Branded Content and the Brain

Brainsights
January 2021

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To say that Nike creates standard advertising might annoy some, but the fact is the brand develops video content in standard lengths for paid media formats, and regularly appears in paid placements on TV and digital video platforms.

It's equally accurate, of course, to say that Nike is different, and often experimental with its advertising. Brands don't grow by sitting still, and this brand is quite literally built on moving.

And while Nike's ads are lauded by the advertising industry, it's one of their more unique executions that stole the spotlight recently - the integration in Drake's *Laugh Now, Cry Later.*

Brainsights often gets requests to quantify the impact of branded content. Our branded content recommendations have led to strong results for brands across industry, like beer and banking.

In this white paper, we're going to show you how we do it, so that you feel empowered to do it yourself.

The following is a step-by-step process that uses Brainsights Bust Bias-Video Creative Intelligence found on the Brainsights online store to evaluate how Nike's ads perform versus their branded content integration with Drake.

/// STEP 1

Submit the videos

For the ads, we used Nike's tribute to Kobe (*Better* | *Mamba Forever*) and the editing masterclass by Wieden & Kennedy (*You Can't Stop Us*). We could have used any ads, but these ones were released around the same time as Drake's video; they're brand focused and include people at least as famous as those who appear in *Laugh Now, Cry Later* (including Drake himself).

But be guided by your objective. Are you looking to prove the value of branded content more broadly, or specific to a campaign or brand objective? If the former, then you'll want to select a range of content that represents a reasonable basket of branded content and brand sell assets. If the latter, then you can focus in on one or two comparison brand sell spots that sought to achieve a similar objective. You're looking to develop some baseline comparisons, so testing against a range of spots can really help to provide that solid comparison.

Video submission happens through the order form in the Bust Bias-VCI product page on the Brainsights online shop at brainsights.com/store.

/// STEP 2

Calculate impact and performance of branded content versus ads

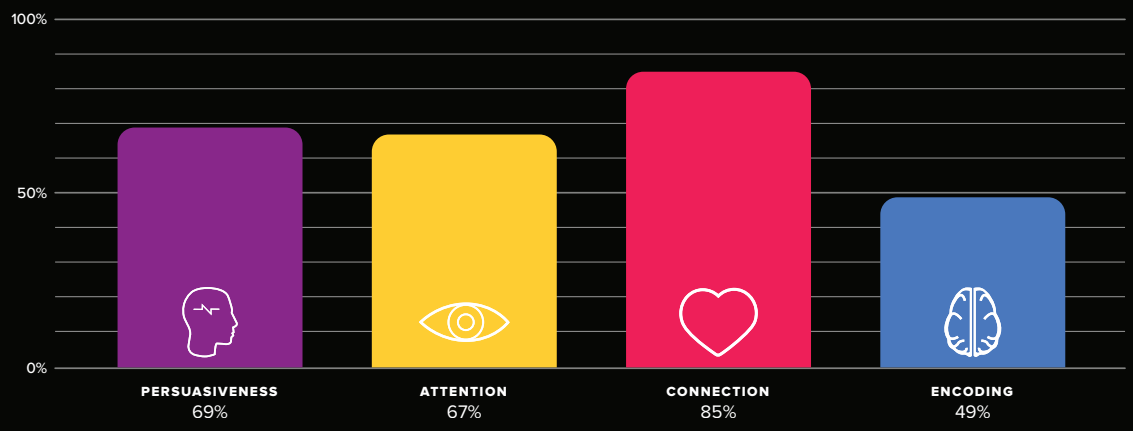
The brain data has been collected and delivered to our dashboards. We're now ready to review it.

The first place we start is the top line metrics - the NeuroScores.

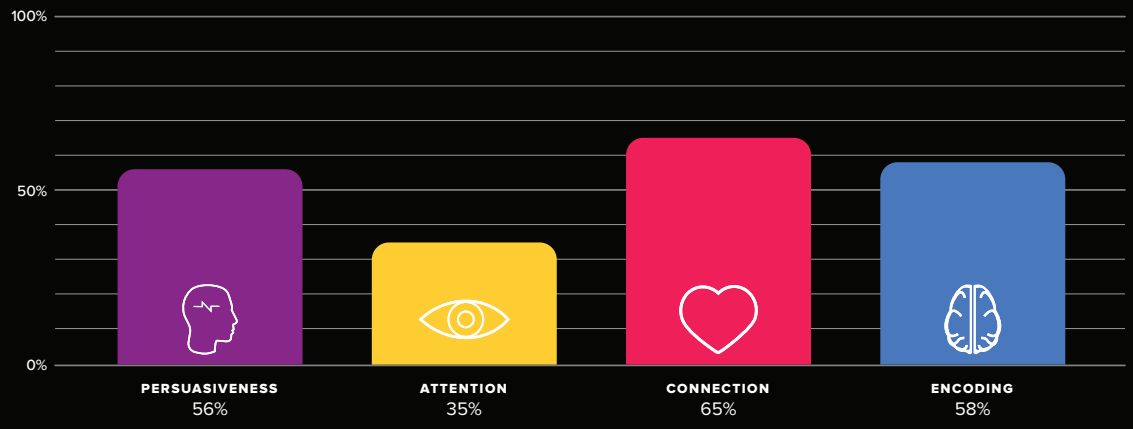
The NeuroScores are the average values for the duration of the spot versus the video benchmarks for that time period. This provides a comprehensive overview of the performance of those spots versus a basket of other video content vying to imprint on the subconscious mind of the consumer.

NeuroScores

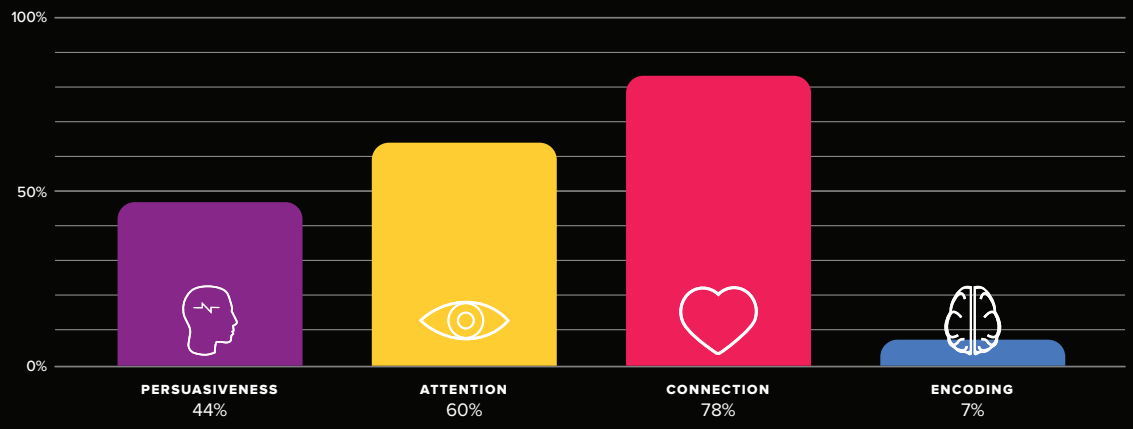
Bust Bias: VCI Drake *Laugh Now, Cry Later*



Bust Bias: VCI Nike *Can't Stop Us*



Bust Bias: VCI Nike *Mamba Forever*



As we can see, people are more Attentive, and Connect more with *Laugh Now Cry Later* than the other spots, but *You Can't Stop Us* has better Encoding to Memory. *Better* | *Mamba Forever* has better Attention and Connection than *You Can't Stop Us*, but inferior Encoding to the others.

On Overall Persuasiveness - a composite of the three other metrics - this places Drake in first, *You Can't Stop Us* in second and *Mamba Forever* in the final podium position for the Nike content.

Maybe no surprise here. We might reasonably expect a music video by a popular international artist to best a pair of ads any day, even if those ads were Nike's. But from our perspective, this is what the Attention Economy is all about - ads are not simply competing against other ads from category competitors. They are competing against all content for the attention of the consumer.

So, does this mean that Drake wins?

Not so fast.

It's one thing to place brands and products within a piece of entertaining content - in this case, a music video - that outperforms advertising.

It's another thing altogether to understand whether and how that placement actually worked on consumers.

What if the Nike moments of *Laugh Now Cry Later* actually drag down overall performance?

What if Drake's music video would have been better without Nike in it?

To figure this out, we need to zero in on precise moments. We can do this by looking at the BiasTrace.

The BiasTrace shows the second-by-second levels of Persuasiveness, Attention, Connection and Encoding, aggregated across consumers who viewed the video, indexed to their respective benchmarks. This allows us to see at each moment how Persuasive the content is, and how people are paying Attention, emotionally Connecting, and Encoding the stimuli to memory versus video benchmark averages.

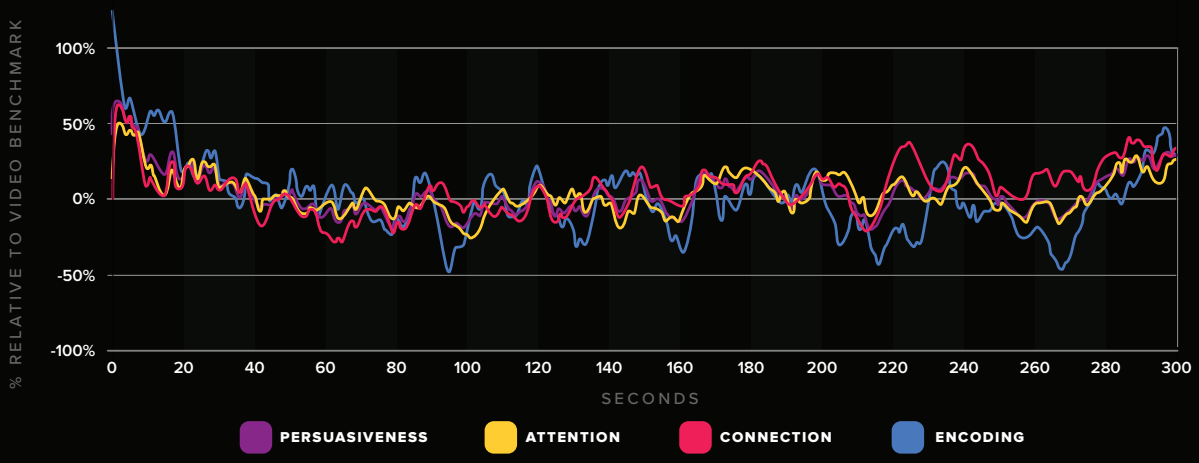
First, we identify the moments in the Drake video that featured Nike. Then, we track the performance of these moments (individual seconds) versus benchmarks, thus understanding how the branded moments perform within the content itself.

If you wanted to be even more precise, you could apply the same treatment to *You Can't Stop Us* and *Mamba Forever*. But, given that those are both clearly 90-second ads, we felt comfortable treating them as such, and using their overall averages. However, Bust Bias-Video Creative Intelligence provides that flexibility.

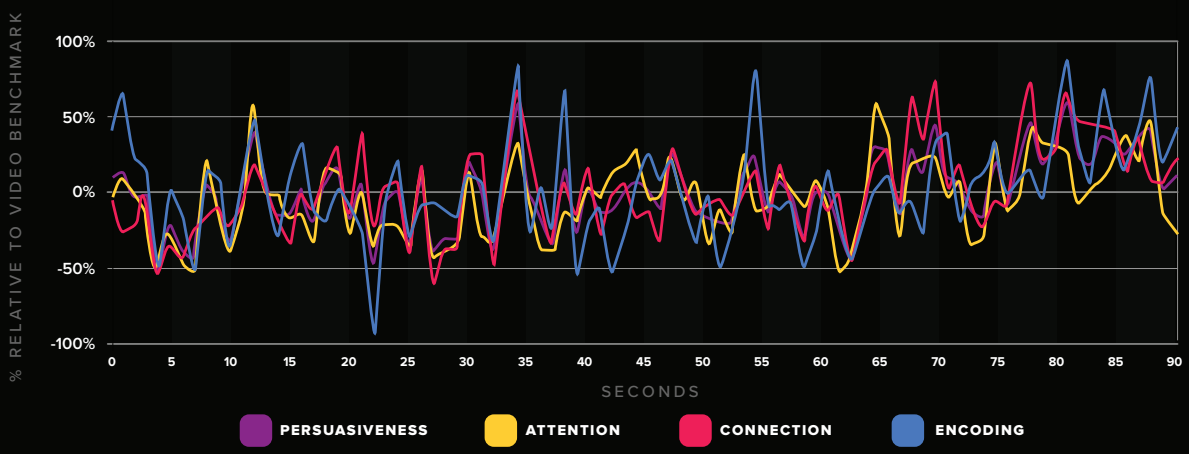
So, what do we find?

BiasTrace

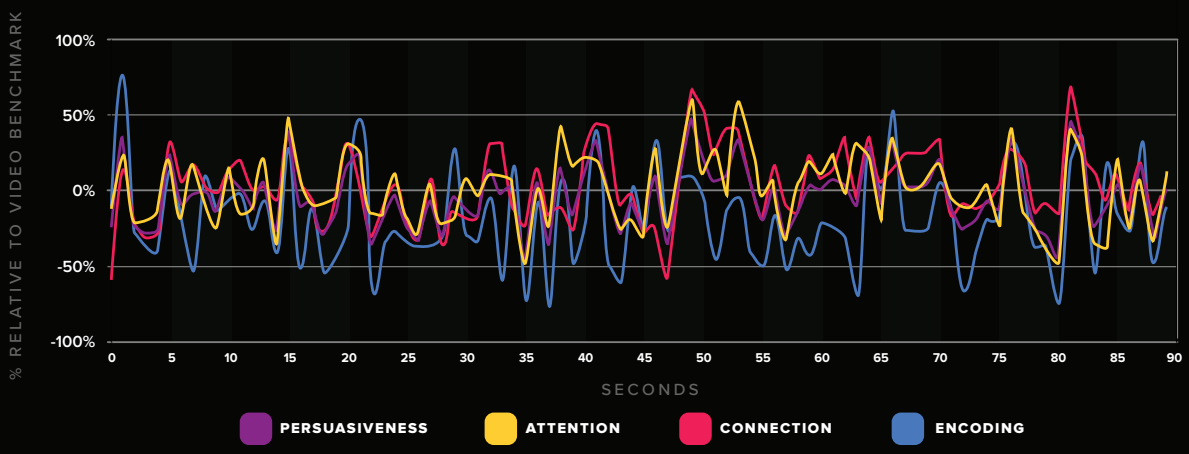
Bust Bias: VCI Drake *Laugh Now, Cry Later*



Bust Bias: VCI Nike *Can't Stop Us*



Bust Bias: VCI Nike *Mamba Forever*



In total, we found 37 seconds that prominently featured Nike in *Laugh Now, Cry Later*

Intro to Nike Headquarters

Screenshot: Drake - Laugh Now, Cry Later

Nike company store (exterior) and store shopping (interior)

Screenshot: Drake - Laugh Now, Cry Later

Nike store shopping (interior)

Screenshot: Drake - Laugh Now, Cry Later

Nike gym floor

Screenshot: Drake - Laugh Now, Cry Later

Nike store shopping (interior)

Screenshot: Drake - Laugh Now, Cry Later

Nike gym floor

Screenshot: Drake - Laugh Now, Cry Later

Nike photograph

Screenshot: Drake - Laugh Now, Cry Later

(There are certainly other moments featuring Nike less prominently, and even associations - Nike athletes Kevin Durant and Odell Beckham Junior, for starters. But again, Bust Bias-VCI provides that flexibility in case you wanted to go even deeper. For illustrative purposes, we'll use these 37 seconds)

What were the results?

By pinpointing each moment of consumer response when the Nike brand is prominently on-screen, we can isolate for the specific impact of that moment, and much better understand the underlying drivers of performance. When we take the average of all these Nike moments and compare them to the overall benchmark for each metric, this is what we find:

Better Attention

Consumers pay more Attention when Nike is on screen than not: 4% better than overall benchmarks, which is about 1% better than the overall average for *Laugh Now Cry Later*. The prominent presence of the brand, combined with whatever else is happening on screen grabs a bit more Attention than benchmark.

Average Encoding

Consumers don't Encode much more to benchmark than normal on average over these moments that Nike is prominently on screen, only about .5%, which isn't significant. Still, this is about 1% better than the *Laugh Now, Cry Later* video on the whole, so, trending in the right direction.

Further, what we do find is that there are substantial swings in this Encoding, and the very highest peak in Encoding reached in this video happened during one of these branded moments - the opening scene.

Given that this is entertainment content, we wouldn't necessarily expect Encoding to be high throughout. But because the highest point of Connection (in s2) happens at the strong moment of Encoding to Memory, it's highly likely that this video is driving a positive association between the brand and Drake.

But what's most remarkable is how these Nike brand moments impacted emotional Connection.

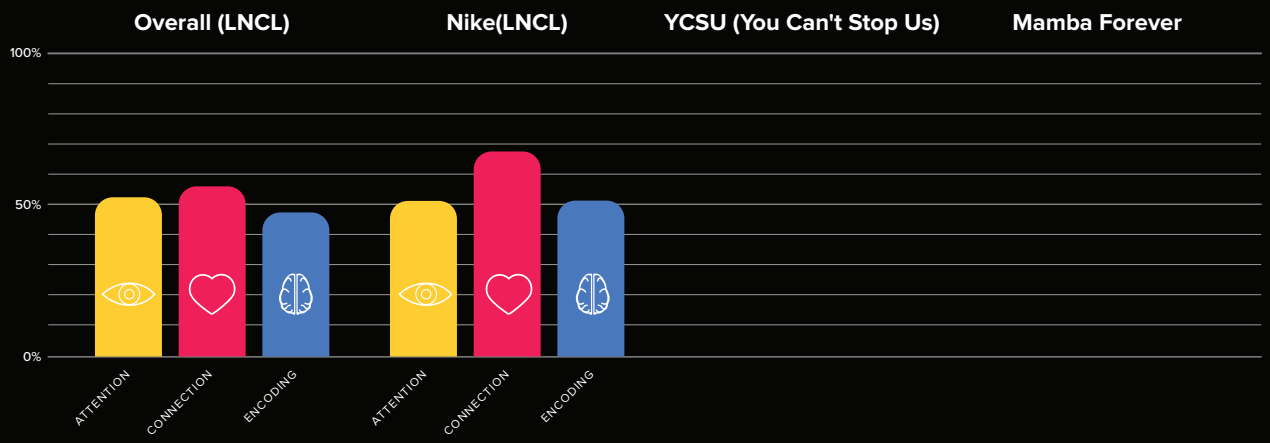
Vastly Better Connection

On average, these moments delivered a whopping +17% increase in Emotional Connection versus benchmark levels. Overall, average Connection levels were already strong for *Laugh Now Cry Later* - these branded moments delivered an incremental ten percentage points to these already strong Connection levels.

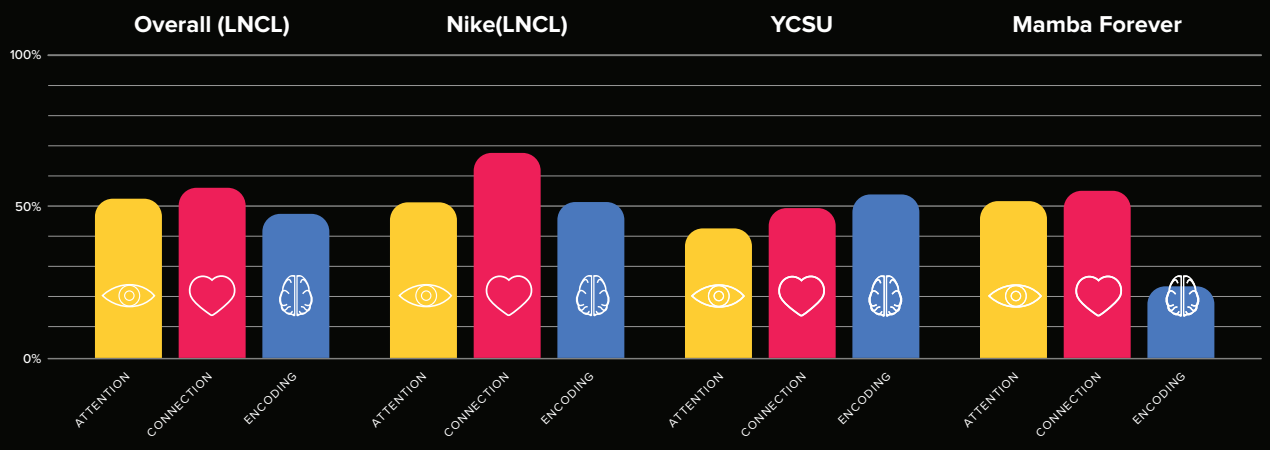
Of course, averages are but one way to look at performance, and big individual moments can have outsized influence on the overall average. So another way to look at it would be to understand the percentage of above average (benchmark) moments (seconds) for each metric for both branded moments when Nike is prominently featured, and all other moments in the music video.

So we did that. And here's what we found:

Percentage of above-average moments (seconds) as a portion of the whole



And this is what it looks like when we include the other spots:



So, slightly less moments of above average Attention during Nike branded moments versus all moments in the ad; substantially more above average moments of Connection during Nike branded moments; and more moments of above average Memory Encoding during Nike branded moments.

/// STEP 3

Pull it all together

Looking at both the overall averages and the branded moments (average performance, and share of above-average performing moments) Nike's integration with Drake proved the most impactful of the three executions. Not only does the overall 5 minute video perform better on average than *Better* | *Mamba Forever* and *You Can't Stop Us*, the Nike moments on average and/or as a share of moments, perform better than both.

It's clear that Drake and Nike benefitted from the integration in *Laugh Now Cry Later*.

Brands that can capture more Attention, elicit more emotional Connection, and Encode more of their brand to memory are much more likely to drive behaviours with consumers than those that do not. And these are building blocks - not necessarily standalone metrics. This is to say that they work best when they work together - capturing Attention, to drive emotional Connection which is then Encoded to memory.

Of course there are questions we are asking about the total ROI of this. This would involve understanding three additional variables:

1. Media delivery
2. Total ad/media investment
3. Share of sales associated with media/advertising activity

By looking at both the overall NeuroScores and the BiasTrace showing the specific moments of unconscious response across Attention, Connection, Encoding and Persuasiveness, we can clearly identify the response consumers have to the overall ad.

Or, in this case, the superior performance of Nike's integration in Drake's *Laugh Now Cry Later*.

Notes

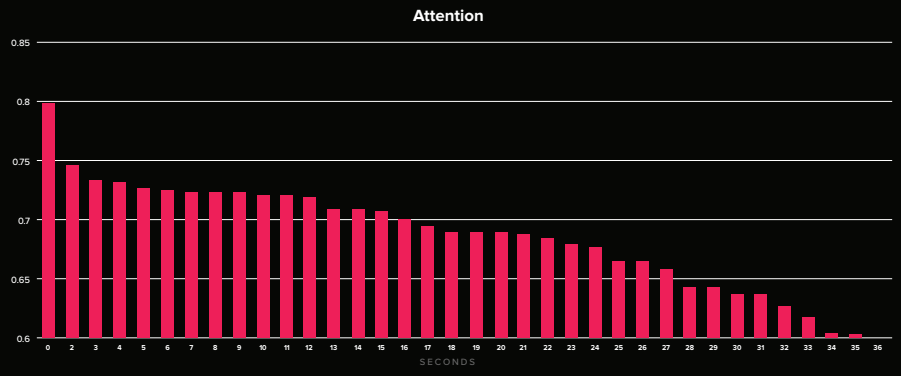
Definition of Attention

To be clear - Attention isn't defined here as the amount of time spent on something. If it was, then by virtue of the forced exposure methodology we use, Drake's *Laugh Now, Cry Later* would clearly have better Attention levels than the other two combined (300 seconds as opposed to 180 seconds)

Attention at Brainsights is derived from brain wave analysis related to how alert and turned on/tuned in one is to the stimuli presented to them, compared to the other content presented to them in a representative clutter reel of video content (which in turn comprises our benchmark).

Think of it like this - we take a one-hour sample of the video content you might consume/be exposed to in a given week. We put that in a reel that we present to people in a viewing session as they have their brain activity recorded at the millisecond level for the whole video reel. To account for any priming effects, we order the reel differently for each viewing session. We run a number of these viewing sessions. We then aggregate the responses from the sample population across each of the viewing sessions. Overall responses are averaged to understand how, on a relative basis, populations are allocating attentional resources.

Here's a graph of the distribution of Attention, by average score, as calculated by the ad's standard deviation of average brain wave activity from the mean for each ad tested in this study:



It's this same method that we use to calculate all of our metrics that populate our NeuroScores and BiasTrace. For more information on how we prepare our data and metrics, review our resource guide here.

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