



Determinants of Generation Z Consumers' Purchase Intention Toward Organic Cosmetics in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The category of organic cosmetics is a growing yet conceptually blurry category of sustainable consumption. Green cosmetics are often associated with Gen Z consumers' environmental awareness, health-oriented lifestyles and digitally informed buying habits but positive attitudes do not always translate into actual buying. This conceptual paper develops a direct-effects model to explain the purchase intention of Malaysian Generation Z consumers towards organic cosmetics. The proposed model is based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and is also supported by current research in the field of green consumption. Six independent variables such as attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, environmental concern, health consciousness and trust in organic claims are used. The dependent variable is the intention to purchase organic cosmetics. This study is a quantitative, cross-sectional study among Malaysian consumers aged 18-29 years old who use cosmetics and are aware of organic cosmetic products. The data can be analysed through the partial least squares structural equation modelling to assess the measurement and structural models. The contribution of the framework is that it combines established behavioural determinants with product-specific ecological, health and credibility considerations into a single simple model. It also provides practical recommendations for cosmetic brands looking to improve product positioning, claim transparency, accessibility and communication to Generation Z consumers.

Keywords: Organic cosmetics; Generation Z; purchase intention; theory of planned behaviour; environmental concern; health consciousness; green trust

INTRODUCTION

The cosmetics and personal-care sector has seen an ever more visible basis for competition in sustainability. The increasing global demand for healthier lifestyles has resulted in consumers paying more attention to products that reduce the health and environmental risks of synthetic chemicals (Zollo et al., 2021). Now product labels commonly reference organic ingredients, clean formulas, cruelty-free manufacturing, recyclable packaging, natural sourcing and a reduced environmental footprint. However, these labels are not interchangeable (Rocca et al., 2022). In general, organic cosmetics are cosmetic products that are largely formulated from ingredients produced organically and marketed through claims about cultivation, processing and ingredient integrity (Rocca et al., 2022). Recent reviews have contextualised organic cosmetics in the wider context of green or natural alternatives, with "organic" being a label attribute in a range of green and circular product claims. This positioning is reflective of the absence of a universal legal definition for organic cosmetics in many jurisdictions and reliance on third-party certifications or consumer interpretations to differentiate "organic" versus "natural" in marketing discourse (Zanini et al., 2024; Bhatia, 2022). Green cosmetics is a broader category which may also include environmental packaging, ethical production or lower ecological impact. Green cosmetics are a wider conceptual category than organic cosmetics (Shimul et al., 2021). They comprise different sustainability attributes like environmental protection, pollution reduction, sustainable resource management, animal welfare, and certifications or eco-labels (Yu & WisaengI, 2026). Therefore, green cosmetics are characterised by their sustainability-oriented objectives and practices, rather than solely by their organic certification status (Limbu & Ahamed, 2023; Gwanya et al., 2024; Zanini et al., 2024). Consumers may be exposed to all these claims at the same time thus purchase decision of an organic cosmetic product includes favourable attitude, practical control,



social approval, personal health priorities and confidence of claims being true (Shimul et al., 2021; Zollo et al., 2021).

Generation Z is a particularly relevant consumer segment for this discussion. Members of this cohort have grown up in a digital environment in which product information, peer recommendations, explanations of ingredients, influencer content and criticism of corporate sustainability claims spread like wildfire. Research on ethical and green consumption shows that Generation Z consumers are open to social norms, perceived value and digital information but their purchasing decisions are also limited by price, availability, uncertainty and perceived credibility (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022; Sun & Xing, 2022). This makes for a demanding consumer in beauty markets: sustainability may be prized, but claims are likely to be benchmarked against product performance, affordability and proof of authenticity.

Recently, research has investigated the green cosmetics, green beauty, vegan cosmetics, organic cosmetics and sustainable personal-care products in different national markets. Attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control are consistently mentioned as relevant predictors in line with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Phu et al., 2024; Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025) other research points to environmental concern, ethical concern, health consciousness, perceived value, trust and scepticism as important product-specific considerations (Kifaya, 2024; Suphasomboon & Vassanadumrongdee, 2022). However, these determinants are often tested in models with multiple indirect paths or samples not focused on Malaysian Generation Z consumers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organic Cosmetics and Generation Z Consumers

The organic cosmetics include skincare, colour cosmetics, haircare, body care and related personal-care products with formulations that meet the specific organic agricultural input thresholds required by industry standards (Yıldırım, 2021). The category overlaps with green, natural, clean and vegan beauty but each label highlights a different attribute (Kalil et al., 2022). Organic positioning focuses on the source of the ingredients and production standards, and is tightly regulated by bodies of government through certification thresholds and minimum percentages of certified organic content (Shimul et al., 2021).

For example, vegan positioning excludes ingredients of animal origin and cruelty-free positioning focuses on animal testing, while green beauty also incorporates packaging recyclability, ethical claims, and broader environmental performance (Yu & WisaengI, 2026). This conceptual difference is important because respondents need to be thinking about the same product category when responding to survey items. Hence, this paper defines organic cosmetics as cosmetic and personal-care products that consumers believe to contain certified or credibly claimed organically produced ingredients and to be manufactured with reduced dependence on synthetic inputs.

Recent research indicates that decisions regarding green and organic beauty are multi-dimensional. Environmental benefits, ethical concerns, quality, perceived value, social influence and behavioural feasibility are considered by consumers (Testa et al., 2024; Zollo et al., 2021) Research on clean beauty in Millennials and Generation Z also identifies safety, ethicality and sustainability as interrelated product attributes (Shim et al., 2024). Therefore, a model based solely on environmental concern would not be able to capture important personal and social determinants.

The digital orientation of generation Z also changes the information environment of organic cosmetics. Electronic word of mouth can influence the purchase intention of green cosmetics by shaping product evaluations and reducing uncertainty (Nguyen et al., 2024). Sharing information through social media can make norms and green value more visible, which may enhance Generation Z's green purchase intention (Sun & Xing, 2022). But digital information can also breed scepticism if claims seem inconsistent, unsupported or overly promotional. Hence, trust in organic claims is particularly pertinent to consumers who routinely compare brand claims with reviews, ingredient analysis and creator content (Nayak et al., 2024).



Purchased Intention toward Organic Cosmetics

Purchase intention is a consumer's conscious probability, willingness or plan to buy a product in the future (Leonidou et al., 2022). This paper aims to discuss the extent of the intention of Malaysian Generation Z consumers to choose and purchase organic cosmetic products when a relevant need arises. Since the proposed study is designed to explain a pre-purchase decision and not actual repeat behaviour, purchase intention is the appropriate dependent variable. It is also widely used in TPB based research, as intention captures the motivational readiness that precedes behaviour (Adenuga et al., 2024)

The intention to buy organic cosmetics is expected more than curiosity. A strong intention should include an intention to consider organic alternatives, a preference for organic cosmetics over comparable conventional cosmetics and an intention to purchase within a foreseeable time. Intention should not be assumed to be the same as actual purchase for questionnaire items. Cost, availability and situational factors can interfere with the translation into behaviour. However, before examining subsequent purchase, adoption or loyalty outcomes, it is important to identify the immediate predictors of intention.

Theoretical Foundation: Theory of Planned Behaviour

The TPB remains one of the most commonly used frameworks to explain intentional consumer behaviour. Its main proposition is that intention is developed on the basis of attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control. Attitude is the positive or negative evaluation of the behaviour, subjective norm is the perceived social pressure and perceived behavioural control is the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour. Recent studies on green products and green cosmetics still support the relevance of the framework, although the relative strength of individual predictors varies across contexts (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025; Kamalanon et al., 2022; Ngo-Thi-Ngoc et al., 2024; Upadhyaya & Sijoria, 2024). For organic cosmetics, the three TPB predictors explain the behavioural core of the decision. However, the TPB does not explain fully why the product category is important for consumers. Environmental concern provides the ecological motive; health consciousness covers concern about personal consequences of ingredients in cosmetics; and trust in organic claims addresses uncertainty around product communication. The three variables do not affect the direct structure of the model. Rather, it broadens the scope of explanation, while maintaining purchase intention as the only dependent variable.

Attitude and Purchase Intention

Attitude to the purchase of organic cosmetics is the consumer's general positive or negative assessment of choosing these products. A positive attitude may be founded on perceptions that organic cosmetics are beneficial, responsible, appropriate, worthwhile or preferable to conventional alternatives. In the TPB, attitude is expected to foster intention because consumers are more motivated to engage in behaviours they view favourably.

Recent studies have reported attitude as a consistent predictor of intention in green beauty and related sustainable consumption contexts. Bevan-Dye and Synodinos (2025) found support for TPB based antecedents of green beauty brand purchase intention. Phu et al. (2024) applied TPB to organic cosmetics and showed the relevance of consumer evaluation in shaping intention. Studies on vegan cosmetics and green products also indicate that positive attitudes result in higher purchase intentions (Kamalanon et al., 2022; Ngo-Thi-Ngoc et al., 2024). For Generation Z, a view of organic cosmetics is likely to combine environmental beliefs with beliefs about product safety, efficacy and value.

H1: Attitude has a positive and significant direct effect on Generation Z consumers' purchase intention toward organic cosmetics.

Subjective Norm and Purchase Intention

Subjective norm refers to the consumer's perception that important others will approve or expect the purchase of organic cosmetics. These referents can be family, friends, peers, online communities, beauty creators and trusted opinion leaders. The construct is particularly relevant to visible or identity-related consumption where product choice can communicate values and group membership.



Generation Z consumers are immersed in dense digital networks that make the assessments of others easily accessible. Consumers may be exposed to norms about environmental responsibility and acceptable product choices through social media information sharing (Sun & Xing, 2022). Electronic word of mouth also influences green cosmetics intention among young consumers by affecting the interpretation and discussion of products (Nguyen et al., 2024). Although subjective norm is not always the strongest predictor in the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), its direct effect has theoretical justification as social approval can reduce uncertainty and organic cosmetics can appear more appropriate, fashionable or responsible.

H2: Subjective norm has a positive and significant direct effect on Generation Z consumers' purchase intention toward organic cosmetics.

Perceived Behavioural Control and Purchase Intention

Perceived behavioural control is defined as the consumer's perception of the degree to which the individual has, or believes he/she has, the resources, opportunities and abilities to engage in the behaviour of purchasing organic cosmetics. This includes access to good products, affordability, knowledge, time, confidence in reading labels and the ability to find trusted sellers. If organic alternatives are difficult to find or perceived as too costly, the consumer may have a positive attitude but low intention.

This construct is particularly important in an emerging market for organic beauty because choice is based on market infrastructure as well as motivation. Testa et al. (2024) identify barriers that may impede green skincare intention. Recent TPB applications show that perceived control is a determinant of green and organic product choice (Bevan-Dye & Synodinos, 2025; Kamalanon et al., 2022). Student or early-career budgets, online access, availability of certified products and confidence in distinguishing credible organic claims from general natural-product marketing may affect control for Malaysian Generation Z consumers.

H3: Perceived behavioural control has a positive and significant direct effect on Generation Z consumers' purchase intention toward organic cosmetics.

Environmental Concern and Purchase Intention

Environmental concern is the extent to which consumers are aware, emotionally connected and concerned about environmental degradation. A conscientious consumer is more likely to think about the environmental impact of ingredients, manufacturing processes, packaging and waste. Consumers may be attracted to organic cosmetics if they think organic sourcing means fewer chemical inputs, that products are grown more responsibly in an environmentally friendly way or that it means lower-impact consumption.

Environmental concern is a common determinant in green-purchase research. Studies on sustainable consumption at a large scale suggest that environmental concern is associated with behavioural intention (Saari et al., 2021). Duong et al. (2026) also demonstrate its relevance in shaping green purchase intention. Systematic reviews rank environmental concern among the dominant individual-level drivers of green consumption (Limbu & Ahamed, 2023; Wijekoon & Sabri, 2021). Kifaya (2024) shows that even if scepticism is included, environmental concern is still important in organic beauty. Environmental concern in the present model is tested as a direct predictor to compare its independent motivational role with attitude and trust.

H4: Environmental concern has a positive and significant direct effect on Generation Z consumers' purchase intention toward organic cosmetics

Health Consciousness and Purchase Intention

Health consciousness is the degree to which people think about and monitor and try to protect their health in their daily choices. For cosmetics, health-conscious consumers may closely examine ingredient lists, avoid ingredients they consider harsh or unnecessary, and select products that are thought to be safe, gentle, and healthful. Thus, organic cosmetics can be interpreted not only as environmentally friendly products, but also as products suitable for a health-oriented lifestyle.

The health consciousness is accentuated by the direct contact of cosmetic formulations with the body. Safety is an important attribute for young consumers in clean beauty research (Shim et al., 2024). Studies of organic cosmetics also reveal that personal health and product-quality expectations influence consumer evaluation and intention (Dlamini & Mahowa, 2024; T et al., 2024). Health consciousness and concern for the environment are not the same: a consumer may buy organic cosmetics mainly for perceived personal benefits, despite moderate ecological concern. Thus, its direct inclusion enables the study to differentiate self-oriented and environment-oriented motivations.

H5: Health consciousness has a positive and significant direct effect on Generation Z consumers' purchase intention toward organic cosmetics.

Trust in Organic Claims and Purchase Intention

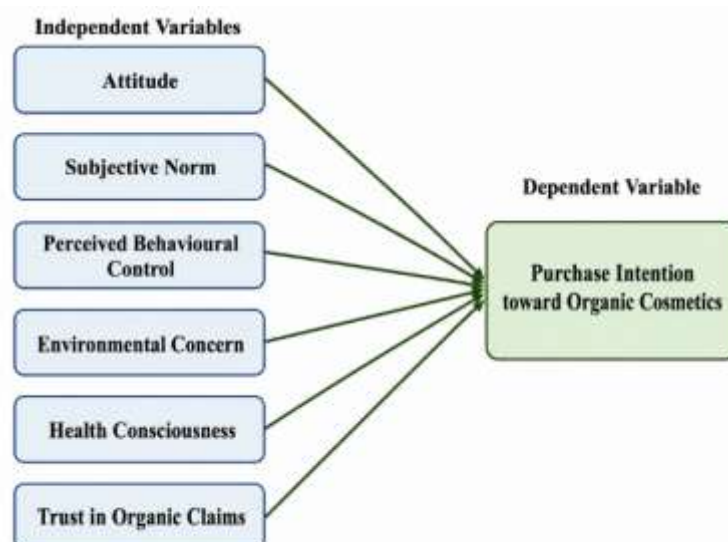
Trust in organic claims is the consumer's willingness to believe that a cosmetic product is made with truly organic ingredients and is manufactured according to the environmental or ethical standards conveyed by the brand. Trust can be supported by recognised certification, transparent ingredient information, traceability, consistent communication, and credible third party evidence. It is diminished if claims are vague, exaggerated or inconsistent with other parts of the product. Trust is important as many organic attributes are credence qualities. Consumers cannot verify them through normal product use. Green-trust research suggests that trust in environmental promises may increase green purchase intention, whereas greenwashing and scepticism can reduce it (Amin & Tarun, 2020; Hossain et al., 2022; Tarabieh, 2020). Kifaya (2024) offers direct evidence that scepticism impedes organic beauty adoption across national contexts. Generation Z is often exposed to competing brand claims and user-generated evaluations, and trust can be the decisive factor in whether positive environmental and health beliefs turn into a concrete purchase plan.

H6: Trust in organic claims has a positive and significant direct effect on Generation Z consumers' purchase intention toward organic cosmetics.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework is illustrated in Fig. 1. The model has six independent variables and one dependent variable. Arrows indicate a direct hypothesised effect on purchase intention towards organic cosmetics. The mediators and moderators are deliberately not included. This design allows the researcher to compare the explanatory power of personal evaluation, social influence, perceived control, environmental motivation, health orientation and claim credibility in one structural model.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



PROPOSED RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical study should employ a longitudinal survey design. A quantitative longitudinal design is appropriate because the framework includes well-defined latent constructs and directional hypotheses that can be measured using multi-item scales across multiple time points. Data may be collected from the same respondents in two or more waves, allowing the study to examine changes in the six predictors and purchase intention over time. This approach also provides stronger evidence regarding the temporal relationships between the predictors and purchase intention compared with a cross-sectional design, although it does not independently establish causality.

The unit of analysis is the Malaysian Generation Z consumer. The study should explain intention, not causal claims. Although the hypotheses are framed in directional terms, the use of cross-sectional data cannot as easily establish the temporal sequence as can longitudinal or experimental work. This limitation must be noted explicitly in the eventual empirical article.

The population for this study is the Malaysian Generation Z consumers aged between 18 to 29 years old at the data collection period. Participants are restricted to adults, avoiding consent issues with minors, and include university students, young working adults and early career consumers. Three screening criteria are proposed: the respondent should be Malaysian, fall within the specified age bracket and have used at least one cosmetic or personal-care product in the last six months. For a fourth screening question, the respondent should know that organic cosmetics exist. Actual prior purchase can be recorded but should not be compulsory because the dependent variable is purchase intention and the study should include aware non-buyers as well as existing buyers.

Purposive sampling is practical because the respondents are required to have certain product awareness and age criteria. Quota controls can be applied to gender, region, employment or student status to improve sample diversity. Recruitment may be through universities, professional networks, social media communities and consumer panels. The survey invitation should be free of wording that would disproportionately appeal to respondents who are highly environmental, as this could bias estimates of environmental concern and intention upwards.

A minimum useful sample size of about 400 respondents is advised. This target is more conservative than a simple minimum based on the number of structural paths, and provides greater stability for scale assessment, subgroup description, and removal of careless responses. Sample-size justification Final Sample-size justification should combine statistical power analysis and methodological direction for partial least squares structural equation modelling (Hair et al., 2022).

The questionnaire should have five parts: screening questions, a short definition of organic cosmetics, construct measures, cosmetic-purchase characteristics and demographic information. Before scaling the items, it is important to provide a standard definition. Otherwise, respondents might consider organic, natural, clean, vegan and green cosmetics as identical categories.

A brief neutral definition should include the statement that organic cosmetics are products marketed as having ingredients that have been produced in accordance with standards for organic cultivation or processing, without implying that the products are necessarily safer or more effective. All seven constructs will be measured as reflective with multiple items adapted from recent studies. A seven-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) can increase response variance yet still be easy to complete. The wording should be short, product-specific and not double-barrelled. For items adapted from studies outside of Malaysia, expert review and cognitive pretesting should be used to assess cultural and linguistic clarity.

Partial least squares structural equation modelling is recommended because the study is prediction orientated, it contains seven latent constructs and it aims at comparing the direct explanatory contribution of six predictors. The analysis can be performed by using SmartPLS or other statistical software. The procedure begins with data screening and describing characteristics of respondents, cosmetic use, awareness and prior purchase experience.



Expected Contribution

Expected Theoretical Contributions

First, the framework facilitates research in organic cosmetics by integrating six theoretically different predictors in one direct-effects model. Existing studies are mostly about general green products, only consider a few TPB variables, or develop complicated indirect mechanisms. The proposed framework preserves the explanatory discipline of the TPB while acknowledging the ecological, bodily and credibility issues involved in organic cosmetics. This tradeoff results in better product-category specificity without overbuilding a complex model.

Second, the model disentangles environmental concern from health consciousness. The two constructs are different motivational orientations that can co-exist. Environment concern is about the ecological consequences. Health consciousness is about personal well-being and the safety of ingredients. Testing both as direct predictors would reveal whether Generation Z's intention to purchase organic cosmetics is mostly other-oriented, self-oriented or a combination of the two.

Third, we conceptualise trust in organic claims as an independent predictor, not as a mediating mechanism. Theoretically, this direct treatment is important because it poses a pragmatic question: Does credibility still explain unique variance in purchase intention when controlling for attitude, norms, control, environmental concern and health consciousness? A significant effect would show that claim verification is not only embedded in a favourable attitude but also acts as an independent decision criterion.

Fourth, the study will add to the recent green and organic beauty evidence for Malaysian Generation Z consumers. Cross-country work has shown that scepticism and environmental motives can be different across markets (Kifaya, 2024), and systematic reviews have called for more context sensitive research (Limbu & Ahamed, 2023). Malaysia is a good example of an emerging market for multicultural consumption, with high social commerce activity and access to local and global beauty brands.

Expected Managerial and Policy Implications

The direct-effects model is meant to generate actionable priorities. If attitude is the strongest predictor, brands should develop the overall value proposition, combining organic attributes with efficacy, quality and suitability, rather than relying on environmental language alone. Product trials, evidence-based demonstrations and clear comparisons may lead to better consumer evaluations.

If subjective norm is important then communication should include credible peer discussion and genuine user advocacy. Brands should engage with knowledgeable creators, educators with dermatology expertise, or customer communities, but avoid scripted endorsements that could damage their credibility. Social proof has to be based on the real experience and not just the popularity.

A strong effect of perceived behavioural control would suggest that intention is based on affordability, access and consumer confidence. Brands might react with smaller initial order sizes, broader retail availability, a solid online presence, simple product navigation, and readily accessible explanations of certifications. Product ease of evaluation and purchase may be as important as sustainability promotion for younger consumers. The segmentation can be more accurate if the effects of environmental concern and health consciousness are different. Environmentally conscious consumers may be interested in sourcing, waste reduction and packaging information, while health-conscious consumers may be drawn to ingredient transparency, testing and suitability (Piracci et al., 2023). Claims must be truthful and in compliance. Organic positioning must not imply unsubstantiated medical or safety superiority.

Finally, a strong trust effect would put transparency at the heart of the strategy of organic cosmetics. Brands should set the standards for an organic claim, state the percentage and source of organic ingredients, disclose relevant certification and be consistent across packaging, websites and social media. Policymakers and industry bodies may also support clearer claim definitions and consumer education to reduce confusion between organic, natural, vegan and green labels.



LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The proposed a framework that is deliberately simple. This does not include product price, perceived quality, past behaviour, green scepticism, brand familiarity or electronic word of mouth as separate predictors, but these variables may be relevant. This is a design choice to preserve interpretability, consistent with the goal of testing a direct IV-DV model. The six-variable model proposed here allows to determine the basic explanatory value, and future studies may compare the model with alternative specifications.

Additionally, the proposed cross-sectional design will estimate relationships at one point in time, and cannot confirm causality (Baumeister et al., 2026). Longitudinal studies could explore whether intention changes after repeated product use, exposure to certification, price changes or sustainability controversies. Experiments could look at the effect of specific label formats, certification marks, or evidence-based claims, holding other product attributes constant.

Purchase intention is not the same as actual purchase behaviour (Ermecke et al., 2025). Organic consumption is a socially desirable activity (Kilian & Mann, 2021) and respondents might overrate sustainable intentions. Future research could evaluate if intention translates into behaviour using purchase records, choice experiments or follow-up surveys. Researchers can also compare current users of organic cosmetics to those who are aware but do not use.

The age range and national focus limit generalisability. “Generation Z is not a homogenous group and may vary by income, gender, skin concerns, cosmetic involvement, religion, region and student or employment status. These features should be described and, sample size permitting, explored via multigroup analysis in future research. Such analyses should follow the initial direct effects test.

Finally, the meaning of organic cosmetics can vary for consumers and brands. The proposed survey tries to address this by proposing a neutral definition, but conceptual ambiguity cannot be entirely removed. Future qualitative research could explore how Malaysian consumers interpret organic certification, ingredient percentages and the connection between organic, natural and clean beauty.

CONCLUSION

This paper is conceptual and aims to present a simple model to explain the purchase intention of Generation Z towards organic cosmetic products in Malaysia. The framework proposes six independent variables which have direct effects on one dependent variable, purchase intention. The independent variables are attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, environmental concern, health consciousness and trust in organic claims. No mediator or moderator.

The model considers the multidimensionality of decisions on organic beauty. The reasons for consumers to want to buy are: evaluating the products positively, perceiving social approval, believing in their access and affordability, caring about environmental consequences, prioritising personal health or trusting the claims presented by the brand. Testing these factors simultaneously will indicate which considerations account for unique variance and provide a clear springboard for theory development and managerial action.

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