

# Multi-Modal Fusion Techniques in Deep Learning

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**Abstract:** Multi-modal fusion techniques in deep learning have gained significant attention due to their capacity to leverage information from diverse sources and enhance the performance of various machine learning applications. This paper provides an overview of the key approaches and strategies employed in the fusion of data from multiple modalities, including images, text, audio, and more. We explore the spectrum of fusion techniques, ranging from early fusion, which combines raw features at the input level, to late fusion, which aggregates predictions at the output level. Additionally, we delve into mid-level fusion techniques that merge representations at intermediate layers within neural networks [1]. Attention mechanisms, such as self-attention and cross-modal attention, play a pivotal role in dynamically weighing the contributions of different modalities during processing. Cross-modal embeddings are discussed as a means to map data from disparate modalities into a shared embedding space, facilitating seamless integration. Graph-based fusion models are explored for their ability to capture inter-modal relationships in a structured manner, while co-attention and co-guidance mechanisms enhance the modeling of interactions between modalities [1]. Hybrid models, combining elements of both early and late fusion, are presented as versatile solutions adaptable to a variety of multi-modal tasks. Memory-augmented neural networks are also examined, offering the capacity to store and retrieve information from different modalities as needed. Through a comprehensive exploration of these multi-modal fusion techniques, this paper aims to provide researchers and practitioners with insights into the advancements and possibilities in the field. These techniques have widespread applications across domains such as natural language processing, computer vision, audio analysis, and beyond, making them a valuable area of study in contemporary deep learning research.

**Keywords:** Multi-modal fusion techniques, Deep learning, Data fusion, Cross-modal attention, Hybrid models

## 1. Introduction

In the era of data-driven decision-making and artificial intelligence, the integration of information from diverse sources has emerged as a paramount challenge and opportunity. Multi-modal fusion techniques, situated at the intersection of deep learning and data integration, have assumed a pivotal role in addressing this challenge. By seamlessly combining data from disparate modalities such as text, images, audio, and more, multi-modal fusion empowers machine learning models to unlock deeper insights, make more accurate predictions, and excel in an array of complex tasks.

The world is inherently multi-modal. Our understanding of the environment and our interactions with it involve a symphony of sensory inputs and data streams. From autonomous vehicles interpreting visual scenes while listening for sirens to healthcare systems diagnosing patients through a fusion of medical images and clinical reports, the ability to harmonize and utilize data from multiple sources has profound implications across various domains.

Deep learning, with its capacity to model complex relationships in large-scale data, has catalyzed advancements in multi-modal fusion techniques. In this landscape, we witness a spectrum of fusion strategies, each offering unique advantages and tailored to specific application scenarios. Early fusion, which merges raw features from multiple modalities at the input level, contrasts with late fusion, where modalities are processed independently, and their outputs are combined at a later stage. Between these extremes, mid-level fusion techniques dynamically merge representations at intermediate layers within neural networks, allowing for rich interplay between modalities.

Attention mechanisms have become a cornerstone of multi-modal fusion, enabling models to dynamically focus on the most salient aspects of each modality during processing. Cross-modal embeddings provide a means to map different data modalities into a common representation space, fostering interoperability. Graph-based fusion models, inspired by relational data structures, offer a structured approach to modeling inter-modal relationships. Meanwhile, co-attention and co-guidance mechanisms enhance our ability to model intricate interactions between modalities.

In this comprehensive exploration of multi-modal fusion techniques, we embark on a journey to unravel the intricacies, capabilities, and real-world applications of these methodologies. By understanding the strengths and trade-offs of different fusion strategies, researchers and practitioners can wield multi-modal fusion as a powerful tool to harness the full spectrum of information available in today's data-rich world. As we delve into the intricacies of early, late, and mid-level fusion, attention mechanisms, cross-modal embeddings, and beyond, we illuminate the path toward building more intelligent and context-aware AI systems capable of understanding and interacting with the world in a multi-modal, human-like manner.

### Early Fusion (Feature-Level Fusion):

Early Fusion, also known as Feature-Level Fusion, is a technique in multi-modal fusion that involves combining raw features or data from different modalities at the input level before feeding them into a neural network or machine learning model. This approach aims to create a single, unified representation of the data that incorporates information from all modalities. Early Fusion is often used when there is a desire to capture both low-level and high-level interactions between modalities from the very beginning of the data processing pipeline. Here are some key details about Early Fusion in multi-modal fusion techniques:

In Early Fusion, the raw features or data representations from each modality are concatenated into a single feature vector. For example, if you have an image modality and a text modality, the pixel values of the image and the word embeddings of the text can be concatenated together into a single vector.

Early Fusion preserves the original information from all modalities in a straightforward manner, ensuring that no modality is neglected during the initial stages of processing. It allows the model to capture both low-level features (e. g., pixel values in images) and high-level features (e. g., semantic information in text) simultaneously.

Early Fusion is relatively simple to implement, as it involves straightforward data concatenation. It can be computationally efficient because the fusion occurs before the neural network's layers, reducing the need for additional processing.

One challenge in Early Fusion is that modalities with different data scales, units, or ranges may require preprocessing or normalization to ensure that the combined data is compatible. It assumes that combining raw features at the input level is an optimal strategy for the given task, which may not always be the case. Some tasks might benefit from more complex fusion strategies.

Early Fusion has been used in tasks such as multi-modal sentiment analysis, where both text and visual features (e. g., images or videos) are combined to determine sentiment or emotion expressed in content. It is also employed in multi-modal image classification, where information from different sensors or image types (e. g., RGB and depth images) is fused at the input level to improve classification accuracy [2].

Early Fusion is versatile and can be adapted to different modalities and architectures. It is not limited to a specific type of neural network and can be used with convolutional neural networks (CNNs), recurrent neural networks (RNNs), transformers, and more.

In summary, Early Fusion is a multi-modal fusion technique that combines raw features from different modalities at the input level, making it a straightforward and effective approach for capturing multi-modal information early in the processing pipeline. Its simplicity and flexibility make it a valuable tool in multi-modal deep learning applications, where the goal is to leverage information from multiple sources for improved performance

#### **Late Fusion (Decision-Level Fusion):**

Late Fusion, also known as Decision-Level Fusion, is a technique used in Multi-Modal Fusion within the context of deep learning and machine learning. Multi-Modal Fusion aims to combine information from multiple modalities or sources, such as text, images, audio, or other data types, to improve the performance of a machine learning system. Late Fusion is one of the common approaches to achieve this fusion.

In Late Fusion, each modality (e. g., text, image, audio) is initially processed independently using modality-specific neural networks or models. This means that each modality is handled separately without any direct interaction between them in the initial stages of processing.

For each modality, relevant features are extracted using deep neural networks or other feature extraction techniques. These features are representations of the data that capture useful information for the specific modality.

The processing of different modalities occurs in parallel, which allows for efficient processing and scalability. Each modality's neural network operates independently without any interconnections.

After feature extraction, each modality-specific model generates individual predictions or outputs based on the features extracted. For example, an image model might predict objects in an image, while a text model might predict sentiment in a text snippet.

The outputs or predictions from the modality-specific models are then fused or combined at the decision level. Various fusion techniques can be applied at this stage, such as averaging, max-pooling, voting, or weighted summation. The choice of fusion method depends on the specific problem and dataset.

The main advantage of Late Fusion is that it leverages the strengths of individual modalities, allowing each modality to focus on its specific domain of expertise. This can lead to improved performance, especially when different modalities provide complementary information.

Late Fusion offers flexibility in incorporating different modalities into a single model. It is also interpretable, as the contribution of each modality can be analyzed separately before fusion.

Late Fusion can handle a wide range of modalities, making it a scalable approach for multi-modal tasks. Researchers and practitioners can add or remove modalities as needed.

One challenge in Late Fusion is determining the appropriate fusion strategy and the weights assigned to different modalities during fusion. These choices can significantly impact the system's performance.

Late Fusion is just one approach in the field of Multi-Modal Fusion. Other approaches, such as Early Fusion (where modalities are combined before feature extraction) and Hybrid Fusion (combining both early and late fusion), are also used depending on the specific requirements of the task. The choice of fusion technique should be guided by the characteristics of the data and the goals of the application. .

#### **Mid-Level Fusion (Intermediate-Level Fusion):**

Mid-Level Fusion, also known as Intermediate-Level Fusion, is a technique used in Multi-Modal Fusion within the context of deep learning and machine learning. Multi-Modal Fusion aims to combine information from multiple modalities or sources, such as text, images, audio, or other

data types, to improve the performance of a machine learning system. Mid-Level Fusion operates between the early fusion and late fusion approaches and involves integrating information from different modalities at an intermediate processing stage. Here are the key details about Mid-Level Fusion [3]:

Similar to Late Fusion, Mid-Level Fusion begins with modality-specific processing. Each modality is initially processed independently using dedicated neural networks or models. These models extract relevant features from the input data for their respective modalities.

After feature extraction from each modality, Mid-Level Fusion involves the creation of an intermediate representation that combines information from multiple modalities. This intermediate representation is typically a fused feature vector or tensor that captures cross-modal relationships and dependencies.

Unlike Early Fusion, which combines modalities before feature extraction, Mid-Level Fusion combines modalities at a higher level of abstraction. This allows for the capture of more complex relationships between modalities, as the fusion occurs after some initial processing.

In some cases, Mid-Level Fusion may involve the use of shared neural layers or models that jointly process multiple modalities. These shared layers learn to extract features that are relevant to all modalities, facilitating the integration of information.

Mid-Level Fusion models are often fine-tuned to optimize the integration of information from different modalities. Training may involve minimizing a multi-modal loss function that combines individual modality-specific losses.

Mid-Level Fusion aims to create an intermediate representation that captures higher-level abstractions and semantic relationships between modalities. This can lead to improved performance in tasks where understanding cross-modal interactions is crucial.

Mid-Level Fusion is flexible and adaptable to various multi-modal tasks. Researchers can design architectures that suit the specific requirements of their applications.

Determining the appropriate architecture for Mid-Level Fusion can be challenging, as it requires balancing the depth of shared representations and the complexity of the fusion process. Overly complex models can be prone to overfitting.

Mid-Level Fusion is often used in tasks such as audio-visual scene analysis, multi-modal sentiment analysis, and cross-modal retrieval, where combining information from multiple modalities at an intermediate level is advantageous.

Mid-Level Fusion offers a compromise between Early Fusion and Late Fusion, allowing for the integration of cross-modal information at a more abstract level while maintaining some of the interpretability and flexibility advantages of Late Fusion. The choice of fusion technique

should be guided by the nature of the data and the objectives of the multi-modal task.

**Attention Mechanisms:**

Attention mechanisms play a crucial role in Multi-Modal Fusion techniques within the field of deep learning. Attention mechanisms were initially developed for natural language processing tasks, such as machine translation, and have since been adapted and extended for multi-modal fusion. They enable models to selectively focus on different parts of the input data or modalities, enhancing the fusion process. Here are the key details about attention mechanisms in multi-modal fusion:

Attention mechanisms allow models to weigh the importance of different elements in the input data or modalities dynamically. Instead of treating all parts of the data equally, attention mechanisms assign different attention scores to different elements based on their relevance to the task.

Self-attention, also known as intra-modal attention, is used within individual modalities to capture dependencies and relationships between elements within the same modality. It helps models understand the contextual information within each modality.

Cross-modal attention, or inter-modal attention, is used to capture relationships and interactions between different modalities. It allows models to focus on relevant information in one modality based on the information in another modality. For example, in image captioning, the model can attend to specific image regions based on the textual description.

Multi-head attention is an extension of attention mechanisms that uses multiple attention heads in parallel. Each attention head can learn different patterns and relationships within the data. The outputs from these heads are typically concatenated or linearly combined to create a multi-modal fusion result.

In many attention mechanisms, including those used for multi-modal fusion, scaled dot-product attention is a common method for computing attention scores. It involves taking the dot product of a query and key, scaling it, and applying a softmax function to obtain the attention weights.

Once attention scores are computed, the context or weighted sum of the values (usually the input data or modalities) is calculated based on these scores. The context captures the most relevant information for the task, considering both intra-modal and inter-modal dependencies.

In sequence-to-sequence tasks, such as machine translation or text generation, positional encoding is often added to the input data to provide information about the position of each element in the sequence. This helps attention mechanisms account for the order of elements.

Attention mechanisms have been applied to various multi-modal tasks, including image captioning, video analysis, speech recognition, and more. They are especially useful

when dealing with complex relationships and interactions between modalities.

Many state-of-the-art multi-modal fusion models, such as BERT, GPT-3, and their variants, are based on the Transformer architecture, which heavily relies on attention mechanisms for both intra-modal and inter-modal processing.

Attention mechanisms are often fine-tuned during training to adapt to the specific multi-modal task. Learning the optimal attention patterns is a crucial part of multi-modal fusion model training.

Attention mechanisms have revolutionized multi-modal fusion by allowing models to focus on relevant information and capture intricate dependencies between modalities. They have become a fundamental component of many successful multi-modal deep learning models and have significantly improved performance across a wide range of applications.

### **Cross-Modal Embeddings:**

Cross-Modal Embeddings play a critical role in Multi-Modal Fusion techniques within the field of deep learning. These embeddings enable the integration of information from different modalities, such as text, images, audio, or other data types, into a common representation space where multi-modal fusion can occur [5].

The primary goal of Cross-Modal Embeddings is to map data from various modalities into a shared embedding space where the information from different sources can be compared, combined, or jointly processed. This shared space allows for seamless multi-modal fusion.

In the embedding space, each modality is represented as a vector or a set of vectors, with each dimension encoding some aspect of the modality's content. The choice of embedding space can vary but often aims to capture semantic or contextual information.

The key idea is to map different modalities into a common representation space in such a way that similar information from different modalities is close to each other in this space. This allows for the easy comparison and fusion of multi-modal information.

To create Cross-Modal Embeddings, alignment techniques are often used. These techniques aim to ensure that related information across modalities has similar embeddings. Common approaches include using shared neural layers or models that learn to align the embeddings during training.

Cross-Modal Embeddings can capture latent semantic information that may not be apparent in the raw data. For example, in image-text retrieval tasks, embeddings can encode the semantic similarity between images and text descriptions.

Several models and techniques have been developed for creating Cross-Modal Embeddings, including: Siamese Networks: These networks use a shared architecture to embed data from different modalities into a common space.

Triplet Networks: Triplet loss functions are often employed to ensure that embeddings for similar examples are closer together, while embeddings for dissimilar examples are farther apart. BERT (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers): Transformer-based models like BERT have been adapted for cross-modal tasks, enabling the creation of cross-modal embeddings.

Cross-Modal Embeddings are used in various multi-modal tasks, such as: Cross-Modal Retrieval: Retrieving text, images, or other content related to a query from a different modality. Image Captioning: Generating natural language descriptions for images. Sentiment Analysis: Analyzing sentiment across text, audio, and video data. Multi-Modal Fusion: Combining information from multiple modalities for improved performance in various applications.

Cross-Modal Embeddings are often fine-tuned during training to optimize their effectiveness for a specific task. Training objectives may involve minimizing the distance between similar examples and maximizing the distance between dissimilar ones.

Cross-Modal Embeddings provide flexibility in multi-modal fusion by allowing for the integration of different modalities while maintaining the interpretability of the shared embedding space.

The quality of Cross-Modal Embeddings is typically evaluated using metrics such as mean average precision (mAP) for cross-modal retrieval tasks or BLEU scores for image captioning tasks.

Cross-Modal Embeddings are a fundamental component of many successful multi-modal deep learning models and enable the seamless integration of information from diverse sources, leading to improved performance in a wide range of multi-modal applications.

### **Graph-Based Fusion:**

Graph-Based Fusion is a Multi-Modal Fusion technique within the field of deep learning that leverages graph structures to integrate information from different modalities or sources. Graphs are used to represent relationships and interactions between elements in the data, enabling the modeling of complex dependencies between modalities [4].

In Graph-Based Fusion, data from different modalities are represented as nodes in a graph, and the relationships or interactions between them are represented as edges. Each modality can be considered as a set of nodes, and the edges define how information flows between them.

The construction of the graph can be based on various criteria, depending on the application. For example, in a social media analysis task, nodes could represent users, images, and text posts, while edges could represent interactions such as likes, comments, or sharing.

One of the key techniques used in Graph-Based Fusion is Graph Convolutional Networks (GCNs). GCNs are a type of neural network that operate on graph-structured data. They perform convolution operations on the graph, allowing

information to propagate across nodes and capture complex relationships.

Multi-Modal Fusion in a graph-based context involves combining information from different modalities at the level of graph nodes, edges, or both. This fusion can occur through various mechanisms, such as feature aggregation, attention mechanisms, or message passing.

Feature aggregation methods involve merging features from different modalities at the node level. This can be done by concatenating, averaging, or applying weighted summation to the node features of different modalities. The aggregated features are then used for downstream tasks.

Attention mechanisms can be applied within a graph to determine the importance of different modalities or nodes when processing information. This enables the model to focus on relevant information and ignore less informative nodes.

Message passing is a fundamental concept in graph-based deep learning. It involves passing information between neighboring nodes in the graph iteratively. Multi-Modal Fusion can be achieved by allowing nodes to exchange messages representing information from different modalities.

Graph-Based Fusion is particularly useful in applications where the relationships and interactions between different data sources are critical. Examples include social network analysis, recommendation systems, knowledge graph completion, and multi-modal event detection.

In some cases, Graph-Based Fusion involves working with heterogeneous graphs where nodes represent different types of entities (e. g., users, products, tags), and edges represent various types of relationships (e. g., user interactions, product associations). Handling heterogeneous graphs requires specialized techniques.

Graph-Based Fusion can be computationally intensive, especially when dealing with large graphs. Efficient graph processing algorithms and hardware acceleration may be necessary to scale to real-world applications.

Graph-Based Fusion offers a powerful framework for modeling complex relationships and interactions between different modalities or data sources. It allows deep learning models to leverage the structured nature of data in the form of graphs, leading to improved performance in tasks that involve multi-modal fusion and understanding of intricate dependencies

#### **Multi-Head Attention:**

Multi-Head Attention is a crucial component of Multi-Modal Fusion techniques in deep learning, especially in models based on the Transformer architecture. It allows models to attend to different parts of the input data, capture diverse relationships, and extract more relevant information from multiple sources or modalities. Here are the key details about Multi-Head Attention in Multi-Modal Fusion: Multi-Head Attention is motivated by the idea that different parts

of the input data or modalities may contain diverse and contextually relevant information. By employing multiple attention heads, a model can learn different patterns and relationships within the data.

Multi-Head Attention was originally introduced as a part of the Transformer model, which has revolutionized natural language processing. Transformers have since been adapted for various multi-modal tasks.

In Multi-Head Attention, the attention mechanism is applied multiple times in parallel, with each "head" having its set of learnable parameters. The number of attention heads is a hyperparameter that can be adjusted based on the task and dataset.

For each attention head, the input is projected into separate query, key, and value vectors using learned linear transformations. These projections allow the model to focus on different aspects of the input data for each head.

Each attention head independently computes attention scores by taking the dot product of the query vectors with the key vectors, followed by scaling and applying a softmax function to obtain attention weights. These weights determine how much each value vector contributes to the final output.

After computing the attention scores, each head produces a head-specific output by weighted summation of the value vectors using the attention weights. These head-specific outputs capture different aspects of the relationships and dependencies in the data.

The outputs from all attention heads are typically concatenated along a specified dimension or linearly combined to create the final multi-modal fusion result. The fusion operation can vary based on the specific task.

Multi-Head Attention allows models to simultaneously focus on different aspects of the input data, facilitating the capture of diverse and complex relationships between modalities. This makes it particularly effective for multi-modal fusion tasks.

Multi-Head Attention is often considered interpretable because each head can be analyzed separately. Researchers can gain insights into which parts of the data are being attended to by different heads.

Multi-Head Attention is applied to various multi-modal tasks, including machine translation, image captioning, speech recognition, and cross-modal retrieval. It has been shown to improve performance by capturing intricate dependencies between modalities.

Multi-Head Attention is trained end-to-end as part of a larger multi-modal model. Learning objectives often involve minimizing task-specific loss functions to fine-tune the attention mechanism.

While Multi-Head Attention is powerful, it can be computationally expensive, especially when dealing with a

large number of heads. Researchers have explored strategies to balance computational cost and model performance.

Multi-Head Attention is a versatile and effective technique for multi-modal fusion, enabling models to capture diverse information and relationships across different modalities. Its incorporation into various deep learning architectures has significantly advanced the field of multi-modal tasks.

#### **Transformer-Based Models:**

Transformer-Based Models have had a profound impact on Multi-Modal Fusion techniques in deep learning. Originally designed for natural language processing tasks, Transformer-based models have been adapted and extended to handle multi-modal data, enabling the development of powerful models that can fuse information from various modalities. Here are the key details about Transformer-Based Models in Multi-Modal Fusion:

The Transformer architecture, introduced in the paper "Attention is All You Need" by Vaswani et al. in 2017, uses self-attention mechanisms to process sequential data, such as text, by capturing dependencies between distant words effectively. Transformers have been extended for multi-modal tasks.

Transformer-Based Models for multi-modal tasks adapt the original architecture to accommodate multiple modalities. Instead of sequences of words, they accept input from various sources, such as text, images, audio, or other data types.

Each modality-specific input is encoded separately, typically using modality-specific encoders (e. g., CNNs for images, RNNs for text). These encoders convert raw data into embeddings or features suitable for processing by the Transformer.

In many multi-modal Transformer models, the goal is to map all modalities into a shared embedding space. This shared space allows for the seamless fusion of information from different sources and facilitates cross-modal understanding.

Multi-Head Attention is a key component of Transformer-Based Models for multi-modal fusion. It enables the model to attend to different parts of each modality's input and capture complex inter-modal relationships. Each attention head can focus on different aspects of the data.

In addition to Multi-Head Attention within modalities, Transformer-Based Models include cross-modal attention mechanisms that enable interactions between different modalities. These mechanisms allow the model to understand how information from one modality relates to another. Positional encoding is crucial for handling sequential data in the original Transformer architecture. In multi-modal variants, it helps models understand the relative positions of elements from different modalities within the shared embedding space.

Transformer-Based Models for multi-modal tasks include task-specific output heads that generate predictions or perform other relevant tasks, such as image captioning,

sentiment analysis, or cross-modal retrieval. Models are often fine-tuned for specific multi-modal tasks. Fine-tuning includes training the model on task-specific data and adjusting the model's parameters to optimize performance.

Transformer-Based Models have been applied to a wide range of multi-modal tasks, including image captioning, video analysis, speech recognition, cross-modal retrieval, and more. They have achieved state-of-the-art results in many of these domains. Pretrained models, like BERT (for text) and Vision Transformer (ViT, for images), have been used as the basis for multi-modal fusion. Researchers fine-tune these models on multi-modal data to leverage their pretrained representations. Large Transformer-Based Models can be computationally intensive. Researchers are exploring strategies to make them more efficient and scalable for real-world applications.

Transformer-Based Models have significantly advanced the field of multi-modal fusion by providing a powerful architecture for handling diverse data types. Their flexibility and capacity to capture complex relationships between modalities have made them a key choice for a wide range of multi-modal tasks.

## **2. Conclusion**

In conclusion, Multi-Modal Fusion techniques in deep learning have emerged as a pivotal area of research and application, revolutionizing our ability to harness the wealth of information available across various modalities. These techniques enable us to combine and extract knowledge from text, images, audio, sensor data, and more, leading to enhanced model performance, richer understanding of data, and improved decision-making in numerous domains.

Through Early Fusion, Late Fusion, Mid-Level Fusion, Cross-Modal Embeddings, Attention Mechanisms, Graph-Based Fusion, Multi-Head Attention, and Transformer-Based Models, we have witnessed a diverse array of approaches for integrating multi-modal data. Each of these techniques offers distinct advantages, catering to different use cases, data structures, and objectives.

Multi-Modal Fusion has proven indispensable in a wide range of applications, from image captioning and video analysis to sentiment analysis, recommendation systems, and healthcare. It enables us to explore intricate relationships and dependencies between modalities, leading to more comprehensive and accurate insights.

As we continue to push the boundaries of deep learning and multi-modal fusion, challenges remain, including computational complexity, interpretability, and scalability. However, ongoing research and advancements in model architectures, training methodologies, and hardware are paving the way for more efficient and effective multi-modal fusion solutions.

In the years to come, we can anticipate even greater innovations in multi-modal fusion, leading to breakthroughs in areas such as autonomous systems, natural language understanding, and human-computer interaction. The

interdisciplinary nature of multi-modal fusion will undoubtedly continue to play a crucial role in shaping the future of artificial intelligence, empowering us to extract the full potential of the diverse data sources at our disposal.

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