

Innovative Role-Play Strategies in Business Ethics Education: The ChatGPT Approach

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Abstract

ChatGPT, a chatbot representing generative artificial intelligence (AI), has rapidly gained transformative power in various areas since its launch in late 2022. This paper explores the innovative integration of ChatGPT in teaching business ethics, contrasting it with traditional role-play methodologies. Utilizing existing role-play learning activity designs, we provide a comparative analysis of these approaches based on the four key pillars identified by Boud & Prosser (2002), which include learner engagement, acknowledgment of the learning context, learner challenge, and practical involvement. Additionally, we analyze the “simulation triad” of time, group dynamics, and environment to evaluate the efficiency of the GPT-powered learning design, as presented by Wills et al. (2011). Our analysis reveals that ChatGPT in business ethics education offers a novel approach to learning, effectively breaking through traditional boundaries while cultivating an enriched, accessible learning experience. We suggest that a hybrid model, which combines the strengths of both traditional and GPT-enhanced methods, is the optimal approach for comprehensive ethics education in the business field.

Keywords: role-play, ethics education, generative AI, ChatGPT

1. Introduction

In late 2022, ChatGPT emerged as a chatbot and rapidly gained 1 million users within five days (Altman, 2022). Powered by a large language model and reinforced learning with human feedback technology, it has sparked a new wave of research in generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) (OpenAI, 2023). This AI capability possesses the potential to transform traditional methods in various tasks, ranging from storytelling and data analysis to programming (Cheng et al., 2023; Lucy & Bamman, 2021; Nascimento et al., 2023). However, its most significant impact is observed in higher education, where it is considered a disruptive technology. This impact extends from redesigning assessments to addressing issues of plagiarism and academic integrity (Lo, 2023).

2. Literature Review

In the field of education, the contributions of ChatGPT have been widely discussed, particularly its ability to enhance teaching and learning by incorporating active learning elements, such as generating diverse scenarios for group work (Rudolph et al., 2023). Some research approaches this from a multidisciplinary perspective and educational applications are discussed within specific disciplinary settings, such as science, media, and engineering education (Dwivedi et al., 2023). In business disciplines, studies have explored areas like information systems, entrepreneurship, and management (Bell & Bell, 2023; Ratten & Jones, 2023; Van Slyke et al., 2023). This paper aims to investigate active learning in teaching business ethics, focusing specifically on strategies to enhance scenario simulations.

The importance of ethics for emerging business leaders has become increasingly evident, particularly in the wake of numerous high-profile corporate scandals in recent decades. These events highlight the critical need for a strong foundation in business ethics education (Collins & Wartick, 1995). All business leaders are regularly faced with making sound decisions. Although the definition of ethics varies across disciplines, Mellon et al. (2021) specifically address industry-specific definitions in management and accounting.

The unique challenges of teaching ethics, including the need for students to confront real-life ethical dilemmas, make role-play an invaluable pedagogical tool. Role-play has long been recognized as a valuable tool for engaging students (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). In business-specific areas, role-play is used to teach active learning skills, fostering

communication and discussion in entrepreneurial course settings (Fioravanti et al., 2022). Additionally, it has been employed to simulate moral dilemmas in economic decision-making (Widyasari, 2020). With technological advancements, Boud & Prosser (2002) have developed a framework to ensure that quality learning activities include role-play, effectively engage learners, acknowledge the context, challenge the learners, and involve them in practical applications. Wills et al. (2011) expanded this framework to online settings, adopting the “simulation triad”, which represents three dimensions of learning design: time, group, and environment, to optimize the functionality of technology in education.

In today’s rapidly evolving business environment, where ethical dilemmas are increasingly complex, there is a pressing need for innovative educational approaches that go beyond the traditional boundaries. This leads us to explore ChatGPT’s potential in this context. As an advanced large language model, ChatGPT offers unique opportunities to revolutionize online learning tools, making ethical education more dynamic and accessible. This study aims to illustrate how ChatGPT can effectively contribute to simulated teaching activities, offering a learning experience that surpasses the conventional limits of time, group dynamics, and environment.

3. Method

In this paper, we primarily adopt the role-play scenario as highlighted by Widyasari (2020). The case study can be generalized to any ethical dilemma in business. For instance, the selected topic could revolve around whether a company should prioritize corporate social responsibility over short-term revenue. However, this approach can be applied to a range of ethical dilemmas in business situations.

3.1 Traditional Classroom Role-Play Structure

In the traditional classroom setting, students engage in role-play debates following these steps.

3.1.1 Sample Size, Power, and Precision

In a traditional classroom setting, students are assigned different roles: ‘Yes’ (for the position), ‘No’ (against the position), or ‘Neutral’ (evaluating the situation and voting). An equal number of students are assigned to the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ positions, with an odd number representing the ‘Neutral’ group, who act as the public and voting body.

3.1.2 Presentation and Debate

After the teacher presents the case, the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ teams engage in a debate. This includes presenting key arguments one by one and exercising rebuttals. The ‘Neutral’ group listens to both teams and has the opportunity to elaborate or seek opinions from both sides.

3.1.3 Voting and Conclusion

Following the debate, the ‘Neutral’ team votes. With their odd number, they decide whether they are more convinced by the ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ team’s arguments. The teacher or moderator concludes the round of discussion, provides suggestions and feedback, and maintains a scorecard system to track the outcomes.

3.2 ChatGPT-powered “Ethical Dilemma Debate Simulator” Structure

To replicate traditional role-play in business ethics, we have developed a ChatGPT chatbot specifically for role-play simulations, featuring prompts for a variety of scenarios. By using the latest GPT-4.0, users can customize a ChatGPT for specific tasks and topics. Access to this feature is available to GPT Plus and Enterprise users via chat.openai.com/create. On the ‘Create’ tab, users can input prompts into the GPT builder messenger to initiate the construction of their customized GPT. After the initial setup, users can further tailor the bot’s actions using prompts and subsequently publish their GPT for broader access.

3.2.1 Prompt for Role-Play Creation

“Please create a role-play game addressing a business ethics case dilemma, such as whether a company should prioritize Corporate Social Responsibility or short-term revenue. Allow users to select from ‘Yes’, ‘No’, or ‘Neutral’ positions.”

3.2.2 Inclusion of Simulator Participants

“Integrate two simulated participants, John and Jane, who will assume any unassigned roles. In this game, there are three participants: the user, John, and Jane, each taking a ‘Yes’, ‘No’, or ‘Neutral’ position.”

3.2.3 Debate Process and Scoring Mechanism

“Once positions are confirmed, the debate begins. The ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ parties will present their arguments, and the ‘Neutral’ participant can seek additional information or provide elaboration. This is followed by a rebuttal phase. Subsequently, the ‘Neutral’ participant decides which team, ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, is more convincing. The winning team is awarded +10 points, the losing team receives -10 points, and the ‘Neutral’ participant is allocated 0 points. At the end of each discussion round, participants are encouraged to provide reflections and summaries. Additionally, a scorecard will be kept to track points throughout the game.”

4. Results

In the results section, we test the performance of the GPT. The online simulator “Ethical Dilemma Debate Simulator” is designed for real-time interaction and fully replicates the traditional classroom setting. Now functional at any time, students have the option to actively engage as debaters to score points, or they can choose to be observers, evaluating and judging the proceedings based on their insights.

Upon entering the simulator, the GPT will greet the students as shown in Figure 1, which illustrates the initial phase of the ethical dilemma simulation, showcasing the GPT Opening Statement where the AI introduces the debate topic and sets the stage for the discussion.

Welcome to the Ethical Dilemma Debate Simulator. Today’s topic is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). As the user, you can choose your stance on the following statement: “Corporations should prioritize social responsibility over profits.” Please select ‘Yes’, ‘No’, or ‘Neutral’ as your stance.

Once you’ve selected your stance, John and Jane will be assigned the remaining stances, and the debate will commence. Remember, the ‘Neutral’ participant has the role of deciding the winning stance at the end of the debate. The scoring system will award +10 points to the winner and deduct -10 points from the loser. Your current cumulative score will also be updated based on the outcome.

Please select your stance to proceed.

Figure 1. GPT Opening Statement

If the student selects ‘Neutral’, the GPT will start the debate and provide the simulation shown in Figure 2, highlighting the interactive exchange between participants and the AI in a simulated ethical debate scenario.

Great, you've chosen the 'Neutral' stance. This means you will be the judge of the debate. John will argue 'Yes', supporting the idea that corporations should prioritize social responsibility over profits, and Jane will argue 'No', opposing this view.

Opening Statements:

John (Yes): "Corporations, as integral parts of society, have a moral obligation to prioritize social responsibility. This includes environmental stewardship, fair labor practices, and ethical business operations. Prioritizing CSR not only benefits society but also enhances a corporation's long-term sustainability and reputation, which can lead to increased profits in the long run."

Jane (No): "While CSR is important, a corporation's primary responsibility is to its shareholders. This means prioritizing profits, which are essential for business growth, shareholder returns, and economic stability. Over-emphasizing CSR can divert resources from core business activities, potentially harming the company's financial health and its ability to invest in sustainable growth."

Discussion Points:

1. Impact on Profitability: Does focusing on CSR negatively impact a corporation's profitability, or can it enhance it in the long term?
2. Stakeholder Expectations: How do the expectations of different stakeholders (like shareholders, employees, and customers) influence a corporation's approach to CSR?
3. Regulatory Compliance vs. Voluntary Initiatives: Should corporations go beyond mere compliance with legal requirements in their CSR efforts?
4. Global Perspectives: How does the emphasis on CSR vary across different cultures and economic systems?

As the neutral judge, you can ask questions, request clarifications, or direct the flow of the debate. When you're ready to hear the closing arguments and make your decision, just let me know. Let's begin the debate!

Figure 2. GPT Debate Simulation

The student can then seek further clarification on discussion points 1, 2, 3, 4, or any points they nominate. For example, if the student chooses '1. Impact on Profitability', the GPT's response will be further illustrated in Figure 3. The further clarification demonstrates how the AI facilitates deeper understanding by elaborating on complex ethical issues.

John (Yes): “Investing in CSR can positively impact a corporation’s profitability in the long run. Consumers are increasingly favoring companies that are socially responsible, which can lead to higher sales and brand loyalty. Moreover, CSR initiatives can lead to operational efficiencies, like reduced waste and energy costs, and can attract and retain talented employees who share these values. These factors contribute to a strong, sustainable profit margin over time.”

Jane (No): “While CSR can have some positive effects, it’s important to recognize that these initiatives often come with high costs. Implementing environmentally friendly technologies or maintaining high labor standards can be expensive, which might reduce short-term profitability. This can be particularly challenging for smaller businesses or those in highly competitive markets. The primary goal of a corporation should be profitability, as this ensures business survival and shareholder returns.”

Your Role as Neutral Judge: As the neutral judge, you can now reflect on these points, ask further questions, or delve deeper into the topic. Do you agree with John’s view that CSR can enhance long-term profitability through consumer loyalty and operational efficiencies? Or do you find Jane’s argument more convincing, that the cost of CSR initiatives can negatively impact short-term profits? Your questions or comments can steer the debate towards a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of CSR on profitability.

Figure 3. GPT Further Clarification

If the student votes for John, the conclusion will be drawn by GPT, as demonstrated in Figure 5. This figure showcases the scorecard and provides a summary of the case.

You’ve decided to award the win to John for his argument supporting the view that corporations should prioritize social responsibility over profits, particularly noting his points about the long-term benefits of CSR on profitability.

Scoring Update:

- John: +10 points
- Jane: -10 points

John’s argument emphasized the positive long-term impact of CSR initiatives on a corporation’s profitability, such as through consumer loyalty and operational efficiencies. This perspective resonated with your

Figure 5. GPT Closing Remarks

Students also have the option to actively participate as debaters in the simulation. For instance, if a student selects the ‘Yes’ position, GPT will accordingly modify the opening statement, as shown in Figure 6. The AI will reiterate the chosen positions and assist in guiding the student’s input for the debate, including providing clarification and facilitating rebuttals.

Great, you've chosen the 'Yes' stance, supporting the idea that corporations should prioritize social responsibility over profits. In this debate, Jane will argue 'No', opposing this view, and John will take on the role of the 'Neutral' judge who will decide the winning argument.

Your Opening Statement (Yes): As the advocate for the 'Yes' stance, your argument could focus on the importance of corporations playing a positive role in society. This can include points like:

1. **Long-Term Sustainability:** Argue that prioritizing social responsibility can lead to long-term sustainability for businesses. This might involve discussing how ethical practices can build customer loyalty and trust, which are crucial for long-term success.
2. **Corporate Reputation:** Emphasize the importance of a good reputation in today's market, where consumers and employees are increasingly valuing socially responsible companies.
3. **Social and Environmental Impact:** Highlight the significant impact corporations can have on social and environmental issues, stressing the moral obligation of businesses to contribute positively to society.
4. **Financial Performance:** You might also argue that CSR can positively influence financial performance by attracting investors who are looking for socially responsible companies.

Jane's Opening Statement (No): Jane will present arguments focusing on why corporations should prioritize profits, such as the importance of financial stability, shareholder obligations, and the idea that profitability allows for more effective CSR initiatives.

Debate Structure:

- You and Jane will present your arguments.
- John, as the neutral judge, can ask questions or seek clarifications.
- Each side will have a chance to provide a closing statement.
- John will decide the winner based on the arguments presented.

Figure 6. GPT-Modified Opening Statement for 'Yes' Position in Debate Simulation

After the student compiles their argument, the chatbot proceeds to simulate multiple rounds of debate. The student will be prompted to structure their contributions in the standard debate format, which includes entering arguments, rebuttals, and closing statements. In the process, GPT will simulate the role of the counter-arguing debater. Based on the quality of the student's arguments, GPT will assume the role of the judge and determine the winner, as illustrated in Figure 7.

Jane (No) - Closing Statement: “While CSR is important, we must remember that a business’s ability to continue its operations and contribute to society fundamentally depends on its profitability. Investors, although increasingly conscious of CSR, ultimately seek returns on their investments. Balancing CSR with profitability is essential, but the latter cannot be compromised. Companies can be socially responsible and profitable, but the primary focus should remain on financial health and growth.”

John (Neutral Judge) - Decision: “This has been a thought-provoking debate. On one side, we have the argument emphasizing the importance of CSR for long-term sustainability and changing investor preferences. On the other, the essential role of profitability and the feasibility of a balanced approach is highlighted. After considering both arguments, I find the ‘Yes’ stance more compelling. The argument that businesses need to prioritize CSR alongside profitability to ensure their long-term survival and appeal to a broader range of modern investors resonates strongly with the current business climate.”

Result:

- You (Yes): +10 points for arguing effectively that CSR is integral to a business’s long-term sustainability and appealing to modern investor sensibilities.
- Jane (No): -10 points for the counterargument focusing on profitability as the primary business goal.

Thank you for participating in this debate. Your insights and arguments were essential in exploring the complex relationship between CSR and profitability. If you’d like to start another debate on a different topic or have any other questions, feel free to let me know!

Figure 7. GPT’s Announcement of Debate Winner and Closing Statements

5. Discussion

We compare the advantages and disadvantages of online GPT-enhanced and traditional role-play in terms of the four pillars of quality learning design as presented by Boud & Prosser (2002) and the triad framework outlined by Wills et al. (2011). Boud & Prosser (2002) highlight four key areas to ensure learning activities provide an opportunity to build upon experience and set expectations, as depicted in Figure 8. These areas involve introducing the activity for the application of knowledge, initiating the activity with challenges and simulations of peers, involving peer review, and concluding with feedback and practical reflection.

As students address the same issue in both in-person classes and the online GPT-enhanced setting, we consider the pillar of acknowledging the context to be quite similar in both approaches. Therefore, our discussion focuses more on the other three pillars: engaging the learner, challenging the learner, and involving them in practical application. A side-by-side detailed comparison of each key aspect is summarized in Table 1. Typically, in traditional settings, students engage in physical presence, face-to-face interactions, and select one of the debate positions. In contrast, the GPT-powered learning bot enables real-time interaction and the construction of scenarios influenced by prior responses, offering flexibility to assume multiple roles. Unlike in the classroom, where it is usually the teacher who moderates the discussion, with the GPT-powered bot, students can simulate various roles, representing multiple scenarios.



Figure 8. Influences on High Quality Learning (Boud & Prosser, 2002)

Table 1. Traditional vs. GPT-Enhanced Settings in Quality Learning Design

Aspects	Traditional Setting	GPT-Enhanced Setting
Identifying and Building upon Learner Intentions	Direct discussion and feedback during class.	Personalized AI prompts based on learner inputs and interests.
Prior Experience and Understanding	Instructor gauges and adapts to student understanding in real-time.	AI adapts to user input, recognizing and building upon users' language and conceptual understanding.
Experiencing Concepts in Varied Ways	Group discussions, individual reflections.	Interactive scenarios with varied ethical dilemmas.
Peer Engagement and Feedback	Face-to-face peer interaction and feedback.	Digital forums and real-time peer interaction online.
Formal Assessment Facilitating Engagement	In-class tests and debates.	Online quizzes and scenario-based assessments.
Reflecting and Integrating Learning	Classroom discussions and reflective essays.	AI-facilitated summaries and reflection prompts.
Affective Engagement and Personal Link	Relatable case studies and group activities.	Customizable scenarios reflecting personal interests.
Student Control Over Engagement	Choice in debate positions and topics.	Options to choose roles, scenarios, and levels of participation.
Questioning Knowledge and Experience	Socratic method and critical discussions.	AI-driven probing questions and scenario variations.
Awareness of Knowledge Limits	Debates and exploration of case study complexities.	Exposure to diverse viewpoints and ethical challenges.
Going Beyond Provided Resources	Encouragement of independent research and inquiry.	Links to external resources and prompts for further exploration.
Self-Directed Learning	Assignments that require independent planning and assessment.	AI suggestions for self-guided learning paths.

Articulating and Demonstrating Learning	Presentations and group discussions.	Interactive role-play scenarios and digital presentations.
Availability of Appropriate Feedback	Immediate instructor and peer feedback.	Real-time AI feedback and peer interaction online.
Discerning and Applying Standards	Rubrics and exemplars provided by the instructor.	AI-generated examples and performance metrics.
Exposure to Practice Models	Analysis of past case studies and role models.	Simulated scenarios demonstrating ideal ethical practices.

In traditional classroom settings, students typically concentrate on a single problem or debate question. Group activities may require several rounds of discussion, often taking substantial time to cover multiple topics. In the GPT-enhanced setting, students can move to the next topic as soon as they are ready, allowing for a more personalized learning journey. The traditional challenge for learners often employs the Socratic method, stimulating discussion through questions. In contrast, AI-enhanced learning not only facilitates questioning but also exposes students to varied scenarios through AI-generated probing questions, providing additional resources and avenues for exploration tailored to their interests.

From the perspective of practice involvement, traditional settings enable teachers to provide feedback using marking rubrics. AI-enhanced learning tools such as GPT, can serve as a moderator or peer, aiding students in reflecting on the context of their learning. While students can receive feedback from several peers on aspects like oral presentation skills and body language, these are elements that GPT currently cannot assess. Although GPT can bolster students' confidence as they prepare for real debates, it does not replace the detailed feedback possible through human interaction.

We further compare the efficiency of the GPT-powered learning design by employing the “simulation triad” of time, group dynamics, and environment as described by Wills et al. (2011). The triad framework, depicted in Figure 9, represents three crucial dimensions in learning design. The first dimension, time, is primarily concerned with the response time expected from learners. The second dimension, group dynamics, examines how technology influences peer review processes and the provision of constructive feedback. The third dimension, environment, is regarded as critical for enabling participation.

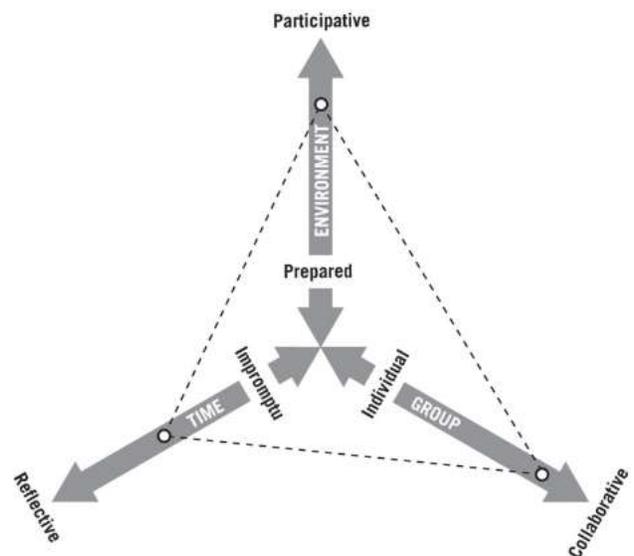


Figure 9. Three Dimensions of Technology Role-based Learning (Wills et al., 2011)

In traditional settings, response time is highly dependent on class schedules and meeting times. Engaging in discussion, conducting research, and listening to others' responses often makes time a limiting factor, as activities need to conclude by the end of class time. In contrast, in the GPT-enhanced setting, responses occur in real-time, providing flexibility for participants to engage in debate at times and for durations that suit them. Students can pause and resume conversations later, thus diminishing the impact of strict time constraints associated with traditional settings.

Regarding group dynamics, traditional settings typically encourage face-to-face interaction and collaborative learning experiences for learners. In such environments, group dynamics are directly observable. Conversely, the GPT-enhanced setting promotes virtual interactions that tend to support a more individualized learning experience. Although it can include multiple learners connected asynchronously from different locations, the absence of in-person interaction may challenge the development of team dynamics, possibly resulting in reduced peer-to-peer interaction.

In terms of environmental considerations, traditional debate settings require a physical space, usually a classroom, which often helps build a sense of community among students. In contrast, the GPT-enhanced setting exists within a virtual environment, which offers greater flexibility as it does not require a physical location. This shift focuses more on content learning rather than on developing interpersonal interactions in a tangible setting, often resulting in a diminished sense of community, a finding echoed by Wills (2012) in the study on online learning environments.

6. Limitations

While our study offers valuable insights into the comparison between GPT-enhanced settings and traditional classroom discussions in business ethics education, it's important to recognize its limitations. The online simulator was used as an elective tool alongside traditional classroom settings, and data from post-simulator engagement surveys have yet to be collected. We also acknowledge the need for careful design in future research to gather empirical data, especially regarding human perceptions and interactions, while considering ethical and psychological factors. Assessing the effectiveness of educational methods, particularly in terms of their long-term impact on students' ethical decision-making skills and behaviors, presents a significant challenge. To address this, our forthcoming research will focus on collecting data related to learning outcomes, student engagement, and the development of critical thinking skills among participants. This study serves as an initial exploration of GPT-powered simulators in ethics education, laying the groundwork for further research and expansion in this area.

7. Conclusion

This paper provides a comprehensive exploration of traditional and GPT-enhanced settings in the context of a business ethics debate simulator. We have developed the GPT-powered "Ethical Dilemma Debate Simulator". Through our analysis, we compared the detailed approaches of traditional debate settings and GPT-enhanced settings in engaging the learner, acknowledging the context, challenging the learner, and involving them in practice. We also analyzed the three critical dimensions of learning design in a technology setting: time, group dynamics, and environment, to assess their impact on the learning experience.

Our findings indicate that while traditional settings excel in facilitating direct, face-to-face interactions and a sense of community, they are often constrained by time and physical space. On the other hand, GPT-enhanced settings, leveraging the latest advancements in AI, offer unparalleled flexibility in terms of time and environment. This setting allows for a more individualized learning experience and the ability to engage with the learning material asynchronously, catering to the diverse schedules and locations of learners.

However, it is essential to note that the virtual interactions in GPT settings, while versatile, do not fully replicate the peer-to-peer dynamics and community feel of a traditional classroom. While GPT-enhanced learning tools show great promise in enriching educational experiences, especially in terms of accessibility and adaptability to individual learning needs, they should be viewed as complementary to, rather than replacements for, traditional methods.

In conclusion, the future of educational activities, especially in the field of business ethics, will hinge on a carefully designed balance between traditional and AI-enhanced methodologies. This balanced approach can leverage the strengths of both worlds: the sense of community and collaboration found in traditional settings, and the flexibility and personalization capabilities offered by GPT-powered environments. As educators and institutions navigate this evolving educational landscape, it will be important to continuously assess and adapt these tools, ensuring an optimized learning experience for students in diverse contexts.

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Not Applicable

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