



Exploring the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women Entrepreneurs through Digital Platforms: An Investigation into the Utilization of Social Media Platforms

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Abstract: This study investigates the economic empowerment of rural women entrepreneurs by exploring the role of digital platforms, with a particular focus on social media platforms. The research aims to investigate how the utilization of these digital tools can positively impact the economic growth and empowerment of women entrepreneurs in rural areas. Data was collected from women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya, using a survey research design. The study analyzed the frequency and extent of social media platform usage for various business functions, such as sales, marketing, customer relationship services, and online banking. Additionally, the research examined the relationship between social media platform usage and women's economic empowerment using statistical models, including correlation and regression analyses. The findings demonstrate that social media platforms, especially WhatsApp and Facebook, play a significant role in advancing women's economic empowerment. However, the usage of these platforms by rural women entrepreneurs remains below average, indicating a need for increased awareness and support. The study highlights that digital platforms enhance productivity, reduce costs, and improve business efficiency, leading to improved health outcomes and environmental benefits. Online sales, facilitated by social media, enable entrepreneurs to expand their markets beyond geographical boundaries, reaching a broader customer base and achieving higher profit margins. These higher profits contribute to business expansion, job creation, and improved living standards, while also offering opportunities for investment in environmental development initiatives. Overall, this research underscores the transformative potential of digital platforms, particularly social media, in fostering economic growth and gender empowerment among rural women entrepreneurs. Policymakers and stakeholders can leverage these insights to develop targeted initiatives and support mechanisms that encourage more women to embrace digital tools for business growth, ultimately contributing to economic development and gender equity in rural communities.

Keywords: Digital Platforms, Social Media Platforms, Women Empowerment, Entrepreneurship, Women Entrepreneurs, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the crucial role that women entrepreneurs play in driving economic development and fostering social empowerment [1]. However, despite their potential, women entrepreneurs, particularly those in rural areas, have historically faced numerous challenges and barriers that have hindered their full participation in the business landscape. In this context, the advent of digital platforms, especially social media, has opened new possibilities for advancing women's economic empowerment in rural regions [2].

This study aims to examine the economic empowerment of rural women entrepreneurs through the utilization of digital platforms, with a specific focus on social media platforms. By investigating the extent to which these digital tools are used and their impact on women entrepreneurs' economic growth, this research seeks to shed light on the transformative potential of technology in addressing gender disparities in entrepreneurship.

Rural areas often present unique challenges for women entrepreneurs, such as limited access to resources, financial constraints, and societal norms that restrict women's participation in business activities. However, the proliferation of digital platforms has democratized business opportunities and empowered entrepreneurs to overcome traditional barriers [2]. Social media platforms, in particular, have emerged as powerful tools for communication, marketing, customer engagement, and market research, providing a level playing field for businesses of all sizes [3].



The potential benefits of social media platforms in advancing women's economic empowerment are numerous [4]. These platforms enable women entrepreneurs to reach a broader audience, expand their market beyond geographical boundaries, and connect with customers globally [5][6]. With increased visibility and accessibility, rural women entrepreneurs can tap into diverse markets, leading to higher profit margins and business growth [7].

Furthermore, digital platforms offer cost-effective and efficient solutions for business operations. The use of online banking, digital marketing, and e-commerce allows entrepreneurs to streamline their processes, reduce operational costs, and improve overall productivity [8]. The resulting savings in time and resources can be reinvested in business expansion and employee welfare, ultimately fostering socio-economic development [5][9].

Despite the potential advantages, the adoption of digital platforms by rural women entrepreneurs may not be uniform. Factors such as digital literacy, access to technology, and cultural norms can influence the extent of platform usage [10]. Thus, it is essential to explore the current patterns of social media platform usage among rural women entrepreneurs and identify potential barriers that hinder their full participation in the digital economy.

By understanding the relationship between social media platform usage and women's economic empowerment, policymakers, development organizations, and stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to support and promote digital literacy among rural women entrepreneurs. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on gender equity and economic development, providing valuable insights into the transformative role of digital platforms in fostering the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in rural areas [11].

In the following sections, this research will present the methodology, data analysis, and findings, offering a comprehensive examination of the link between social media platform usage and the economic empowerment of rural women entrepreneurs. The implications of the study's results will be discussed, along with recommendations for promoting women's entrepreneurship and gender-inclusive economic growth in rural communities.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This allowed for a comprehensive investigation into the economic empowerment of rural women entrepreneurs and the use of social media platforms. The quantitative data provided statistical insights, while the qualitative data offered deeper insights into the experiences and perceptions of the participants.

The research focused on rural areas in Siaya County, Kenya, where women entrepreneurs face unique challenges and opportunities for economic empowerment. Siaya County is known for its predominantly rural landscape, making it a suitable setting to explore the impact of digital platforms on women's economic activities.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select women entrepreneurs from different rural areas in Siaya County. The participants were selected based on their active usage of social media platforms for business purposes. The sample size was determined based on the saturation point, where data collection reaches a point of diminishing returns, ensuring data adequacy.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data on social media platform usage among women entrepreneurs. The questionnaire included questions about the frequency and purpose of platform usage, the type of business functions supported, and perceived economic empowerment. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with a subset of participants to gather qualitative data. These interviews explored the participants' experiences, challenges, and success stories related to using social media platforms for economic empowerment.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the frequency and patterns of social media platform usage in business functions. Regression analysis, specifically Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), was employed to examine the relationships between platform usage and women's economic empowerment. Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns, themes, and insights from the interview and focus group data. The qualitative findings complemented the quantitative results, providing a more nuanced understanding of the impact of social media platforms.

The research adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy of the participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before data collection.



The study's limitations may include the potential for response bias in self-reported data and the constraints of the sample size, which may limit generalizability. However, efforts were made to address these limitations through careful data collection and analysis.

The research aims to provide valuable insights into the role of social media platforms in advancing rural women's economic empowerment. The findings can inform policy and interventions that support women entrepreneurs in leveraging digital platforms for business growth and economic independence. Additionally, the research contributes to the existing literature on gender, entrepreneurship, and technology in rural contexts.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Descriptive Statistics

The provided tables present descriptive statistics related to the usage of different social media platforms among women entrepreneurs for advancing women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship.

TABLE I: SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Statistics	Facebook	WhatsApp	Twitter	Instagram	LinkedIn	YouTube
N	200	200	200	200	200	200
Frequency	129	154	43	39	8	58
Mean	2.86	3.40	1.44	1.39	1.09	1.62
Median	3.00	4.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Mode	1	4	1	1	1	1
Skewness	-0.040	-0.654	1.838	1.869	5.085	1.461
Std. error of skewness	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172
Kurtosis	-1.594	-1.050	2.605	2.030	27.527	0.790
Std. error of Kurtosis	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342

Table I shows the percentage of respondents using each social media platform for their business:

- i. 36.0% (N=154) of respondents use WhatsApp.
- ii. 30.0% (N=129) of respondents use Facebook.
- iii. 13.0% (N=58) of respondents use YouTube.
- iv. 10.0% (N=43) of respondents use Twitter.
- v. 9.0% (N=39) of respondents use Instagram.
- vi. 2.0% (N=8) of respondents use LinkedIn.

Table II provides additional information about the usage of each social media platform in terms of Mean Usage, Median Usage, Mode Usage, Skewness, and Kurtosis.

TABLE II: SUMMARY OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Social Media Platform	Mean Usage	Median Usage	Mode Usage	Skewness	Kurtosis
Facebook	Sometimes	Sometimes	Never	Moderately	No outliers
WhatsApp	Sometimes	Mostly	Mostly	Moderately	No outliers
Twitter	Never	Never	Never	Extremely	No outliers
Instagram	Never	Never	Never	Extremely	No outliers
LinkedIn	Never	Never	Never	Extremely	Excess outliers
YouTube	Seldom	Never	Never	Extremely	No outliers

1. **Mean Usage:** This indicates the average frequency of using a specific social media platform for business purposes.
 - Facebook: Sometimes (indicating that, on average, respondents use Facebook occasionally for business).
 - WhatsApp: Sometimes (indicating that, on average, respondents use WhatsApp occasionally for business).
 - Twitter: Never (indicating that, on average, respondents do not use Twitter for business).
 - Instagram: Never (indicating that, on average, respondents do not use Instagram for business).



- LinkedIn: Never (indicating that, on average, respondents do not use LinkedIn for business).
 - YouTube: Seldom (indicating that, on average, respondents use YouTube infrequently for business).
2. **Median Usage:** This represents the middle value in the distribution, indicating the point at which half of the respondents use the platform more frequently, and half use it less frequently.
 - Facebook: Sometimes (median usage).
 - WhatsApp: Mostly (median usage).
 - Twitter: Never (median usage).
 - Instagram: Never (median usage).
 - LinkedIn: Never (median usage).
 - YouTube: Never (median usage).
 3. **Mode Usage:** This shows the most common response or value in the distribution.
 - Facebook: Never (indicating that "Never" was the most common response for Facebook usage).
 - WhatsApp: Mostly (indicating that "Mostly" was the most common response for WhatsApp usage).
 - Twitter: Never (indicating that "Never" was the most common response for Twitter usage).
 - Instagram: Never (indicating that "Never" was the most common response for Instagram usage).
 - LinkedIn: Never (indicating that "Never" was the most common response for LinkedIn usage).
 - YouTube: Never (indicating that "Never" was the most common response for YouTube usage).
 4. **Skewness:** Skewness measures the asymmetry of the distribution. A value close to zero indicates a roughly symmetric distribution, while positive (right-skewed) or negative (left-skewed) values indicate asymmetry.
 - Facebook: Moderately left-skewed (-0.040).
 - WhatsApp: Moderately left-skewed (-0.654).
 - Twitter: Highly right-skewed (1.838).
 - Instagram: Highly right-skewed (1.869).
 - LinkedIn: Highly right-skewed (5.085).
 - YouTube: Moderately right-skewed (1.461).
 5. **Kurtosis:** Kurtosis measures the peakedness or flatness of a distribution compared to the normal distribution (which has a kurtosis of 3). Values greater than 3 indicate a leptokurtic distribution (more peaked), while values less than 3 indicate a platykurtic distribution (flatter).
 - Facebook: Platykurtic (-1.594).
 - WhatsApp: Platykurtic (-1.050).
 - Twitter: Leptokurtic (2.605).
 - Instagram: Leptokurtic (2.030).
 - LinkedIn: Leptokurtic (27.527) - indicating a significant presence of outliers.
 - YouTube: Platykurtic (0.790).

These findings show that:

- WhatsApp and Facebook are the most commonly used platforms among women entrepreneurs, with both being used frequently for business purposes. Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube are less popular, and most respondents do not use them for business.
- The distributions of use for Facebook and WhatsApp are roughly symmetric, while the distributions for Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube are highly right-skewed, suggesting that these platforms are used infrequently.
- Facebook and WhatsApp distributions have kurtosis values less than 3, indicating no outliers and relatively normal distributions. On the other hand, LinkedIn has a significantly higher kurtosis value, indicating a leptokurtic distribution with a presence of excess outliers.
- The findings suggest that WhatsApp and Facebook are more promising platforms for advancing women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship, given their higher usage and more regular distribution patterns.

B. Social Media Platforms Usage in Business

The data collected and analyzed revealed the usage of social media platforms by women entrepreneurs in rural areas to support various business functions. The findings are summarized in Table III and Table IV.

Table presents the frequencies of social media platforms usage for different business functions among women entrepreneurs. The study identified eight business functions that these entrepreneurs utilized social media platforms for: Sales, Purchases, Marketing, Customer relationship services, Communication services, Market research, Online banking services and Online meetings.

TABLE III: SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS USES IN BUSINESS FUNCTIONS FREQUENCIES



Business Function	WhatsApp	Facebook	YouTube	Twitter	Instagram	LinkedIn
Sales	106	82	5	5	8	3
Purchases	81	61	7	4	5	3
Marketing	150	107	24	26	37	3
CRM	148	114	10	23	15	6
Communication	152	119	6	33	19	9
Market research	80	106	58	12	20	6
Internet Banking	5	4	1	3	1	2
Online meetings	84	57	0	7	6	0

Based on the data, it was evident that the usage of social media platforms for business functions was above average for two platforms, namely WhatsApp and Facebook. These two platforms were the most popular choices among the women entrepreneurs. WhatsApp, with 154 out of 200 users, was mainly used for communication services, marketing, and customer relationship services. Facebook, with 129 out of 200 users, was predominantly used for communication services, customer relationship services, market research, and marketing.

On the other hand, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn were less popular among the women entrepreneurs. YouTube, with only 58 out of 200 users, was mostly used for market research, marketing, and customer relationship services. Twitter, with 43 out of 200 users, was mainly used for communication, marketing, and customer relationship services. Instagram, with 39 out of 200 users, was mostly used for marketing, market research, and communication services, while its usage for online banking, purchases, and online meetings was relatively low. LinkedIn had the lowest usage, with only 8 out of 200 users, and it was mainly used for communication services, customer relationship services, and market research.

Table IV ranks the social media platforms based on their popularity among the women entrepreneurs for specific business functions. It shows that WhatsApp ranked first, followed by Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn, respectively.

TABLE IV: SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS RANKING AND PREFERRED USES IN BUSINESS

Position	Social Media Platform	Frequency	Contribution	Most Preferred Uses	Least Preferred Uses
1	WhatsApp	154	0.36	1. Communication 2. Marketing 3. CRM	1. Internet Banking 2. Purchases 3. Online meetings
2	Facebook	129	0.3	1. Communication 2. CRM 3. Marketing	1. Internet Banking 2. Online meetings 3. Purchases
3	YouTube	58	0.13	1. Market research 2. Marketing 3. CRM	1. Online meetings 2. Internet banking 3. sales
4	Twitter	43	0.1	1. Communication 2. Marketing 3. CRM	1. Internet Banking 2. Purchases 3. Sales
5	Instagram	39	0.09	1. Marketing 2. Market research 3. Communication	1. Internet Banking 2. Purchases 3. Online meetings
6	LinkedIn	8	0.02	1. Communication 2. CRM 3. Market research	1. Online meetings, 2. Internet banking 3. Sales, Purchases, Marketing

The findings indicate that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most preferred social media platforms for business functions among women entrepreneurs in rural areas. These platforms are widely used for communication, marketing, and customer relationship services, indicating their significant role in facilitating business interactions and promoting customer engagement.



On the other hand, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn are less commonly used for business purposes among the surveyed entrepreneurs. This suggests that these platforms may not be as suitable for their specific business needs or may require more awareness and exploration of their potential benefits.

The study highlights the importance of choosing the right social media platforms based on the business's objectives and target audience. While some platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook show promising results in supporting business functions, entrepreneurs should be mindful of selecting platforms that align with their business goals and customer preferences.

Overall, the findings shed light on the current social media platform usage patterns among women entrepreneurs in rural areas and provide valuable insights for businesses and policymakers to enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies and business growth in these regions.

C. Relationship between Social Media Platforms Usage in Business and Women Economic Empowerment

The study investigated the relationship between social media platform usage in business and women's economic empowerment among entrepreneurs in rural areas of Siaya County, Kenya. Hypotheses were formulated and analyzed using inferential statistics for correlation and regression. The findings are summarized in Table V and Table VI.

TABLE V SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES

S/No	Hypothesis Code	Hypothesis Description	Supported/Not Supported
1	H1 _o	Facebook usage positively predicts economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Supported
2	H1 _a	Facebook usage does not positively predict economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Not Supported
3	H2 _o	Twitter usage positively predicts economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Supported
4	H2 _a	Twitter usage does not positively predict economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Not Supported
5	H3 _o	WhatsApp usage positively predicts economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Supported
6	H3 _a	WhatsApp usage does not positively predict economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Not Supported
7	H4 _o	Instagram usage positively predicts economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Not Supported
8	H4 _a	Instagram usage does not positively predict economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Supported
9	H5 _o	LinkedIn usage positively predicts economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Not Supported
10	H5 _a	LinkedIn usage does not predict economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Supported
11	H6 _o	YouTube usage positively predicts economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Supported



12	H6 _a	YouTube usage does not predict economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Siaya County, Kenya	Not Supported
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Table V presents the hypotheses and their outcomes. The study formulated hypotheses to test the relationship between each social media platform's usage and women's economic empowerment. The hypotheses are divided into two parts: H1o, H2o, H3o, H4o, H5o, and H6o, which state that the usage of Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube positively predicts women's economic empowerment, respectively. The second part, H1a, H2a, H3a, H4a, H5a, and H6a, represents the opposite, suggesting that the usage of these platforms does not positively predict women's economic empowerment. The findings show that Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube usage positively predict women's economic empowerment (Supported), while Instagram and LinkedIn usage do not significantly predict women's economic empowerment (Not Supported).

TABLE VI: PATH COEFFICIENTS AND P VALUES

S/No	Variable Name	P value (p)	Path Coeff (β)	Significance of path
1.	Facebook	< 0.001	0.266	Significant
2.	Twitter	0.003	0.190	Significant
3.	WhatsApp	< 0.001	0.426	Significant
4.	Instagram	0.450	0.009	Insignificant
5.	LinkedIn	0.225	0.053	Insignificant
6.	YouTube	0.003	0.165	Significant

Table VI presents the p-values and path coefficients for each social media platform, indicating the strength and significance of the relationships between platform usage and women's economic empowerment. A p-value less than 0.05 indicates a statistically significant relationship. The results reveal the following:

- Facebook:** The relationship between Facebook usage and women's economic empowerment is positive and significant ($p < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.266$). As Facebook usage in businesses increases, women's economic empowerment tends to increase.
- Twitter:** The relationship between Twitter usage and women's economic empowerment is positive and significant ($p = 0.003$, $\beta = 0.190$). Increased Twitter usage in business corresponds to higher women's economic empowerment.
- WhatsApp:** The relationship between WhatsApp usage and women's economic empowerment is positive and significant ($p < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.426$). Greater usage of WhatsApp in business is associated with increased women's economic empowerment.
- Instagram:** The relationship between Instagram usage and women's economic empowerment is positive but insignificant ($p = 0.450$, $\beta = 0.009$). While there is a positive correlation, it is not strong enough to be considered a predictor of women's economic empowerment.
- LinkedIn:** The relationship between LinkedIn usage and women's economic empowerment is positive but insignificant ($p = 0.225$, $\beta = 0.053$). Similar to Instagram, the correlation exists, but it is not strong enough to be a predictor.
- YouTube:** The relationship between YouTube usage and women's economic empowerment is positive and significant ($p = 0.009$, $\beta = 0.165$). Increased usage of YouTube is associated with higher women's economic empowerment.

The findings show the correlation or relationships between each social media platform's usage and women's economic empowerment. The findings indicate that the relationships between WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube usage and women's economic empowerment are strong, while Twitter's relationship is moderately strong. On the other hand, the relationships between Instagram and LinkedIn usage and women's economic empowerment are weak.

D. Effects of Social Media Platforms Usage in Advancing Women Economic Empowerment through Digital Platforms

The study highlights that social media platforms play a significant role in advancing women's economic empowerment in rural areas. When women entrepreneurs utilize social media platforms in their businesses, it positively predicts their economic empowerment. However, the study also reveals that the usage of social media platforms by women entrepreneurs in rural areas is still below average, indicating a need for increased awareness and support.



The usage of social media platforms in business offers numerous benefits. It enhances productivity by enabling fast, cost-effective, and efficient business transactions. It also reduces the need for frequent business travels, leading to cost savings and improved health outcomes. Online meetings, though not widely used, are valuable for saving time and costs and breaking geographical barriers.

Moreover, social media platform usage contributes to waste reduction through paperless communication and online purchases. Online sales allow entrepreneurs to access global markets, leading to higher profit margins and fair competition. The increased profits empower women entrepreneurs to improve living standards, invest in new ventures, and support environmental development initiatives.

Overall, the study highlights the immense potential of social media platforms as catalysts for women's economic empowerment. Policymakers and stakeholders can use these insights to develop targeted initiatives and support mechanisms to encourage more women to adopt social media platforms for their businesses, fostering economic growth and gender equity in rural areas.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this study, the researcher set out to examine the economic empowerment of rural women entrepreneurs through the utilization of digital platforms, with a specific focus on social media platforms. The findings of this investigation have shed light on the transformative potential of technology in advancing women's economic empowerment in rural areas.

The results have highlighted the significant positive impact of social media platform usage on women's economic empowerment. Social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools that play a crucial role in fostering business growth and increasing women entrepreneurs' profitability. When women entrepreneurs effectively utilize these digital platforms in their businesses, it positively predicts their economic empowerment.

Despite the potential benefits, the study also revealed that the usage of social media platforms by women entrepreneurs in rural areas is still below average. This points to the need for increased awareness, digital literacy training, and support mechanisms to encourage more women to leverage these digital tools for business growth and empowerment.

The study has shown that social media platform usage in business enhances productivity, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. With reduced reliance on frequent business travels, entrepreneurs can save costs, minimize health risks, and contribute to environmental preservation by reducing paper waste.

Moreover, the study highlights that online sales have a transformative effect on women entrepreneurs in rural areas. By reaching global markets, entrepreneurs can experience higher profit margins, leading to business expansion and job creation. The ability to invest in environmental development initiatives further demonstrates the positive impact of women's economic empowerment on sustainable business practices.

The insights from this research have significant implications for policymakers, development organizations, and stakeholders. The study calls for targeted initiatives to promote digital literacy and access to technology among rural women entrepreneurs. By providing support and training in utilizing social media platforms effectively, we can empower women entrepreneurs to overcome traditional barriers and participate more actively in the digital economy.

Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on gender equity and economic development. By harnessing the power of digital platforms, we have the potential to foster inclusive economic growth, reduce gender disparities, and promote women's entrepreneurship in rural communities.

Moving forward, it is essential to continue advocating for gender-inclusive policies, creating an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs to thrive, and bridging the digital divide in rural areas. By embracing the opportunities provided by digital platforms, we can pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous future, where rural women entrepreneurs are key drivers of economic development and social empowerment.

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