

Hamas Conspiracy Theories: Personality and Demographic Correlates of Three Conspiracy Theories

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Abstract

This paper attempted to advance the Conspiracy Theory (CT) literature in two ways. First, we devised a new CT measure concerning the Hamas/Israeli conflict (H/IC), which we correlated with two other CTs: a general, and health-related CT. Second, we assessed the Dark Tetrad traits in addition to demographic, ideological, self-esteem (SE), and Just World Belief (BJW) correlates on all three CTs. All CTs maintained acceptable alphas and were highly correlated $0.46 < r < 0.83$. Psychopathology on the Tetrad measure was related to all three CTs. The correlation and regression results highlighted different factors, but clearly endorsing one CT is the strongest predictor of other CTs: evidence of a *CT mindset*. Demographic (sex, education), political beliefs, Dark Tetrad traits (Narcissism, Psychopathology) and BJWs were significant in the regression onto H/IC. Implications and limitations are acknowledged.

Keywords

Conspiracy Theory, Dark Triad, Demographics, Hamas/Israeli Conflict

1. Introduction

Since the millennium, there has been a considerable growth in the interest in conspiracy theories (CTs) (Bowes et al., 2021; Furnham, 2023; Galliford & Furnham, 2017; Pérez-Gay Juárez, et al., 2024; Pilch, 2023; Sutton & Douglas, 2020; Swami & Furnham, 2012, 2014; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017; van Prooijen et al., 2015; Walter & Drochon, 2020). This interest includes CTs about particular issues, like climate change (Douglas & Sutton, 2015) and Covid (Haakonsen & Furnham, 2023) as well as business (Furnham & Leka, 2023). These theories can be classified or categorised into particular areas/topics, like aviation, deaths and disappear-

ances, espionage, governments, medicine, science and technology. Various researchers have looked at religious conspiracy theories and the role of a person's religiousness in supporting those theories (Azeri, 2025; Robertson & Asbjørn, 2018). We developed and looked at the convergent validity of CT issues around the Hamas/Israeli conflict in this research project.

Goreis and Voracek (2019) noted that studies in the field tend to concern generic or specific CTs. They reviewed the data on individual correlates of believing in CTs, including bright and dark-side personality variables and socio-political attitudes. They noted that: "*Conspiracies appear to appeal to those who feel disconnected from society, who are unhappy or dissatisfied with their circumstances, who possess a subjective worldview that includes unusual beliefs, experiences and thoughts, and do not feel in control of their life. The endorsement of them challenges existing power structures in society. Furthermore, those with higher levels of clinically relevant traits such as paranoid thought and schizotypy endorse them*" (p. 10).

Enders et al. (2021) examined a number of CTs and found two categories: where "*the various external variables reveal two broader substantive dimensions—one dealing with left-right politics, and the other anti-social orientations and behaviours—that are largely unrelated to one another*" (p. 263). Various factors or "motives" have been suggested to explain beliefs in conspiracy theories. Douglas et al. (2019) essentially categorised these as either *epistemic* (e.g., tendency toward intuitive rather than analytic thinking), *existential* (e.g., powerlessness, anxiety, alienation), and *social* (e.g., collective narcissism).

More recently Williams et al. (2024) showed that CTs were stable over time. They noted that people developing beliefs in a succession of conspiracy theories are often characterised as falling down a "rabbit hole" and that if they do, it is typically one with a rather gradual slope.

In the present research, we attempt a highly topical study about a major international issue, namely the *Hamas/Israeli conflict* (H/IC). Most researchers in this field tend to concentrate on CTs regarding specific topics, many in medicine. Several groups have become increasingly concerned about the spread of CTs, as they relate to issues such as obedience to the law, political activities of one sort or the other, alongside pro- and anti-social behaviour. CTs are now seen as "spreading like wildfire" because of social media. This study explores a CT, which can be considered relatively new following its increase in public attention: the Hamas/Israeli Conflict.

1.1. Hamas/Israeli Conflict Conspiracy Theories

While conflict can be dated back to over half a century ago, the 7th of October 2023 events marks a pivotal point which impelled the armed conflict between Israel and Hamas in, and around, the Gaza Strip. Hamas, the Palestinian militant group, launched a surprise attack on southern Israel from the Gaza Strip. The attack elicited significant military escalation in the region, which continues. The event has

had major global ramifications, leading to demonstrations, particularly in Western countries. It continues to dominate the news, rapidly inducing numerous conspiracy theories. We decided to develop a scale to measure some of these theories, though we recognize there are many. We did this by a content analysis of the media, paying particular attention to CT-like beliefs that began appearing a month after the conflict began. We devised and piloted a short measure as there is no other measure available.

1.2. Dark-Side Correlates of CTs

There have been many studies looking at the relationship between personality variables and CTs (Stasielowicz, 2022). In this study, we were specifically fascinated by the dark-side personality correlates of the H/IC CT, along with two additional correlates. Our primary interest is the relationship between personality disorders (PDs) and CTs. Comparatively, few studies have looked at the relationship between PDs and believing in CTs. Swami et al. (2016) used the dimensional trait model of individual differences in personality disorders, included in Section III of the *DSM-5*, and found that the PID-5 facets of Unusual Beliefs, Experiences, and, to a lesser extent, Suspiciousness significantly predicted beliefs in conspiracy theories. They suggest that further exploration into the link between various disorders and CTs would improve scholars' understanding of the etiology and maintenance of CTs. In this study we examine the relationship between the four PDs and three CTs.

March and Springer (2019) examined the relationship between schizotypy, Machiavellianism, grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, and primary and secondary psychopathy in predicting beliefs in conspiracy theories. In a study of 230 Australian undergraduates, they discovered odd beliefs/magical thinking, trait Machiavellianism, and primary psychopathy were significant positive predictors of beliefs in CTs. They concluded that individuals who are more likely to believe in CTs tend to have unusual patterns of thinking and cognitions, be strategic and manipulative, and display interpersonal and affective deficits.

Furnham and Grover (2022) compared all 14 PDs and CTs; the strongest PD correlates were Schizotypal, Paranoid, and Borderline PD. This comparison also extended the literature by exploring the relationship between the PD clusters and belief in CTs. The results patently indicated that the higher-order clusters were the clearest predictors of belief in CTs. According to the literature, Cluster A is called the Odd/Eccentric cluster. It includes Paranoid Personality Disorder, Schizoid Personality Disorder, and Schizotypal Personality Disorders. The personality disorders in this cluster are dominated by distorted thinking; other common features include social awkwardness and social withdrawal. The correlations and regressions reveal Cluster A as the highest correlates of the CTs.

This study uses the Dark Tetrad, which aims to assess four traits: (1) Machiavellianism (Crafty), referring to manipulative tendencies, highly pragmatic and ethic-free, goal-oriented thinking, with a noticeable disregard and relativization

of morality. (2) Narcissism (Special), characterized by grandiosity, entitlement, domination, and a pronounced sense of personal and social superiority rooted in an unrealistic self-image. (3) Psychopathy (Wild) is associated with callousness, lack of empathy and remorse, and disinhibited social behavior. (4) Sadism (Mean) is characterized by the enjoyment of inflicting physical, sexual, or emotional pain on others, along with the tendency to try to control, humiliate, and punish other people. The central feature of the Short Dark Tetrad (SD4) is the addition of Sadism, which concerns callousness and impaired empathy. Sadistic individuals have poor behavioral control, exhibited by a short temper, irritability, and low frustration tolerance. They are hostile, manipulative, lacking in empathy, cold-hearted, and abrasive to others, particularly those they see as their inferiors. They are also cognitively rigid and prone to social intolerance and tend to seek social positions that enable them to exercise their need to control others. The trait has recently attracted a great deal of research interest (Buckels et al., 2014, 2018).

1.3. Socio-Political Beliefs

It has been argued that socio-political beliefs are often associated with CTs (Enders et al., 2024; Furnham & Leka, 2023; Hesse & Weidemann, 2025). In this study, we examine two beliefs: religious (very-not at all) and political (left-right wing). Previous studies have shown that these strongly relate to CTs (Furnham et al., 2025). We assume more religious and politically conservative people endorse all CTs, particularly the H/IC theory.

1.4. Demographic Factors

In this study, we examine three classic demographic factors: age, education, and sex. Most studies on CTs have shown significant correlates, such that females more than males, less rather than more educated, and younger rather than older people accept CTs (Furnham et al., 2025). We expected to replicate these findings with all three CTs.

1.5. The Just World

In this research, we predict that Just World Beliefs (JW) will be negatively associated with CTs. Three recent studies have documented the relationship between Unjust (rather than Just) world beliefs and general belief in CTs (Furnham 2021; Furnham et al., 2025; O'Brien et al., 2025). They found that those who believe the world is Unjust in the sense that “bad things happen to good people” are likely to believe in many CTs. The UJW belief reflects the unfairness of the world and a sense of powerlessness associated with CT beliefs.

1.6. Self-Esteem

There is evidence that general beliefs about self-esteem and self-worth are related to CTs, such that those with lower scores are more likely to be interested in CTs (Cichočka et al., 2016). We hypothesised a similar pattern in the present research.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

In total, 300 adults participated in the study; 150 stated they were women, and 150 were men. The youngest participant was 19, and the oldest was 76 ($M = 48.10$, $SD = 12.32$). Education was measured by degree status: 51% were graduates, and 49% were not. In all, 24% were single, and 48% were married. All were British nationals and were fluent in English. All were employed, working in manufacturing, health and education, IT and Finance; 45% were in managerial roles, and 55% were in technical roles.

2.2. Measures

1. *The Short Dark Tetrad* (Paulhus et al., 2020). This is a 28-item measure assessing Narcissism, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy, and Sadism. The calculated alphas in this study were *Crafty* (Machiavellianism; $\alpha = 0.80$), *Special* (Narcissism; $\alpha = 0.82$), *Wild* (Psychopathy; $\alpha = 0.75$), and *Mean* (Sadism $\alpha = 0.78$).
2. *CT measures*. There were two measures; (1) *Generic Conspiracist Beliefs Scale* (Kay & Slovic, 2023), with five items ($\alpha = 0.84$), (2) *Medical Conspiracy Theories* (Oliver & Wood, 2014), with five items ($\alpha = 0.92$).
3. *Beliefs about the Hamas/Israeli Conflict*: this was measured by ten items, derived by two researchers searching the web for related CTs and forming a list. Once a list was obtained, one aim was to see how much support/traffic surrounded each CT. The most discussed CTs were retained. Next, we made efforts to write clear, objective items. The Alpha for this scale was 0.86.
4. *Belief in a Just World* (Dalbert, 1999). This is a well-used six-item measure, which assesses belief in a just world ($\alpha = 0.83$).
5. *Self-Esteem* (Furnham & Cuppello, 2023): comprised of four other factors on a scale of 1 - 100: Physical Attractiveness ($M = 46.71$; $SD = 21.25$), Physical Health ($M = 56.96$, $SD = 22.96$), Intelligence (IQ) ($M = 68.40$, $SD = 15.22$), and Emotional Intelligence ($M = 67.00$, $SD = 18.91$). The Alpha was 0.69 for these four items, which were summed together forming a variable labelled Self-Esteem. This has been used in a number of studies as a valid measure of self-esteem (Furnham & Cuppello, 2023).
6. *Ideology*. Participants rated their beliefs on two scales: Religiousness (1 = Not at all to 9 = Very, $M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.96$), and Politics (1 = Conservative to 9 = Liberal, $M = 5.57$, $SD = 2.40$).

2.3. Procedure

The study was conducted on an online survey platform (Prolific) and began running on the 20th of February 2024, roughly four months after the conflict began. The application entry for ethical review was considered low risk due to the nature of the research project: i.e. anonymous, non-invasive questionnaires administered to healthy employed adults whose participation was entirely voluntary. Partici-

pants were paid for their participation, at the agreed rate and told that they may omit answering any question for any reason. There was very little missing data or evidence of erratic responding.

3. Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and gender differences for the ten Hamas items (6 = Strongly Agree; 1 = Strongly Disagree).

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
1) The October 7th attacks were carried out by Netanyahu as an excuse to carry out genocide on Palestinians.	Men	1.85	1.11	46.81	<0.001
	Women	2.83	1.34		
	Total	2.34	1.32		
2) The Rothschild family and associated corporations are responsible for, and funding Israel's actions in, Gaza.	Men	2.09	1.29	18.82	<0.001
	Women	2.71	1.20		
	Total	2.40	1.28		
3) Netanyahu knew about the October 7th surprise attacks before they happened.	Men	2.34	1.33	17.33	<0.001
	Women	2.99	1.36		
	Total	2.66	1.38		
4) The initial set of hostages believed to have been abducted by Hamas and taken, were kidnapped by Israeli soldiers.	Men	1.69	0.97	28.97	<0.001
	Women	2.37	1.21		
	Total	2.03	1.15		
5) Hamas created a website to document and showcase their crimes.	Men	2.87	1.36	3.81	0.05
	Women	3.15	1.18		
	Total	3.01	1.28		
6) The US was behind the October 7th attacks.	Men	1.41	0.78	28.65	<0.001
	Women	2.02	1.15		
	Total	1.72	1.03		
7) The Israel-Hamas conflict is being used as a media stunt to profit 'Western Zionist-run' media outlets.	Men	1.94	1.25	3.46	0.06
	Women	2.21	1.24		
	Total	2.07	1.25		
8) The US is reluctant to call a ceasefire in Gaza because US arms companies make \$100 million every day from the ongoing conflict.	Men	3.13	1.50	3.70	0.05
	Women	3.46	1.52		
	Total	3.29	1.52		
9) Donations allegedly going to aid civilians in Gaza is funding Hamas.	Men	2.95	1.52	0.65	0.42
	Women	2.82	1.36		
	Total	2.89	1.44		
10) Members of Hamas were trained by the Israeli military.	Men	2.05	1.09	32.01	<0.001
	Women	2.79	1.19		
	Total	2.42	1.20		

Table 2. Pearson correlations between study variables.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1) Hamas CT	2.48	0.86													
2) Gender	1.50	0.50	0.29**												
3) Age	48.10	12.33	-0.12*	-0.09											
4) Degree	1.49	0.50	0.07	0.00	0.25**										
5) Religiousness	2.32	1.96	0.05	0.08	0.06	0.00									
6) Liberalism	5.57	1.73	-0.03	0.12*	-0.21**	-0.22**	-0.16**								
7) Machiavellianism	40.45	11.23	0.12*	-0.16**	-0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.06							
8) Narcissism	24.94	11.03	0.11	-0.17**	-0.15**	-0.11*	0.103	-0.09	0.45**						
9) Psychopathy	18.15	8.96	0.20**	-0.25**	-0.06	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	0.39**	0.48**					
10) Sadism	24.93	11.95	0.10	-0.39**	-0.13*	0.06	-0.09	-0.11	0.46**	0.38**	0.65**				
11) BJW	18.93	5.52	-0.08	-0.02	-0.00	0.06	0.07	-0.27**	0.00	0.13*	-0.09	0.015			
12) Self-Evaluations	370.16	92.83	-0.16**	-0.06	-0.08	-0.12*	0.14*	-0.04	0.09	0.38**	-0.04	0.029	0.21**		
13) CT General	13.55	6.19	0.49**	0.104	-0.11	0.17**	0.04	-0.07	0.14*	0.16**	0.21**	0.14*	-0.13*	-0.101	
14) CT Health	13.67	7.68	0.46**	0.13*	0.01	0.20**	0.12*	-0.16**	0.05	0.18**	0.21**	0.058	-0.095	-0.065	0.83**

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, Gender: 1 = Male, 2 = Female; Age: in Years; Degree: 1 = Yes, 2 = No.

Table 3. Regressions of demographic and personality variables onto conspiracy theory variables.

	Hamas CT Total					CT General					CT Health				
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Std. B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Std. B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Std. B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Gender	5.15	0.93	0.299	5.55	0.001	1.93	0.74	0.16	2.62	0.009	2.67	0.90	0.17	2.97	0.003
Age	-0.04	0.04	-0.05	-0.96	0.34	-0.07	0.03	-0.14	-2.38	0.018	-0.03	0.04	-0.04	-0.68	0.495
Degree	-0.209	0.902	-0.01	-0.23	0.82	2.43	0.71	0.197	3.407	0.001	3.18	0.87	0.208	3.67	0.001
Religiousness	0.07	0.22	0.02	0.34	0.74	0.095	0.18	0.03	0.54	0.590	0.29	0.22	0.07	1.33	0.181
Liberalism	-0.106	0.27	-0.02	-0.39	0.69	-0.35	0.21	-0.097	-1.63	0.105	-0.71	0.26	-0.16	-2.74	0.007
Machiavellianism	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.74	0.46	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.79	0.431	-0.04	0.04	-0.06	-0.95	0.340
Narcissism	0.02	0.05	0.03	0.41	0.68	0.09	0.04	0.15	2.04	0.042	0.15	0.05	0.21	2.91	0.004
Psychopathy	0.09	0.07	0.09	1.26	0.21	0.09	0.06	0.13	1.59	0.110	0.19	0.07	0.22	2.83	0.005
Sadism	0.06	0.05	0.08	1.06	0.29	0.000	0.04	0.000	-0.001	0.999	-0.06	0.05	-0.096	-1.205	0.231
BJW	-0.008	0.08	-0.005	-0.10	0.92	-0.17	0.07	-0.15	-2.54	0.010	-0.197	0.08	-0.14	-2.49	0.012
Self-Evaluations	-0.01	0.005	-0.12	-2.19	0.03	-0.007	0.004	-0.11	-1.808	0.071	-0.007	0.005	-0.08	-1.34	0.183
CT General	0.38	0.13	0.27	2.99	0.00										
CT Health	0.17	0.104	0.15	1.58	0.12										
R^2 (Adjusted R^2)			0.35 (0.32)					0.16 (0.13)					0.19 (0.16)		
<i>F</i>			11.62					5.004					6.73		
<i>p</i>			<0.001					<0.001					<0.001		

Table 1 shows the items and sex differences. Two things are noticeable: first, as expected, endorsement of the items is low, only two above three on the six-point scale. Next, there were multiple significant sex differences, with females scoring higher than males on half.

Table 2 displays the correlations between the major variables. The three CTs were positively and significantly correlated, as expected. The four Tetrad scores were also positively associated. There were five significant correlates of the H/IC score: sex, age, Machiavellianism, Psychopathy and Self-Esteem. The three CT were highly correlated: $46 < r < 0.83$.

Table 3 reveals the results of the regressions. In the first regression the Hamas scale was the criterion (independent) variable. For the H/IC CT, there were three significant factors, accounting for a third of the variance. It was endorsed more by females, those with low self-esteem, and believers in General CTs. The regression was repeated without the two other CTs (General and Medical). This was significant ($F(11, 299) = 7.08, p < 0.001, \text{Adj } R^2 = 0.18$). Three variables were significant: Gender ($t = 6.36, p < 0.001$), Psychopathy ($t = 2.14, p < 0.05$), and Self-esteem ($t = 2.70, p < 0.01$).

The regression onto the General CT showed that five variables were significant, accounting for around a sixth of the variance. Gender ($t = 2.62, p < 0.01$) and education ($t = 3.41, p < 0.001$) were the strongest predictors. The regression onto the Medical CT conveyed that six variables were significant, accounting for sixteen percent of the variance. In all, six factors were significant, particularly Gender ($t = 2.97, p < 0.01$) and Education ($t = 3.67, p < 0.001$). Two of the Dark Triad measures were also significant: Narcissism and Psychopath.

4. Discussion

There has been enormous expansion in the CT literature over the past decade. One area of such research involves documenting the range of existing CTs and attempting to classify them. As new events occur, new theories arise, hence the focus of this study. One question is the similarity in their correlates: that is, are the demographic, cognitive and trait correlates of all/any CTs much the same or are they specific to various theories?

The endorsement of the three CTs was, as predicted, significantly positive supporting the “monological belief system” argument, a view stating that once an individual has adopted a conspiracist worldview, new conspiracy theories are assimilated more easily and quickly because they support that particular worldview (Goertzel, 1994; Enders et al., 2021). This suggests a CT world view, which happily integrates theories about new events into a belief system. However, it was interesting to note that the correlation between the general and health CT was effectively twice the size of the correlations with the H/IC theory.

At the time of this study (February 2024), the H/IC was worldwide news, with many global demonstrations. As is always the case, many new CTs arose around the origin and conduct of the H/IC. One issue is how rapidly CTs about a partic-

ular issue arise, peak, and then perhaps fade from consciousness, much like the CT concerning the Malaysian airline disappearance, where the cause and whereabouts of 239 passengers remain unknown (Brotherton, 2014).

The correlational analyses evidently displayed that some factors were unrelated to the endorsement of all CTs. Surprisingly, neither religion nor BJWs were significantly correlated. The explanation for the religious factor is that this research population consisted mainly of people with no religion or strict beliefs. In this study the mean score on a nine-point scale was 2.32 ($SD = 1.96$) indicating that the vast majority were agnostics or atheists. Given that this CT is particularly related to religion this may account for the fact that variables was not significant in either the correlations or regression. However, as Enders et al., (2024) also showed usually left-right political orientations are not systematically related to conspiracism. Similarly, Hesse and Weidemann, (2025) argued the relationship between religious beliefs and CTs was highly complex and the simple measure of religious beliefs in this study may have been too restricting.

Equally, it was surprising that political beliefs were unrelated to the H/IC CT. There has been a great deal of interest and research on the relationship between political beliefs and CTs (Imhoff et al. 2022; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). A possible reason for this is that this issue is not central to the beliefs or consciousness of the predominantly non-religious European sample used in this study, though this may have changed over the period since this data was collected.

In the correlational results, four factors were significantly associated with the endorsement of the H/IC CT. It indicated that younger more than older, females more than males, and those who scored higher on Machiavellianism and Psychopathy tended to endorse the new CT. When the regression included the other CTs, it showed that sex, General CTs, and self-esteem accounted for a third of the variance. However, upon removing the other CTs, Psychopathy became significant. Indeed, Psychopathy correlated with the endorsement of all three CTs. This might be a consequence of the worldview maintained by those scoring high on this dimension; that is, they see others as anti-social, competitive, and as selfish as they are.

The role of self-esteem/evaluation was interesting. It aligned with previous research in that lower scores related to more support of H/IC CT. It has been suggested that Conspiracy Theorists are generally social outsiders who often feel powerless and alienated, which no doubt leads to them having lower self-esteem (Swami & Furnham, 2014). However, it is intriguing to note that self-esteem did not significantly correlate with the other two CTs.

There are notable consistencies and inconsistencies in the regression results for the three different CTs. The only consistently significant variable was sex. For the Health and General CTs, education, Narcissism and the BJW were significant, indicating that less well-educated people with higher Narcissism were more likely to endorse these two CTs. As predicted, those more likely to Believe the World is Just did not endorse either theory.

In all, six factors were significant in the regression on Health CTs, accounting for a fifth of the variance. Results align with hypotheses and previous research, indicating that females more than males, less rather than better educated, politically conservative rather than liberal, those scoring higher on Narcissism and Psychopathy, and those less likely to Believe the World is Just are more likely to endorse Health CTs.

Sceptics and cynics might ask, “Why yet another study” on yet another “new” conspiracy theory? What does this study and those similar offer the research in this field? First, the study partly supported the conspiracist worldview idea that people are happy to accept and integrate any and all new CTs into their mindset. The question is, which theories are totally or even partly, accepted and which are rejected? It may be that a function of particular theories interests them more than others. Thus, a new Medical CT may be more easily integrated than a CT surrounding a new event with an entirely new function. Further research would be beneficial to deliver some insight into the abovementioned questions.

As ever, this study had limitations particularly in what we did not know about the participants such as their particular religious and political beliefs, as well as their interest in knowledge about the conflict. Ideally we would have had a larger, more representative sample, and more comprehensive measures of their religious and political beliefs.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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