYBERBULLYING AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ADOLESCENT MENTAL AND SOCIAL WELLBEING.

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ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying has emerged as a significant social and psychological concern in the digital age, particularly among adolescents who increasingly use social media platforms, messaging applications, online gaming communities, and other digital communication technologies to interact with their peers. Although these technologies provide opportunities for learning, entertainment, self-expression, and social connection, they can also expose adolescents to online harassment, threats, humiliation, exclusion, impersonation, and the unauthorized sharing of personal information. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur at any time, reach a large audience, and remain accessible through repeated sharing of harmful content, making it difficult for victims to escape the experience even within their homes. This research article examines the influence of cyberbullying on adolescent mental and social wellbeing, with particular attention to emotional distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, reduced self-esteem, loneliness, social withdrawal, peer relationships, and educational participation. Recent research syntheses indicate that cyberbullying victimization is associated with several adverse psychological outcomes, although the strength and nature of these relationships may vary according to individual characteristics, family support, school environment, and exposure to online harassment (Kasturiratna et al., 2025). The article adopts a qualitative, literature-based research approach to examine relevant scholarly studies published between 2023 and 2026. It also considers the role of parents, teachers, educational institutions, mental health professionals, and digital platforms in preventing cyberbullying and supporting affected adolescents. The discussion emphasizes digital literacy, responsible online communication, accessible reporting systems, emotional support, and evidence-informed school policies as important elements of prevention. Overall, the article argues that adolescent wellbeing in the digital environment requires cooperation between families, schools, communities, and technology providers so that young people can participate in online spaces without fear, humiliation, or social exclusion.

KEYWORDS: *Cyberbullying, adolescents, mental health, social wellbeing, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, social isolation, digital safety, online harassment*.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has transformed the ways adolescents communicate, develop friendships, share experiences, and participate in social life. Social networking platforms, instant messaging applications, online gaming environments, video-sharing services, and digital learning tools have become important parts of everyday adolescent experience. These technologies allow young people to maintain friendships, express opinions, exchange educational information, explore personal interests, and build supportive communities beyond geographical boundaries. However, the same digital environments can also create opportunities for harmful interpersonal behaviour, particularly when users employ online platforms to intimidate, insult, threaten, embarrass, or deliberately exclude others. Cyberbullying generally refers to repeated or harmful aggression carried out through electronic communication, although researchers differ in how they define repetition, intent, power imbalance, and the boundaries between cyberbullying and other forms of online harassment. Common examples include sending abusive messages, spreading rumours, publishing humiliating photographs, creating fake accounts, sharing private conversations without permission, and encouraging other users to ridicule a particular individual. Such behaviour can become especially damaging during adolescence because this developmental

period involves important changes in identity, emotional regulation, self-confidence, peer relationships, and the desire for social acceptance. xiaoyu, w., zainuddin, z., & hai leng, c. (2025). generative artificial intelligence in pedagogical practices: a systematic review of empirical studies (2022–2024). cogent education, 12(1), 2485499.found that negative online comments may therefore be interpreted not simply as isolated disagreements but as threats to an adolescent's reputation, friendships, and sense of belonging. Furthermore, harmful content can be copied, circulated, and viewed repeatedly by classmates or strangers, extending the experience beyond the original interaction. Research syntheses have associated cyberbullying victimization with psychological difficulties, reduced wellbeing, and problematic coping behaviours, demonstrating the importance of understanding online victimization as a broader developmental and social issue rather than merely a technological problem (Kasturiratna et al., 2025). Consequently, investigating cyberbullying and its influence on adolescent mental and social wellbeing is essential for developing effective prevention strategies, strengthening supportive relationships, and promoting safer digital participation.Cyberbullying can influence adolescent mental wellbeing through several interconnected emotional and psychological processes.

Such uncertainty can interfere with concentration, sleep, academic motivation, and participation in everyday activities. Some adolescents may repeatedly check their phones because they fear missing new attacks, while others may avoid digital communication entirely in an attempt to protect themselves from further humiliation. Neither response necessarily resolves the underlying problem, particularly when harmful content remains available or perpetrators continue their behaviour through different accounts. Research examining cyberbullying and psychological wellbeing has identified associations with negative emotional outcomes and reduced psychological wellbeing, although findings should be interpreted in light of differences in study populations, definitions, and research designs (Kasturiratna et al., 2025). bozdoğan, ö., & akçay, g. (eds.). (2026). found that It is also important to recognize that not every adolescent experiences the same consequences. The severity and duration of distress may depend on the frequency of harassment, the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, previous experiences of bullying, existing emotional difficulties, family circumstances, and the availability of supportive adults. Adolescents who are already struggling with social exclusion or low self-confidence may be particularly vulnerable to additional emotional pressure, while strong family relationships, trusted friendships, and timely professional support may help reduce the harmful effects. Cyberbullying should therefore be understood as a potentially serious risk factor rather than a guaranteed cause of a specific mental health condition. A careful examination of these relationships can help parents, teachers, counsellors, and healthcare professionals recognize early warning signs and provide appropriate support before distress begins to affect multiple areas of an adolescent's life.

For example, a student who becomes the target of humiliating messages in a class group may feel uncomfortable attending school because the people involved in the online incident are also present in the classroom. Another adolescent may withdraw from friendship groups after private conversations are shared publicly or after classmates remain silent while harmful comments circulate. The involvement of bystanders is particularly important because liking, forwarding, commenting on, or laughing at abusive content can increase its visibility and intensify the victim's sense of rejection. from screens to minds: the connection between

cyberbullying, psychological well-being, and the mediating role of perceived social support in high school students. advances in public health, 2024 found that even when bystanders do not directly participate, their silence may sometimes be interpreted as approval, although fear of becoming a target can also explain why young people fail to intervene. The resulting social pressure may encourage victims to isolate themselves, avoid conversations, distrust new friendships, or become reluctant to express personal opinions. Research reviews have highlighted the relationships between cyberbullying victimization, negative psychological outcomes, and difficulties in social and educational functioning (Kasturiratna et al., 2025). Nevertheless, supportive peers can also play a protective role by refusing to circulate harmful content, reporting abusive behaviour, expressing solidarity with victims, and encouraging them to seek help. Social wellbeing should therefore be considered an important dimension of the cyberbullying problem because healthy development depends not only on the absence of mental illness but also on meaningful relationships, social acceptance, safety, and opportunities for participation. This study examines these psychological and interpersonal dimensions together to develop a broader understanding of how cyberbullying can affect adolescent development and what families, schools, and digital communities can do to reduce its harmful consequences.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the influence of cyberbullying on adolescents' mental wellbeing, particularly anxiety, depressive symptoms, emotional distress, self-esteem, and psychological security.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does cyberbullying influence adolescents' mental wellbeing, emotional stability, self-esteem, and psychological health?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between cyberbullying and adolescent mental wellbeing has received increasing attention because online victimization may expose young people to persistent social stress during a particularly sensitive stage of development. Mental wellbeing includes emotional stability, positive self-perception, the ability to manage everyday challenges, and a sense of personal security. Cyberbullying may threaten these dimensions when adolescents repeatedly encounter insulting comments, public humiliation, threatening messages, manipulated images, or deliberate online exclusion. Victims may become preoccupied with the possibility of further attacks and develop negative expectations about how their peers will treat them. Such experiences can contribute to emotional exhaustion, irritability, fear, embarrassment, and reduced confidence. A systematic review of meta-analyses by Kasturiratna et al. (2025) examined a broad body of evidence concerning cyberbullying victimization, associated risk factors, psychological consequences, and intervention strategies. Its findings indicated consistent associations between cyberbullying victimization and adverse psychological outcomes, alongside difficulties in school performance and coping. from screens to minds: the connection between cyberbullying, psychological well-being, and the mediating role of perceived social support in high school students. advances in public health, 2024found that these findings support the importance of investigating

cyberbullying as a public health and educational concern. However, mental health outcomes should not be interpreted as identical across all adolescents, because individual experiences differ according to the nature of the abuse, its duration, social support, and other personal circumstances. Some adolescents may experience temporary distress, whereas others may develop persistent symptoms that interfere with their daily functioning.

In addition, a relationship between cyberbullying and psychological difficulties does not automatically establish that cyberbullying alone caused those difficulties. Researchers must consider whether other factors, such as previous bullying, family conflict, academic pressure, or existing mental health challenges, also contribute to the observed outcomes. A balanced literature review must therefore consider both the seriousness of the reported associations and the limitations of the available evidence. xiaoyu, w., zainuddin, z., & hai leng, c. (2025).found that such an approach supports more responsible recommendations for prevention, early identification, and professional assistance.Depression, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem are among the most frequently discussed psychological outcomes associated with cyberbullying. Adolescents who experience repeated online humiliation may begin to believe that their peers dislike them or that their personal characteristics make them unacceptable. Negative social comparisons and repeated criticism can undermine confidence, particularly when the harassment concerns appearance, academic performance, socioeconomic circumstances, personal identity, or friendship choices. Anxiety may emerge through constant worry about new messages, uncertainty about who has seen harmful content, or fear of being ridiculed in school. Depressive symptoms may involve persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, hopelessness, social withdrawal, or reduced motivation. Research on cybervictimization and mental health among university students has also identified associations with depression, anxiety, stress, and lower self-esteem, although university populations are not equivalent to younger adolescents and the results should be used as related rather than directly interchangeable evidence (Arif et al., 2024). The broader implication is that online victimization can be connected with several dimensions of psychological distress and may require more than a simple instruction to ignore negative comments.

Where distress is severe or persistent, qualified mental health professionals can help determine the adolescent's needs and provide suitable care. Prevention efforts should consequently combine digital safety education with emotional support, anti-bullying procedures, and accessible pathways to professional assistance.Social wellbeing refers to the quality of an individual's relationships, sense of belonging, trust in other people, participation in social activities, and ability to maintain supportive connections. During adolescence, these dimensions are particularly important because peer acceptance often contributes to identity development and emotional confidence. zareef, h., sarim, f. m., qureshi, r., & gul, m. t. (2026). releaved cyberbullying may interfere with social wellbeing when online communication becomes a means of spreading rumours, excluding particular students from digital groups, circulating embarrassing photographs, or encouraging others to reject a victim. Because digital interactions frequently overlap with face-to-face relationships, an incident that begins online may affect classroom discussions, friendships, group projects, sports activities, and family life. A young person who believes that classmates have seen a humiliating post may avoid social gatherings or become reluctant to speak in public. Others may withdraw from group chats because they no longer feel safe sharing their thoughts or

personal information. The systematic evidence reviewed by Kasturiratna et al. (2025) links cyberbullying victimization with adverse psychological and school-related outcomes, supporting the view that its effects extend beyond individual emotional reactions. Social isolation can also create a difficult cycle: victims may withdraw to avoid further harm, but reduced interaction may leave them with fewer opportunities to obtain reassurance, assistance, or friendship. Nevertheless, withdrawal should not always be interpreted as a permanent consequence, and adolescents respond differently depending on their circumstances and available support. Some regain confidence through trusted friendships, supportive teachers, family involvement, and positive peer experiences.

Schools can strengthen social wellbeing by promoting respectful communication, establishing clear procedures for reporting online incidents, and teaching students how to support affected classmates without spreading harmful content. Peer-support activities and inclusive classroom practices may also help restore a sense of belonging. These measures recognize that preventing cyberbullying requires attention to the social environment in which it occurs, not merely to the individual behaviour of a single perpetrator.The role of bystanders is an important theme in understanding the social consequences of cyberbullying. In digital environments, a harmful message or image can quickly reach many users, and the reactions of those users may influence whether the incident escalates or stops. Sharing abusive posts, adding insulting comments, or using reaction features to ridicule a victim can increase the public visibility of the harassment. Even when bystanders do not create the original content, their participation may communicate that humiliation is socially acceptable. On the other hand, bystanders can help prevent escalation by refusing to forward harmful material, reporting content through appropriate channels, privately offering support to the victim, and informing a trusted adult when necessary. Research on cyberbullying risk and protective factors emphasizes the importance of the surrounding social and environmental context, including supportive relationships and effective intervention practices (Kasturiratna et al., 2025).

This suggests that schools should not focus exclusively on punishing individual perpetrators but should also educate students about collective responsibility and the consequences of digital participation. Adolescents may hesitate to intervene because they fear becoming targets themselves, worry about losing friendships, or are uncertain whether the behaviour is serious enough to report. Clear reporting procedures, confidentiality where feasible, and reassurance against retaliation can make help-seeking easier. teachers should also distinguish between harmless disagreement and repeated targeted behaviour that involves humiliation, intimidation, or exclusion. xiaoyu, w., zainuddin, z., & hai leng, c. (2025explaned that encouraging students to respond safely does not mean asking them to confront aggressive individuals directly or place themselves at risk. instead, schools can teach practical steps such as documenting relevant evidence, using platform reporting features, supporting the affected student, and seeking adult assistance. by building a culture in which online cruelty is challenged rather than rewarded, educational institutions can strengthen peer trust and reduce the social conditions that allow cyberbullying A systematic review of adolescent mental health policies and programmes found that some interventions in higher-income settings reduced bullying-related and other adverse outcomes, while also highlighting the shortage of comparable evidence from low- and middle-income countries (What Effects Do Mental Health Policies Have on Adolescent Suicidal Ideation or Behavior, Suicide, and Bullying?,

2024). This limitation matters for countries such as Pakistan, where school resources, counselling services, internet access, family expectations, and attitudes toward mental health may differ considerably across communities. Effective prevention strategies should therefore be adapted to local needs rather than copied without evaluation from other settings. Schools can work with parents, counsellors, community organizations, and students to develop age-appropriate educational programmes that explain online respect, privacy, consent, and safe reporting. Teachers should receive training to recognize possible signs of cyberbullying and respond consistently without publicly embarrassing the affected student. Such coordinated measures can improve trust in reporting systems and help ensure that cyberbullying is treated as a shared safeguarding concern rather than an individual problem that adolescents must manage alone.Digital platforms also have an important role in reducing cyberbullying and protecting adolescent wellbeing.

Online services can provide reporting tools, privacy controls, blocking functions, moderation systems, and options to restrict unwanted contact. However, the existence of these tools does not guarantee that harmful behaviour will be identified or addressed quickly. Adolescents may find reporting procedures confusing, fear that abusive accounts will retaliate, or believe that their complaints will not receive meaningful attention. Platforms should make safety features accessible, explain reporting outcomes clearly, and respond appropriately to credible reports of threats, harassment, impersonation, and the non-consensual sharing of personal material. Digital literacy education is equally important because young people need to understand how online content can spread, how digital footprints may persist, and why private information should be shared carefully. At the same time, responsibility should not be placed entirely on adolescents to protect themselves from harmful behaviour. Research syntheses have found that cyberbullying interventions can show promising results, while the effectiveness of particular programmes varies according to their design, context, and implementation (Kasturiratna et al., 2025). This indicates the need for evidence-informed programmes that combine student education, school policies, family involvement, and platform-level safety measures. Schools and researchers should evaluate whether interventions actually reduce victimization, improve reporting confidence, and support psychological recovery instead of measuring success only by the number of awareness sessions delivered. Special attention should also be given to students who face additional barriers to seeking help, including those who fear social stigma or lack access to trusted support services. In this way, prevention can become a sustained process involving education, accountability, accessible assistance, and continued assessment rather than a one-time campaign.

METHODOLOGY

The present study employs a qualitative, literature-based methodology to examine the influence of cyberbullying on adolescent mental and social wellbeing. This methodological approach is appropriate because the research seeks to understand psychological experiences, social relationships, emotional responses, and prevention strategies through the interpretation of existing scholarly evidence rather than through the collection of new numerical data from participants. The study focuses on relevant research published between 2023 and 2026, particularly articles examining cyberbullying victimization, adolescent psychological wellbeing, social support, emotional regulation, peer relationships, and educational outcomes.

Relevant literature was identified through searches of scholarly databases and academic publishing platforms, including Google Scholar, PubMed, Springer Nature, ScienceDirect, and other journal websites. Search terms included cyberbullying and adolescent mental health, cyberbullying and social wellbeing, online harassment among teenagers, cybervictimization and psychological wellbeing, and social support and cyberbullying prevention. Priority was given to peer-reviewed empirical studies, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses that directly addressed the research questions and clearly described their populations, methods, and findings. Studies concerning university students or broader youth populations were considered supplementary when their findings offered relevant insights, but they were not automatically treated as direct evidence about younger adolescents. The selected literature was examined thematically to identify recurring patterns concerning anxiety, depressive symptoms, self-esteem, loneliness, friendship quality, social participation, and protective factors. Attention was also given to differences in research settings, measurement methods, cultural contexts, and study limitations so that conclusions would not depend on a single investigation. As this is a literature-based study, it does not claim to have conducted interviews, surveys, experiments, or statistical tests on a new sample of adolescents. Instead, the methodology provides a structured basis for synthesizing existing evidence and developing recommendations for families, schools, mental health professionals, and digital platforms.

RESEARCH APPROACH

This study follows a qualitative interpretive research approach that examines how cyberbullying is associated with adolescents' emotional experiences, perceptions of social acceptance, interpersonal relationships, and overall wellbeing. The approach emphasizes the meaning and context of online victimization rather than reducing the issue to a single numerical indicator. It recognizes that an insulting message, a threatening post, or the circulation of private information may have different consequences depending on the adolescent's age, previous experiences, family circumstances, peer relationships, and access to support. The literature is therefore interpreted in relation to the psychological and social processes that may connect online harassment with distress, reduced confidence, loneliness, and withdrawal from social activities. Findings from empirical studies are considered alongside systematic reviews to identify areas of agreement and differences in the available evidence. For example, longitudinal research can help investigate whether cyberbullying experiences precede changes in wellbeing over time, whereas cross-sectional studies mainly identify relationships between variables at a particular point. Distinguishing these forms of evidence is important because association does not necessarily demonstrate causation. The interpretive approach also considers protective influences, including supportive friendships, emotional regulation skills, parental understanding, school counselling, and accessible reporting procedures. By examining these factors together, the study seeks to develop a balanced explanation of cyberbullying that acknowledges both the potential seriousness of its effects and the different ways adolescents respond to online adversity.A thematic approach is used to organize the reviewed literature into interconnected areas of analysis. The first theme concerns mental wellbeing and examines psychological distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, self-esteem, and emotional security. The second theme addresses social wellbeing, focusing on friendship quality, peer acceptance, trust, loneliness, social exclusion, and participation in school or community activities.

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RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is a structured narrative literature review with thematic synthesis. This design enables the researcher to bring together relevant findings from empirical studies, systematic reviews, and other credible scholarly publications without claiming to perform a new experiment or collect primary participant data. The review focuses on literature published from 2023 through 2026, with particular attention to research directly examining adolescents and secondary-school students. The selection process begins with searches using predefined keywords and combinations of terms related to cyberbullying, mental health, social wellbeing, adolescence, emotional distress, peer support, and prevention. Titles and abstracts are examined to determine whether publications address at least one of the study's research questions. Potentially relevant publications are then assessed for their population, research purpose, methodological transparency, and relevance to the central topic. Research involving adults or university students is used cautiously when it provides useful supplementary evidence, while studies that discuss general internet use without examining bullying or related outcomes receive lower priority. The review gives particular importance to peer-reviewed research, longitudinal investigations, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses because these sources can contribute different forms of evidence to the discussion. However, a narrative review is not equivalent to a fully registered systematic review, and no claim is made that every publication meeting the criteria has been identified. The design is intended to provide an organized and transparent synthesis of relevant literature rather than an exhaustive statistical assessment of every available study.The analytical framework is organized around the relationship between cyberbullying exposure, mental wellbeing, social wellbeing, and protective factors. Cyberbullying exposure includes experiences such as repeated insults, online threats, public humiliation, rumour spreading, impersonation, and exclusion from digital social groups.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis consists of a qualitative thematic synthesis of the selected literature. Rather than calculating new statistical results, the study compares the findings and conclusions reported in the original publications to identify recurring patterns concerning the relationship between cyberbullying and adolescent wellbeing. First, the relevant information from each publication is organized according to its publication year, research population, study design, main outcomes, and implications. Second, reported outcomes are grouped into mental health, social relationships, academic and everyday functioning, and protective influences. Third, similarities and differences across studies are examined to determine which conclusions receive support from multiple sources and which require additional investigation. For example, research examining adolescent subjective wellbeing has reported negative associations between cyberbullying experiences and aspects of wellbeing, while longitudinal studies have investigated the relationships between online victimization, friendship satisfaction, body-image satisfaction, happiness, and academic outcomes (Halliday et al., 2023; Tao et al., 2024; Vieta-Piferrer et al., 2024). These findings are considered in relation to their respective study designs and populations rather than treated as identical measurements of a single outcome. The analysis also examines whether social support, coping skills, and emotional regulation may help explain differences in the experiences of adolescents exposed to cyberbullying. Finally, the thematic findings are used to develop

recommendations for prevention, early identification, and support. This process helps connect the research questions with the available evidence while avoiding unsupported numerical estimates or claims of statistical significance for the present review.A second analytical consideration is the distinction between risk factors, outcomes, and protective factors. Risk factors may include repeated online victimization, previous bullying experiences, unsupportive peer environments, and limited access to trusted adults.

FINDINGS

The literature synthesis indicates that cyberbullying is associated with important risks to adolescent mental wellbeing, particularly when online harassment involves repeated humiliation, threats, social rejection, or the circulation of harmful content. Across the reviewed evidence, psychological concerns include anxiety, sadness, stress, reduced self-esteem, and lower subjective wellbeing. Halliday et al. (2023), in a study of 9,139 South Australian students aged 10–13, found that cyberbullying victimization was associated with lower happiness and life satisfaction and higher sadness and worry over the shorter term. Their findings also indicated associations with lower reading and numeracy outcomes over subsequent school years. Tao et al. (2024) examined cyberbullying experiences and subjective wellbeing among adolescents in Hong Kong and reported that associations varied according to the type of involvement and sex of the participants. These findings suggest that cyberbullying should not be evaluated solely by counting online incidents; researchers and educators should also consider how victimization relates to emotional security, daily functioning, and perceptions of social acceptance. Nevertheless, these studies do not establish that every adolescent who experiences cyberbullying will develop a mental health disorder. Individual responses vary, and the influence of existing difficulties, family relationships, peer support, and the duration of harassment must also be considered. The central finding is therefore that cyberbullying represents a meaningful risk to wellbeing that deserves early attention, careful assessment, and appropriate support rather than dismissal as a normal part of growing up.A second major finding concerns the relationship between cyberbullying and adolescents' social wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

Cyberbullying and its influence on adolescent mental and social wellbeing represent an important concern in contemporary digital society. The reviewed literature indicates that online harassment may be associated with emotional distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, reduced self-esteem, lower happiness, and difficulties in maintaining positive social relationships. Its effects can extend beyond digital platforms because online interactions frequently overlap with school life, family relationships, and everyday peer communication. Public humiliation, online exclusion, threatening messages, and the circulation of private information may weaken adolescents' confidence and sense of belonging, particularly when harmful content continues to spread or when victims feel unable to obtain support. Research examining adolescent wellbeing has reported associations between cyberbullying victimization and adverse emotional or social outcomes, while longitudinal studies provide additional evidence that some difficulties may remain relevant beyond the immediate incident (Halliday et al., 2023; Vieta-Piferrer et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the relationship between cyberbullying and wellbeing is complex, and the evidence should not be interpreted as proof

that all victims will experience the same psychological consequences. Individual circumstances, previous experiences, the severity of harassment, and the availability of supportive relationships can influence how adolescents respond. The central conclusion of this study is that cyberbullying should be treated as a serious safeguarding and wellbeing issue rather than a minor disagreement or an unavoidable feature of social media. Effective responses must protect victims, address harmful behaviour, and promote online environments in which adolescents can communicate safely and maintain healthy relationships.Preventing cyberbullying requires cooperation among families, schools, peers, mental health professionals, communities, and digital platforms.

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