The Accessibility Landscape of Co-Creative AI Systems: Analysis, Insights and Recommendations

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Abstract

Recent advancements in generative AI tools have brought human-AI co-creativity to the forefront of mainstream culture. However, designing co-creative systems that are accessible and inclusive for all users, regardless of their physical abilities or disabilities, remains a significant research challenge. Understanding the accessibility considerations of existing co-creative AI systems—an often overlooked aspect in the co-creativity domain—is essential for identifying trends, gaps, and opportunities to create more inclusive, human-centered co-creative AI. This paper examines the accessibility features of 26 co-creative AI systems and presents findings from the analysis. The results provide valuable insights into common accessibility issues across these systems and suggest strategies for developing more accessible and humane AI systems for co-creation, laying the foundation for future research in this area.

Keywords

Co-Creative AI, Gen AI, Accessibility, Analysis, Accessibility Analysis

1. Introduction

In recent years, the adoption and development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) have grown significantly, with human-AI co-creativity emerging as a key area of interest. This concept represents a form of hybrid intelligence, where humans and AI collaborate on creative tasks [1], producing outcomes that surpass what either could achieve independently [2]. The rise of accessible generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT [3], Midjourney [4], and GitHub Copilot [5], has further fueled public interest, bringing human-AI co-creativity into the mainstream. These tools are now widely utilized across various creative domains, including image generation, text generation, music composition, coding, and design. The effectiveness of co-creative AI is shaped by the users' diverse social, cultural, and demographic backgrounds, including factors like disabilities [6]. As a result, designing human-centered co-creative AI systems requires addressing the expectations and preferences of a wide range of users, ensuring inclusivity [7]. With the increasing relevance and adoption of these systems, it is important to ensure these systems are accessible [7], enabling individuals with disabilities to fully engage with and benefit from them.

Accessibility is a crucial factor in technology, ensuring that individuals, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, can use digital systems effectively and efficiently [8]. The rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools has fundamentally changed how people approach information retrieval and content creation across various contexts. Researchers in the human-

Joint Proceedings of the ACM IUI Workshops 2025, March 24-27, 2025, Cagliari, Italy

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computer interaction (HCI) field have explored the challenges faced by people with disabilities in using AI technologies [9], and how these technologies can sometimes perpetuate biases against disabled individuals [10]. Amid the rapid expansion of GenAI tools in creative fields, many individuals with disabilities have embraced co-creative AI systems, utilizing these technologies to enrich their creative endeavors [11]. However, despite significant commercial and public attention towards the promises of GenAI, we know significantly less about the accessibility practices and considerations across various domains of co-creative AI due to a lack of research in this area. Bridging these gaps is important to ensuring co-creative systems are inclusive as these tools become increasingly mainstream.

Motivated by the research gap, this paper investigates the accessibility of 26 co-creative AI systems to better understand the current landscape of accessibility considerations and gaps in generative AI tools for co-creation. We conducted both automated and manual testing to assess accessibility. For automated testing, we used the Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool (WAVE) [12], which identifies accessibility issues on web pages. Manual testing focused on evaluating keyboard navigation and screen reader compatibility using a free screen reader, NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access) [13]. Our findings reveal that many of these systems fail to meet basic accessibility standards, with critical issues hindering their usability for people with disabilities. These results highlight significant areas for improvement in the development of human-centered and inclusive co-creative AI technologies. Drawing from these insights, we offer design recommendations to enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of co-creative AI, laying the foundation for future research in this field.

2. Related Works

2.1. Co-Creative AI and Accessibility

In co-creative systems, humans and AI contribute as partners in the creative process [1], distinguished from autonomous creative systems which generate creative products independently, and creativity support tools which support human creativity [14]. Liapis et al. [2] argued that creativity arising from human-AI interaction transcends the creativity of either party. The role of co-creative AI shifts from being a sole decision-maker to a more complex entity, depending on the nature of the collaboration [15]. As AI increasingly takes on roles akin to social entities, the ethical and value-based considerations surrounding these interactions become even more pressing and complex [16]. The rapid advancements in AI technologies amplify the challenge of ensuring that AI behaviors align with diverse user values and needs [17].

Meurisch et al. [18] highlighted that human factors, including disabilities, influence users' expectations and perceptions of AI systems. However, many current GenAI systems are inaccessible to people with disabilities, underscoring the need for a fundamental shift in design practices [19]. Despite the growing body of literature on GenAI, there has been relatively little focus on the implications for people with disabilities [20]. Notably, Glazko et al. [9] conducted a study within a team of researchers, both with and without disabilities, demonstrating how they used GenAI to create accessibility for themselves and others, and how existing tools sometimes failed in this regard. Researchers also investigated disability representation in GenAI and found biases and stereotypes in GenAI responses [21, 22, 23]. As GenAI becomes more prevalent in

co-creative environments, it is crucial to increase the accessibility of these co-creative systems to ensure they are inclusive and beneficial for all users [7]. However, research on human-AI co-creativity has given limited attention to accessibility concerns.

There are few studies that specifically focused on the accessibility aspects of generative AI-based creative content generation. For instance, Adnin and Das [20] interviewed 19 blind individuals to explore how they use and perceive GenAI systems. Das et al. [24] investigated the accessibility of AI-generated images, particularly in terms of alternative text descriptions. Palmer and Oswal [25] examined the accessibility of websites created using generative AI tools. Huh et al. [26] developed a system to enhance text-to-image generation for blind users by providing detailed descriptions of AI-generated images and offering options to verify if generated images align with user prompts. Current research on GenAI-driven digital accessibility largely focus on visual impairments, leaving significant gaps in addressing other disabilities such as speech and hearing impairments [19]. Moreover, there is a lack of studies focused on identifying trends and gaps in the accessibility standards of existing generative AI systems within co-creative contexts.

2.2. Web Accessibility

Web accessibility is the practice of creating websites and web-based digital content that can be used by everyone, regardless of their abilities or disabilities [27]. It can lead to better search engine optimization, increased usability, and compliance with legal requirements such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) [28]. Implementing web accessibility not only benefits users with disabilities but also improves the overall user experience for all users [29]. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), serve as the primary standard for web accessibility [30]. WCAG provides three levels of conformance: Level A (Basic accessibility requirements), Level AA (Addresses common barriers and is the standard for most websites), and Level AAA (The highest level of accessibility).

The most effective approach to assess web accessibility involves a combination of both automated tools and manual testing [31]. Automated tools can quickly identify certain issues, while manual testing by experts and users with disabilities provides insights into real-world nuanced usability [32]. Automated testing tools are designed to identify issues that follow clear-cut rules, such as missing alternative text for images, insufficient color contrast, improper heading structure, and broken links. On the other hand, manual inspection is crucial for identifying nuanced issues that might only become apparent when considering real user behaviors and interactions. One of the most effective methods for manual testing is using a screen reader, such as NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access) [13], to simulate how users with visual impairments interact with a website.

3. Methodology

In this study, we analyzed 26 web-based Human-AI co-creative systems (Table 1) using both automated and manual testing. Our dataset was initially built from systems listed in the Library of Mixed-Initiative Creative Interfaces (LMICI) [33], which archives many of the existing co-creative systems from the literature. However, many systems were excluded because they required downloading and lacked a web-based platform, which is necessary for running the

Table 1
List of Co-creative Systems in the Dataset.

Domain	Co-creative Systems
Coding Assistant (1)	EarSketch (2011) [34]
Drawing (1)	Magic Sketchpad (2016) [35]
Chatbots (3)	ChatGPT-4 (2023) [3], Meta AI (2023) [36], Gemini (2023) [37]
Creative Writing (4)	Co-PoeTryMe (2012) [38], AI Dungeon (2019) [39], Sudowrite (2021) [40], illuminate (2024) [41]
Music Generation (5)	Piano Scribe (2016) [42], Beat Blender (2016) [43], AIVA (2016) [44], Melody Studio (2023) [45], MusicFX DJ (2024) [46]
Image Generation (6)	DeepDream (2015) [47], Image to Image (2016) [48],Toposketch (2017) [49], Runway ML (2018) [50], Artbreeder (2019) [51], Neural Love (2020) [52], Stable Diffusion (2022), [53], KREA.AI (2022) [54], OpenArt AI (2022) [55], Imagine Art (2023) [56], Adobe Firefly (2023) [57], ImageFX (2024) [58]

automated testing tool we used. Additionally, some systems were not publicly available, and therefore could not be included in the study. To expand the dataset, we identified additional systems through online research, prior knowledge, and literature review. Only web-based co-creative systems that were freely available were included, ensuring they qualified as co-creative rather than purely generative AI systems. We categorized the systems into domains based on primary functionality: Image Generation (12 systems), Creative Writing (4), ChatBots (3), Music Generation (5), Drawing (1), and Coding (1) (see Table 1).

3.1. Automated Testing with WAVE

To evaluate the accessibility of co-creative systems, we used the Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool (WAVE) [12], a free automated testing tool. WAVE identifies and categorizes accessibility issues into errors and alerts. Errors are further categorized in terms of severity by WCAG conformance levels (A, AA, or AAA). We document flagged errors and organized the findings for detailed analysis. For systems with user input, such as image generation platforms, we tested functionality using the prompt "Create me an image of a dog." To maintain consistency, we evaluated up to 10 pages or features for systems with extensive features and pages.

3.2. Manual Testing

We conducted manual testing using a free screen reader, NVDA (NonVisual Desktop Access) [13], to simulate the experience of users with vision-related conditions, such as low vision and blindness, who rely on screen readers and keyboard navigation. The testing involved navigating interfaces, interacting with prompts, and accessing features. We also focused on the challenges of users who are deaf or hard of hearing, who often depend on visual alternatives or text-based content to access audio outputs. Observations were documented and categorized into accessibility and usability issues. Additionally, we tested each system's keyboard functionality to ensure operability without a mouse and overall compliance with the accessibility standards of WCAG.

4. Findings

This section presents the findings from both automated and manual testing, highlighting common accessibility and usability issues, their severity, and frequency. We also compare these issues across individual systems and creative domains to provide a comparative analysis.

4.1. Automated Testing

In this section, we report the findings from the automated testing using WAVE.

4.1.1. Overview of Errors

Table 2
Major Accessibility Errors across All Systems in the Dataset.

	Image Missing Alt Text (Level A)	Missing Form Label (Level A)	Empty Buttons (Level A)	Insufficient Color Contrast (Level AA)	Language Unidentified (Level A)	Empty Links (Level A)	Broken ARIA Reference (Level A)
Image to Image	✓ (0)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)	✗ (18)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
TopoSketch	✗ (8)	✗ (4)	✗ (2)	✗ (2)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
Co-PoeTryMe	✗ (12)	✗ (9)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
ChatGPT 4	✓ (0)	✗ (2)	✗ (37)	✓ (0)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
Stable Diffusion	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✗ (3)	✓ (0)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
Magic Sketchpad	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✗ (22)	✗ (7)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
Piano Scribe	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✗ (4)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
Beat Blender	✓ (0)	✗ (1)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)	✗ (1)	✗ (2)	✓ (0)
AIVA	✗ (159)	✗ (19)	✓ (0)	✗ (24)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
Runway ML	✗ (46)	✗ (45)	✗ (70)	✗ (3)	✗ (11)	✗ (3)	✓ (0)
Meta AI	✓ (0)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)
Gemini	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✗ (1)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✗ (1)
Adobe Firefly	✓ (0)	✗ (2)	✓ (0)	✗ (2)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✗ (4)
Krea AI	✓ (0)	✗ (13)	✗ (69)	✗ (31)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
Imagine Art	✓ (0)	✗ (17)	✗ (45)	✗ (9)	✓ (0)	✗ (3)	✗ (3)
DeepDream	✗ (68)	✗ (39)	✗ (4)	✗ (75)	✗ (6)	✗ (160)	✓ (0)
Illuminate (*DeepMind*)	✓ (0)	✗ (2)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
Music FX DJ (*DeepMind*)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✗ (3)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
ImageFX (*DeepMind*)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
EarSketch	✗ (28)	✗ (3)	✓ (0)	✗ (33)	✓ (0)	✗ (4)	✓ (0)
OpenArt AI	✗ (25)	✗ (76)	✗ (11)	✗ (8)	✓ (0)	✗ (15)	✗ (10)
Melodey Studio	✗ (52)	✗ (3)	✗ (32)	✗ (91)	✓ (0)	✗ (3)	✓ (0)
Sudowrite	✗ (5)	✗ (15)	✓ (0)	✗ (23)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
AI Dungeon	✓ (0)	✓ (0)	✗ (1)	✗ (1)	✗ (3)	✓ (0)	✓ (0)
Artbreeder	✗ (15)	✗ (53)	✗ (222)	✗ (53)	✓ (0)	✗ (16)	✓ (0)
Neural Love	✗ (75)	✗ (22)	✗ (10)	✗ (491)	✓ (0)	✗ (78)	✓ (0)

Table 2 shows the major accessibility issues that emerged across the systems, which are highest (level A) or moderate (level AA) severity based on WCAG guidelines. The major issues found include 1) images/videos missing alternative text, which prevents screen readers from conveying the content and purpose of images to users with visual disabilities; 2) missing form labels that make it difficult for users to understand form fields and interact with them; and 3) empty buttons that lack descriptive labels, making them inaccessible to screen reader users. Additionally, 4) language unidentified error hinders screen readers from selecting the correct language settings, while 5) empty links without functional text prevent users from understanding the link's destination or purpose. Lastly, 6) broken ARIA references, such as improperly defined roles or missing states, confuse users relying on assistive technologies to

navigate dynamic content. Table 2 shows that most co-creative AI systems, including popular tools like ChatGPT, fail to meet basic accessibility requirements.

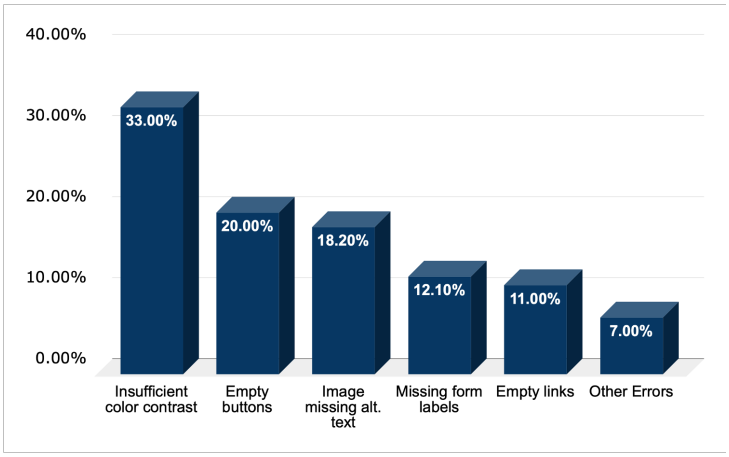

Figure 1: Most Common Accessibility Issues across All the Systems.

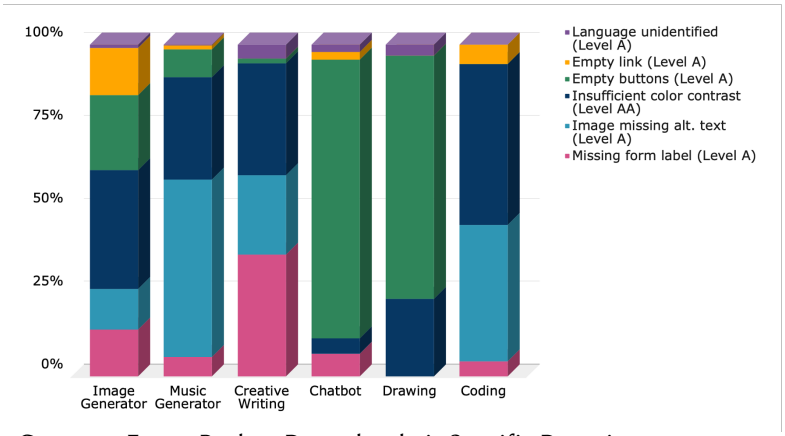

Figure 2: Most Common Errors Broken Down by their Specific Domain

Figure 1 summarizes the most common accessibility errors identified across the dataset. Our findings show that the most frequent accessibility issues found are insufficient color contrast, buttons lacking descriptive labels, images missing alternative text, missing form labels and empty links. Among these, most of the common errors are severe (level A) and fail to meet basic accessibility requirements as outlined by WCAG.

Figure 2 shows the percentages of the most common errors in each specific domain. An interesting finding is that chatbots have the highest frequency of empty buttons without descriptive labels, which account for over 80% of the accessibility issues in this domain. Buttons missing descriptive labels make them inaccessible to users who rely on screen readers. This issue is also prevalent in the drawing domain. In contrast, music generation, creative writing, and coding assistants are most affected by missing alternative text errors. Insufficient color contrast is another common issue across most domains, with the exception of chatbots, likely due to their simpler user interface.

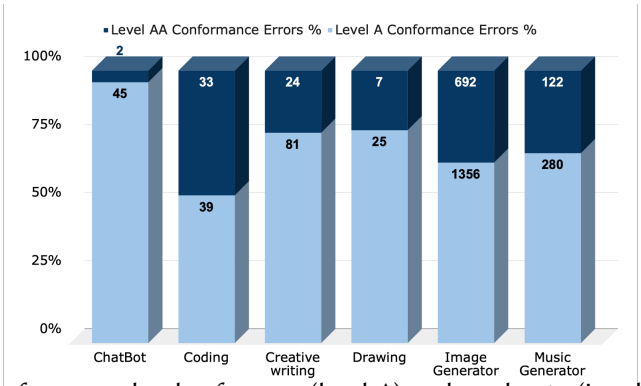

Figure 3: WCAG conformance levels of severe (level A) and moderate (Level AA) errors across all systems broken down by their specific domain

Figure 3 shows the percentage of errors across the systems, categorized by their severity according to WCAG conformance levels (Level A and Level AA), across all systems and broken down by their specific domains. We excluded Level AAA errors, as they are considered minor and are categorized as alerts rather than errors. Notable findings include chatbots having the highest number of severe accessibility violations (Level A), while the coding domain exhibits the fewest severe issues.

4.2. Manual Testing

We applied Thematic Analysis to identify recurring patterns in the observation data we collected from the manual testing, grouping accessibility issues into themes. Several recurring accessibility issues were identified across co-creative systems, impacting both screen reader compatibility and keyboard operability. The key findings are as follows:

Keyboard Accessibility Issues: Our analysis revealed that most systems (20) had multiple buttons, features, and functions that were not operable via keyboard, making it difficult for users to navigate the interface effectively. Examples of such issues included inaccessible drawing buttons in Image to Image, non-focusable (users can't navigate to it using the keyboard) animation buttons in Toposketch, and non-functional navigation in AIVA and Neural Love. Moreover, some systems allowed navigation into specific areas but failed to provide a way out, causing keyboard traps. For example, Runway ML's homepage navigation and EarSketch's coding feature caused keyboard traps.

Insufficient Alt Text for Images: While many systems lacked alt text for images, those that did include it often provided insufficient or non-descriptive alternative text, hindering access for users relying on screen readers. For instance, Stable Diffusion used generic alt text like "Thumbnail," while Krea.AI and Artbreeder offered insufficient descriptions such as "dog" or "generated image" for the generated images from the prompt we used ("Create me an image of a dog"), making it impossible for the users to understand the content of the images.

Insufficient Audio Alternatives: Our findings indicated that all music generation systems analyzed (5) lacked textual or visual representations of the audio outputs created by the AI, making them inaccessible to users who are deaf or hard of hearing. Systems like Piano Scribe, Beat Blender, and MusicFX DJ failed to provide any alternative formats for the generated music,

such as transcripts, visualizations, or audio descriptions. In addition, the absence of accessible alternatives also hinders the broader inclusivity of these platforms, as it prevents users from fully understanding or interacting with the content.

Missing Skip Links: All the systems we analyzed (25) lacked skip links, except EarSketch, which are navigation aids that allow users to bypass repetitive content and quickly jump to the main sections of a page. This issue forces users to rely on keyboard navigation to navigate through unnecessary or redundant information, creating a frustrating experience.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Accessibility is crucial for the next frontiers of co-creative AI systems that go beyond their technical abilities to be human-centered and inclusive [7]. To better understand the accessibility challenges and practices within the current landscape of co-creative systems, this paper examines 26 existing systems using a combination of automated and manual testing against WCAG guidelines. The findings reveal a range of accessibility issues, from severe to moderate, that hinder basic accessibility in web-based technologies. The results provide an overview of the current state of accessibility in co-creative AI, highlighting areas in need of improvement and offering a foundation for future research to address these challenges.

The automated testing revealed significant accessibility barriers across the co-creative AI systems in our dataset. The most common errors included insufficient color contrast, empty buttons, links without descriptive text, images and videos without alternative text, and missing form labels—all of which are severe violations of basic web accessibility standards. Manual testing further revealed that many systems are not fully accessible to users with visual or hearing impairments. For example, many systems contain elements that are non-functional via keyboard, lack skip links, and do not provide sufficient text and audio alternatives, making them difficult for screen reader users and inaccessible to users with hearing disabilities. These findings demonstrate that most of the systems in our dataset fail to meet basic accessibility requirements, limiting their usability for users with various disabilities. These findings demonstrate that the majority of the systems in our dataset fail to meet essential accessibility standards, limiting their usability for users with diverse disabilities. As one of the first studies focusing on accessibility in human-AI co-creativity, this research underscores the need for greater attention to the accessibility aspects of co-creative AI, which are often overlooked.

Our analysis also included domain-based comparisons across the systems, which revealed variations in accessibility issues. These comparisons reveal that chatbots have the highest number of severe accessibility violations (Level A), according to WCAG, which is particularly surprising given that chatbots like ChatGPT are rapidly growing in popularity and have a large user base, making accessibility a critical concern. Music generation, creative writing, image generators and coding domains were most affected by missing alternative text errors. These domain-specific comparisons offer valuable insights into which areas require more attention and suggest where improvements are needed. They also indicate which domains are better addressing accessibility and which have significant room for improvement. Given that each domain presents unique accessibility challenges, tailored solutions are essential. For example, music generation systems could benefit from adding textual or visual representations of audio

outputs to make them accessible to users with hearing impairments. Similarly, systems focused on drawing or image generation should ensure that alternative text is provided for all generated content. Leveraging Generative AI (GenAI) tools could help produce meaningful alternative text or audio for such content, further enhancing accessibility.

As one of the first studies to focus on accessibility in human-AI co-creativity, this research highlights a significant gap in the literature. Future studies should explore the accessibility needs of users with diverse disabilities, such as those with cognitive impairments and how biases (e.g., ableism or exclusionary design) can emerge in these technologies. Research should also focus on developing best practices for making co-creative AI systems universally accessible. Future research could focus on developing GenAI-powered accessibility testing tools specifically tailored for creative AI applications, capable of automatically detecting issues, enabling improvements in these areas. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this paper, developers can create more inclusive and accessible co-creative AI systems, resulting in better and more equitable user experiences. Ongoing research will be crucial to advancing accessibility in this rapidly evolving field.

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