



## Conceptualizing excessive fan consumption behavior



Robert Davis <sup>a,\*</sup>, Lee Phillip McGinnis <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Associate Professor and Consultant, Ubelab, Auckland, New Zealand, 42 Woodside Road, Mt Eden, Auckland 1024, New Zealand

<sup>b</sup> Associate Professor of Marketing, Stonehill College, 101B Stanger Building, 320 Washington Street, Easton, MA 02357, USA

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### ABSTRACT

This research develops a theoretical model that provides new insight into excessive consumption and identification based on the consumption of rugby and brand biography of the All Blacks. This paper is grounded in Maori protocols and the spiritual relationship between the All Blacks, New Zealand and Maori. The conceptual model development process is based on the grounded theory approach and analysis of interview evidence from 15 fans in New Zealand. The model posits that the cultural sources of excessive identification or importance in consumption relate to country factors. In terms of response, excessive fan identification has two major outcomes at the individual level, one positive and the other negative. From a negative standpoint, excessive behavior leads to deviant behaviors, such as violence, misplaced priorities, psychological flow and rationalization. From a positive standpoint, however, excessive identification leads to more benign consumption in the form of cultural and social capital and communitas. Future research implications are discussed.

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### 1. Karakia and Haka

We begin with a Karakia (prayer) and Wero (challenge) to bless this paper in its journey. We are guided by the Maori Cultural Advisor, Mihaere Emery, from Ngati-Awa (Te Teko), Tuho, Tainui and Ngati-Raukawa.

He Honore, He Kororia, He Maungarongo ki runga ki te Whenua,

He Whakaaro pai ki nga Tanagata

Katoa. Amine!!

To Honor, To Glorify the good word of the Almighty God,

From the highest points of the Ranges

Down to the flat Lands of mother earth,

Spreading the good and powerful thoughts of the Almighty

To all the people of the Land. Amen!!

We acknowledge the importance of Maori to this paper and we Whakautethia (Respect) the concepts that relate to the Mana (Prestige) and Taonga (Treasured Gifts) of Tangata Whenua the Maori People. This paper consists of Aroha (Love), Manaakitanga (Protection), Whakapono (Faithful) and Kaitiakitanga (Guardianship), gifted naturally from Tipuna (Ancestors) down through to

Papatuanuku (Mother Earth) the Whenua (Land) of Aotearoa (Land of the long white cloud).

Mauri Tuu, Mauri Ora!! (Stand strong, Stand alive).

This paper represents a Wero (challenge) to fan behavior theory. In respect to the All Blacks we begin with the Haka (Ignition of Breath); Ka mate, Ka mate (McLean, 1996; Burns, 1983). Ka Mate has two sections: a prayer and chant composed by the Ngati Toa Chief Te Rauparaha, captain of the Tainui canoe, descending from Hoturoa born in the 1760's at Kawhia.

#### Ka mate, Ka mate

##### Part 1: Karakia (Prayer)

Kikiki kakaka!

Kikiki kakaka kau ana!

Kei waniwania taku aro,

Kei tara wahia kei te rua i te kerokero!

He pounga rahui te uira ka rarapa;

Ketekete kau ana, to peru kairiri:

Mau au e koro e.

Ka wehi au ka matakana.

Ko wai te tangata kia rere ure

I'm jabbering and quivering, stuttering, shaking and naked!

I'm brushed by your body your formed curves, pulsating with energy!

Forbidden mysteries are revealed;

banter and closeness, flushed looks:

I am caught in a trap.

I'm scared but fully alert.

Who is this man with thrusting

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [drradavis@gmail.com](mailto:drradavis@gmail.com) (R. Davis), [lmcginnis@stonehill.edu](mailto:lmcginnis@stonehill.edu) (L.P. McGinnis).

	weapon
Tirohanga nga rua rerarera,	investigating the hot moist flesh,
Nga rua kuri kakanui i raro?	so pungent beneath him?
Part 2: Chant	
Ka mate! Ka mate!	I am dying, I'm dead!
Ka ora! Ka ora!	No, I'm alive, fully alive!
Tenei te tangata puhuruhuru	a virile man
Nana nei i tiki mai whaka-	who can bring joy and peace!
whiti te ra!	
Upane, ka upane!	Together, side by side
Whiti te ra!	We can make the sun shine!

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## 2. Introduction

A fundamental question in consumer research has been: “what do people do when they consume” (Holt, 1995, p. 1; Havlena and Holbrook, 1986; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). However, despite the important developments of this research and others (Belk, 2010; Varman and Belk, 2009; Sherry et al., 2004), little attention has been placed on excessive consumption practices (Grove et al., 2012; Fisk et al., 2010; Celsi et al., 1993). This is a significant gap in our understanding because consumers regularly engage in excessive and disruptive behaviors, dysfunctional resistance, vandalism and rage (Reynolds and Harris, 2009; Garcia-Bardidia et al., 2011; Denegri-Knott, 2006).

In this study, we unpack excessive consumption practices evolving from countrywide patriotism, manifesting itself under the cloak of fan support. We develop a theoretical model that helps us to understand and reinterpret excessive consumption and identification. Like Holt (1995) in the observation of baseball spectators, we study the excessive fan consumption of rugby, specifically focusing on the brand biography (Paharia et al., 2011) of the All Blacks.

### 2.1. Contribution and paper organization

Through the consumption practices of sports fan behavior, we conceptualize excessive consumption and identification. This model will explore the effect of country characteristics, pride and self-perceptions on excessive identification as well as consequential behaviors.

In this paper, we uncover why consumers consume sport, building towards the pervasiveness of sport consumption revolving around rugby and the All Blacks: the excessive practice of rugby consumption and impact on national identity and cultural consumption. Following a presentation of our method, we discuss the findings derived from a grounded theory analysis of 15 All Blacks fans. The paper concludes with the conceptual model of excessive fan consumption behavior as well as highlighting research implications for consumption behavior.

### 2.2. Research questions

Our research addresses several questions. First, we seek to understand the pervasiveness of fan sport consumption. Second, we conceptualize consumption in excessive fan behavior. This model also uncovers:

1. What are some of the key stages of consumption?
2. What determines excessive identification?
3. How does consumption end and progress to consequences?
4. Is excessive consumption primarily a negative or positive

process?

## 3. The journey towards excessive consumption

Our journey towards conceptualizing excessive consumption practices starts with an explanation of sports consumption as a universal and pervasive phenomenon. Funk et al. (2012) argue that it accounts for a significant proportion of a consumer's everyday behavior (d'Astous and Bitz, 1995). In the US, Europe, Asia and the Americas, consumers watch 11 hours/week of sport on television (Perform, 2012). The US sports industry is the fastest growing (DeSarbo and Madrigal, 2011). The FIFA World Cup is often touted to be the most viewed sporting event in history, but the 2011 World Cup Rugby event was watched by a cumulative audience of 4.2 billion people (Chadwick et al., 2011), contributing US\$1.67 billion to the global sports economy.

Why are there such high rates of sport consumption? Sport is a social process of national identity and voyeurism. The psychological consumption defines societies and national cultures (Funk et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2011) as well as the underlying health and well-being of a nation (Anokye, et al., 2012). Consumption is motivated by the attraction to a team's image and brand biography: the symbolic meaning that commonly reflects the identity of the culture of geography (Chun et al., 2004). Sport consumption is often referred to as a sub-culture of society (Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan, 2007). For example, US fans often bask in the glory of the 1980 gold medal winning USA Ice Hockey Team. Others consume because of the underdog effect (Paharia et al., 2011): “Underdogs are seen as warmer” (Goldschmied and Vandello, 2009 p. 29). Many remember *Cool Running's*: the excessive representation of the underdog Jamaican bobsled team that competed in the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics.

The All Blacks are a good example of a subculture in which consumption is pervasive. They define the social psyche, national identity and cultural consumption. The All Blacks and their fans are of interest to consumer research because rugby is an excessive, intensely masculine and gender-reinforcing sport (Nauright and Chandler, 1996; Phillips, 1996; Schacht, 1996). Masculinity has been explored in other sports (Messner, 1988, 1992, 1997), but little attention has been placed on the excessive consumption of rugby. Rugby identifies a nation and its fans, and perhaps in no other country does a single sport identify a nation more completely than rugby in New Zealand. Rugby is uniquely excessive because the sport itself is a game of violence and aggression, both on and off the field (Stafford et al., 2013; Fields Sarah et al., 2010). Rugby is also an interesting consumption practice as it permeates almost every region of the world: 117 countries across five continents by men, women, boys and girls. Tourists often come to see the rugby specifically in New Zealand (McIntosh, 2004) because it is a living artifact of the nation's history and identity (Evans and Kelley, 2002). The US has also caught on to the excitement: rugby is growing at a rate of 25% per year (Kaplan et al., 2008).

Global growth in consumption behavior in the All Blacks was recently conservatively valued between \$US190m and \$US220m dollars, putting them in the same league as Juventus and the Boston Red Sox (BRRLTD, 2013). As World Cup Champions, the All Blacks reign over England, South Africa, Australia, France and Argentina. Hence, the All Blacks is a world-renowned story of consumption and a phenomenon worth exploring as the ritual of the champion. Building that brand biography and fan base starts with grass-roots fans and players. The organization officially impacts children at five years, but consumption starts when fans are babies. Watching the ‘game’ on dad's (or mum's) knee is the fabric of family attitudes, relationships and traditions in New Zealand (Park, 2000).

In many ways, the All Blacks are the epitome of rugby and their fans exemplify excessive consumption behavior. Rugby defines the national identity and mood of New Zealand. If you are not 'for' rugby you are branded a traitor. In 1976, the Prime Minister of New Zealand declared organizations *against* rugby to be "engaging in acts which border on treason" (Richards, 1999, p. 2). Even in 2014, the New Zealand Government has a Minister of the Crown for the World Cup Rugby. In its totality, the consumption of rugby is a religious experience: a pilgrimage of spiritual self-discovery. Hence, many fans believe rugby to be the religion of New Zealand (Abrams et al., 2011). Rugby is also important to national identity because it intimates, mimics, and unifies three cultural reflections in New Zealand society: the Pakeha, the Maori and the Pacific Islander. While individually different, rugby binds these peoples alongside other divergent cultural images, creating what might be considered the purest form of *communitas*, where social status and ethnicity are stripped and true humanity is recognized (Turner, 1969).

Conversely, at the societal level, New Zealand is an underdog nation. Daily New Zealanders arise to the social reality of being the underdog (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft and Lawson, 2011). It is a nation of fewer than five million residents, living on islands near the bottom of the Pacific. From a place of insularity every citizen faces the reality that they are an underdog, fostering the need to compensate and rationalize (Fox, 2009). Falcous and West (2009) conclude that the national consciousness takes on the imagery of the former colonizer vs. dominated underdog nation.

Some argue that the haka is a Wero (challenge) and process of rationalization by the All Blacks and New Zealand society to their insularity and underdog status (Walker, 1996). Murray (2000, p. 345) supports this view: the haka is more than just a spectacle used in sport; the haka is a conversation in the "discourses of identifications" of the "intra-indigenous, collective indigenous, and nationalistic." As a process, it is a narrative of the journey New Zealand faces in the form of a pre-game ritual of the All Blacks, which represents the iron-will underdog determination of a nation state, a country trying and willing to attain international status (Walker, 1996). The haka is an important component of rugby consumption in that it defines the underlying spiritual knowledge of All Blacks rugby and its relationship to Maori (Clarkson et al., 2013). It also creates a state of expectancy and yearning, a vital component of the imminent consumption value (Richins, 2013). Consistent with ritual consumption, the haka sets the tone for the deep underlying meaning of the fan and creates the basis for *communitas* (Rook, 1985; Rothenbuhler, 1998).

Interestingly, the spiritual meaning of the haka, *Ka mate*, is based on the history of the Ngati Toa chief Te Rauparaha. The meaning of *Ka Mate* is described in the oral histories of two Iwi tribes: Ngati Toa and Ngati Tuwharetoa (Ngati Toa, 2013). In essence, the haka is about Te Rauparaha and how he escaped from a war party that wanted revenge. Te Rauparaha, the underdog had to trick his enemies by hiding. While he hid in a *kumara* (sweet potato) pit, he used deviance, the spiritual powers of a woman and food to elude his hopeful captors (Ngati Toa, 2013). The modern day All Blacks haka, 'Kapa O Pango,' is performed at the beginning of every game played. It is the ritual for the players, the opposition and fans. The haka, along with other aspects of consumption, and, as suggested in our findings, sets the scene for consumption. For fans it creates a strong experience of patriotic feeling and cultural uniqueness (Murray, 2000), much like the playing of the national anthem sets off a collective feeling of national pride. The opposing team is forced to face the performance of the haka. *Kapa O Pango* defines New Zealand as the All Blacks: passion, dominance, power and supremacy (All Blacks, 2013), themes we might expect to see in this study. *Kapa O Pango* talks about the team and their fans as the underdog. Like Te Rauparaha, they come from a position of

weakness, the beginning: "my first gasp of breath" and "the earth". From here they rise to be the All Blacks: "it is New Zealand that thunders now." In essence, the pilgrimage represents a deep, profound and sacred meaning for New Zealanders, despite the context of rugby being in a traditional profane, non-religious domain (Belk et al., 1989).

What is interesting is that the haka always defines the context of consumption as being oriented as an underdog (McGinnis and Gentry, 2009). As Cialdini et al. (1976) found, people generally want to be associated with winners. It would be expected that the All Blacks and their fans would want to rejoice in their greatness. However, the consumption experience begins with the oral history of Ngati Toa and the 'deviant' behavior of Te Rauparaha. Kim et al. (2008) argues that this type of 'script' is pervasive in many societies. The haka seeks to trick the opposition and position the All Blacks as the underdog. This was confirmed by O'Carroll (2009, p. 39), who concluded that "the haka and its first accounts of coming into existence are told through stories of oral history that describe the haka being used as"..."appeasement or as a means of trickery that embody a knowledge system of values and beliefs" (p. 43).

In a way this may create conflicting and contrasting feelings in the fans and may foster the creation of consumption guilt. To explain this complex process we begin with what fans know based upon previous game experiences and outcomes, that is, the All Blacks are dominant. However, to confound this image and the complexity of this ritualized consumption behavior, the haka espouses that they are to be positioned as an underdog and deviant to achieve that power and supremacy.

Hence, fans may experience guilt or cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) because they feel that they may not deserve that position of power. Bennett (1999, p. 296) calls this a type of false consensus: "when individuals assume that their own judgments and choices are common and appropriate" and "what one does and believes oneself is regarded as normal and customary among peers." Cialdini et al. (1993) defines a similar process as pluralistic ignorance. The haka also has powerful effects, inciting fans and players to violence. As Adams (2010, p. 37) sums up: it is the "kiwi ritual [that] always gets the blood pumping. I feel like running through brick walls after doing the haka."

Hence, it appears that the players and fans' consumption experience is unsettling and uncomfortable, as tension arises when the consumer seeks self-congruency (Sirgy, 1982) through the consumption experience with the All Blacks brand. This tension, or dissonance, might be perplexing to underdog researchers (McGinnis and Gentry, 2009), especially in light of the basking-in-reflected-glory (i.e., BIRGing) phenomenon (Cialdini et al., 1976; Wann and Branscombe, 1990), where following a winning team supposedly aligns with one's self-identity. However, does the consumer seek a congruent match between opposing sources of identity (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012)? We anticipate that their conflicted reality, wedged between weakness, deviance and dominance, is engrained deeply in New Zealand culture. Consumption will be associated with negotiation and rationalization when the consumer seeks congruency with their self-concept (Cherrier et al., 2011).

#### 4. Method

The methodology is based on the interpretivist grounded theory tradition (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The researchers serve as instruments in the interpretation of the data from which the theory emerges (Kane and Maxwell, 2011; Sanday, 1979). Interview data was collected from 15 All Blacks fans in New Zealand in 2013/14, including consultation of a Maori Cultural Rugby Advisor to further validate our model (Lincoln and

**Table 1**  
Fan characteristics.

Sex type	Male	57%
	Female	43%
Education	Secondary School/College	0%
	Trade/Professional Qualification	14%
	Degree/Diploma	71%
	Post-graduate Degree/Diploma	14%
Marital status	Single	21%
	Widowed	0%
	Living with permanent partner	0%
	Married	71%
	Divorced/ Separated	7%
Ethnicity	NZ Pakeha	50%
	Maori	29%
	Pacific Islander	14%
	Asian	0%
	European	7%
	Other	0%
Employment status	Retired	21%
	Student	0%
	Full time	57%
	Self employed	14%
	Unemployed	0%
	Homemaker	0%
	Part-time	7%
Personal income (\$NZ)	\$40,001–\$50,000	29%
	\$50,001–\$60,000	21%
	\$60,001–\$70,000	7%
	\$70,001–\$80,000	14%
	\$80,001–\$90,000	7%
	\$90,001–\$100,000	21%

Guba, 1985) (Table 1). The fans were recruited through rugby clubs and All Blacks fan groups. The interviews were unstructured but the entry question focused on the fans All Back rugby fan behavior. Interview transcripts were prepared for analysis in verbatim.

The grounded theory development process followed a procedure of categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, and iteration (Spiggle, 1994). The categorization process involves identifying units of data in the text as “belonging to, representing, or being an example of some more general phenomenon” (Canniford and Shankar, 2013; Spiggle, 1994, p. 493). This process started with open coding: the discovery and naming of categories (Strauss, 1987) through analysis of field notes and interview transcripts (Strauss, 1987). The first author in New Zealand conducted the interviews, and these were sent to the second author in the USA to concurrently analyze the data, determining emerging categories through open coding.

Once categories were established, we engaged in abstraction. Abstraction places empirically grounded categories into higher order constructs. These higher order constructs are in essence relationships among existing constructs that allow for a broader gestalt of a participant’s experience. The next process used was comparison. In this case, we began to implicitly and un-systematically examine data from within and across interview transcripts as we proceeded with the process. Preliminary analysis also allowed us to test preliminary propositions that had developed with our initial comparisons. Once we noted this initial proposition, subsequent analysis supported these relationships. This process helped determine the extent to which our categories existed across our data.

The next step involved the process of dimensionalization across interviews to determine how our categories varied along a continuum. We also used the process of integration in an attempt to start building grounded theory. To do this we used axial coding, which can be used to show the conditions around which a process

occurs (Strauss, 1987). The goal for us in this process was to determine cause-and-effect relations, or, at least, strong correlations. Along side our processes we also employed iteration: a back-and-forth process through which subsequent data collection is shaped by current operations and information. Our typical process was to examine a series of interviews along with field notes and memos, examine the emerging themes, examine the extant literature, and then exchange model ideas. Finally, at the end of the process we analyzed the transcripts as a whole, which aids in the inductive process.

## 5. Findings

In this paper we conceptualize consumption in excessive fan behavior (Fig. 1), defined as the actions and attitudes people have with a sports team due to self-reported high levels of fan identification (Dimmock and Grove, 2005) with strong identification leading to rage (Grove et al., 2012). Whereas previous fan behavior models identify antecedents at the individual (Cialdini et al., 1976; Wann and Branscombe, 1990) or servicescape level (Grove et al., 2012), we draw upon country-level factors as antecedents. This model argues that three factors drive excessive fan identification: country underdognicity, patriotism, and country insularity. This approach is similar to (Bloch and Richins, 1983; Hill and Robinson, 1991) and more recently (Pritchard and Funk, 2010). The model posits that the cultural sources of excessive identification relate to country factors. In terms of response, excessive fan identification has two major outcomes: negative and positive. Negatively, excessive behavior leads to deviant behaviors, such as violence, misplaced priorities, psychological flow and rationalization. Positively, excessive identification leads to more benign consumption in the form of cultural and social capital and communitas.

### 5.1. Excessive identification

Many of our informants’ highly-identified identities centered on the intimate lives of the players. They know the players, are personalizing and admiring them in ways that demonstrate personal kinship (Holt, 1995). They need to interpret their every move no matter how insignificant, such as how the All Blacks interacted with younger fans:

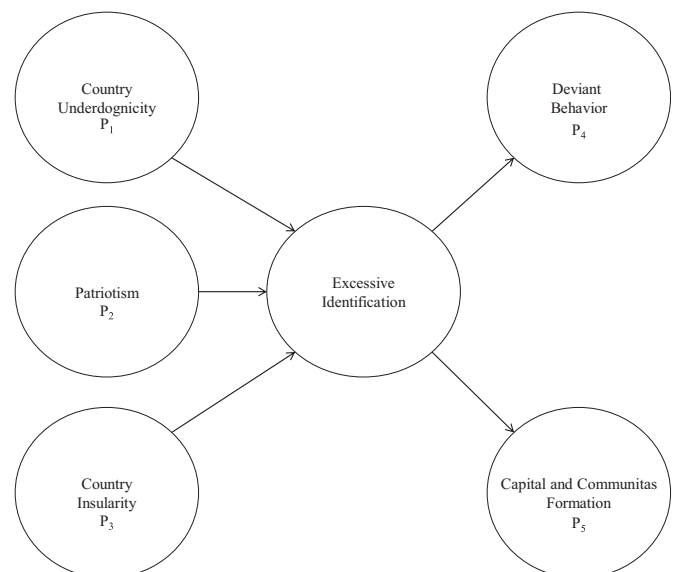


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

Ritchie McCaw is such an incredible leader. Ritchie was distinct in that he crouched down to be at eye level with these kids. [Kramer]

They often admire them, as role models in ways that go beyond their athletic prowess, admirable leaders on the field, setting an example for society to follow:

Well the majority of them set extremely good examples as citizens. There have been occasional lapses...but in general I think they are admired, like the New Zealand captain, Richie McCaw. I think he sets a very good example, particularly the way he does not respond when he is being treated badly on the field. [Bob]

Fans noted how they would wake up during all hours of the evening to watch games on TV. While this is common, some fans acknowledge that this is high identification and excessive adulation bestowed upon the team. Love and admiration is attributed to personalities rather than skills:

Maybe that is why Dan Carter and Richie McCaw, because they've come through a period of where rugby, New Zealand rugby, has been so dominant they've become like rock stars. It's become about those personalities rather than the game. [Karl]

Identification was so excessive that rugby has become life and self-concept aligned with rugby. Their clothing, friends and community would be congruent with this identification. Fans will combine watching the All Blacks with other objects to make the experience more enjoyable (Rahinel and Redden, 2013):

I've got a crazy rugby hat and I have got an All Blacks training jersey, special edition; it was given to me. If I am going to watch a game I will put that on. I would get in the zone by putting on my All Blacks training jersey just to participate. [Kramer]

Some fans mark their bodies with *Tā moko* (tattoos) that symbolize rugby and Maori spiritual values (Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson, 2005). The motivation is related to experience, integration and classification (Holt, 1995). This identification is “kind of body modification as a supplementary form of adornment” and “a supplementary aspect of identity expression” (Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson, 2005, p. 176). We argue that congruent consumption behaviors exist with the All Blacks and fans' subculture by allowing fans to “acquire and manipulate object meanings” to experience emotion, integrate self to the objects symbolic properties and be “viewed as vessels of cultural and personal meanings” (Holt, 1995, p. 2). Thus, representations, we contend, occur at the country level of identification and the routinization and aestheticisation of fashionable consumption (Sandicki and Guliz, 2010).

### 5.1.1. Country underdognicity

The All Blacks are not considered to be underdogs but instead champions. Will argues, “New Zealand has never been the underdog.” However, some alluded to New Zealand's relatively nascent societal history, island nation culture and underdog status:

I suppose when you look at X Factor, and I have only just started watching it the last 3 weeks because my 2 daughters watch it, and they talk about karaoke and I see rugby as being New Zealand karaoke... [Karl]

Their fandom is an instrument of equalization in world affairs, helping to overcome feelings of inferiority. We contend that a country's collective self-image can be a determining factor in establishing the level, intensity, and the nature of fan support. In New Zealand this underdognicity is due to its status in the world economy, small population and historic roots. Underdogs evolve

because there is a lack of resources or prominent disadvantage, but despite these shortcomings the underdog continues to persevere (McGinnis and Gentry, 2009; Paharia et al., 2011). Informants alluded to the notion of New Zealand's economy and country size in the context of intrigue. Though New Zealand might not be a serious contender from an economic standpoint, its All Blacks served as sort of an equalizer against the world's titans, for example, Australia and England. The competitive force the fans feel toward these countries is intense, arising from latent ideological expressions of resistance (Russell et al., 2011):

You can never, like the Aussies, you know I mean I do not hate any particular team. I am just always disappointed when you lose to them. If they lose fair and square then what can you say. But I mean like this loss to England, you know, it ruined our whole year to be honest. [Will]

At the country level we contend that feelings of ill will are probably stronger, as the foe is not only superior athletically but in other aspects that speak to cultural and capital superiority (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). We contend this fan's feelings toward the All Blacks' main competitors are quite commonly shared and emblematic of New Zealand fans, even though they are the reigning champion. The fans' bitterness toward the countries it shares roots with are targeted most toward those that hold something over another. Feelings are heightened towards England as they colonized New Zealand forcibly, imposing their history of superiority and cultural values. Based on the finding that informants alluded to notions of underdognicity as reasons for the excessive identification with the ABs, we propose the following:

P<sub>1</sub>: In fan consumption behavior, excessive identification is a consequence of fan perceived country underdognicity.

### 5.1.2. Patriotism

Another factor prevalent among these fans was a strong sense of patriotism that created the aforementioned excessive identification. Fans mentioned pride in the country directly, or notions of it, when providing reasons for support. For example, the country brand means pride and power:

It shows us what New Zealander's are all about. So sort of seeing that side you know, we are hard workers, we you know, do not take crap... [Stanley]

Though fans often don apparel, boast of the team's power, and bask in the reflected glory (Cialdini et al., 1976), some are quick to demerit fandom based upon sport ownership. For example, one fan argued that although the All Blacks dominate world rugby, New Zealand does not own the sport because it was invented somewhere else. The sense of patriotism negatively impacted their degree of identification:

It is not even a New Zealand game; it's an English game... We're young, we're new, we do not have history; we don't have tradition. New Zealand is all immigrants... [Karl]

Patriotism is also more salient when linked with an obsession with the All Blacks. Patriotism, or an emotional degree of attachment toward one's country, manifested itself in a way that could now be visible to others, demonstrating not only a sense of patriotism but also country affinity or excessive liking (Kosterman and Feshbach, 1989). Nationalism, or a belief in one's country being superior to other countries, was not present in this study, at least apart from rugby. Nationalism is dangerous when it becomes passionate and obsessive, when people feel exceptionally threatened by other countries, such as Germany did during Adolf Hitler's rise to power (Shook, 2008). The nationalism exhibited in our study was benign and expressed in a friendly yet competitive

context.

When love for one's country remains benign and when support is due to the liking of that country, an affinity exists. According to country affinity research (Oberecker et al., 2008), the stronger the affinity a consumer has for a country (whether residing there or not), the more inclined this person is to support products from that country. In Evans and Kelley's (2002) study, in which they examined data from the International Social Survey Program, they found that the Irish and New Zealanders take the greatest pride in their nation's sporting success. They argue that what is most likely occurring is an achievement-to-pride-to-attachment causal link, which suggests that pride in a country could first be driven by a country's success at something, or, in the case of New Zealand, success at rugby might drive national pride. Irrespective of the temporal ordering, we contend that the stronger one's affinity toward a country, the stronger one's inkling to not only support the products of that country but desire to visibly show its admiration thereof, similar to feelings of BIRGing exhibited in the Cialdini et al. (1976) study. Therefore, we propose that patriotism manifests the display of excessive fan identification. Identification with the team provides a socially acceptable way to demonstrate one's patriotism:

P<sub>2</sub>: In fan consumption behavior, excessive identification is a consequence of fan patriotism.

### 5.1.3. Country insularity

Strong fan identification with the All Blacks is related to remoteness and country insularity. Many of the fans alluded to New Zealand's insularity and also showed that support for the team stood as a way to elevate the country's status in a way that other measures could not. Sports served as an equalizer for the country's insularity and a way to draw attention. Fans leveraged this effect relative to countries that are not only strong in rugby but also counterparts in trade and politics:

And we have always been, in our eyes, the best in the world year in year out, you know. We just have a hiccup from time to time, but generally like our record's superior to, way more superior to, anyone else's. [Will]

Insularity leading to more excessive and passionate fandom is justified when considering the limited options for which a country can compete on a global scale. This is comparable to the idea of being the only game in town, where fans as a whole put their full backing behind something that really stands out for the country from a branding perspective (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Research has indicated that size of country has an impact on sports team pride, with smaller countries demonstrating more pride (Evans, 1996). This is because international competitions (e.g., Olympics) provide recognition for smaller countries on the same level as bigger countries, providing recognition they would not receive normally (Malcolm, 2001).

Though size was the factor driving this relationship, insularity, which perhaps has similar effects on recognition, could drive the same sense of pride in a country's team. Fans acknowledge that the All Blacks' contribute significantly to New Zealand from an international branding perspective:

...I must confess the fact that they are so powerful and they're sort of, they brand New Zealand, I suppose, the fact that they're so powerful and they're so well-known gives New Zealand an international aspect. I like that part of it, but not the game. [Karl]

Even though Australia, New Zealand, America and England appear to be similar in terms of culture, New Zealand's bi-cultural partnership between Maori and Pakeha creates significant cultural

separation (Murphy, 1999), arguably making New Zealand more isolated. Dawn argues for this cultural divorce:

...they are just a different breed, the Australians. Their culture is...more aligned to America. [Dawn]

The insularity of the country's population represents a strong avenue through which fans establish their New Zealander identity, channel their emotions, and help validate their substantial investments in the team. Insularity provides a reason for identification and a way for fans to amplify their isolated, unheard voice:

P<sub>3</sub>: In fan consumption behavior, excessive identification is a consequence of fan perceived cultural insularity.

## 5.2. Outcomes of excessive identification: deviant behaviors

### 5.2.1. Violence

Excessive identification with the All Blacks was associated with deviant behaviors, including violence and rage (Grove et al., 2012, p. 4): "a behavioral response that is intensely negative, antisocial, and displays hostility, ferocity, hate, and the like." For example, Tane states the identification with elite players was excessive and complex. The boundaries between stardom, the game and deviant behaviors were ambiguous. It all just seemed to be part of the game and what it meant to be a rugby player and fan:

...the fans were all about giving drugs to the players. And it was common and that was something that I wanted to achieve. I wanted to be a star...So as a young fella... you just wanted to be like them. Even though I was young, I was, yeah brought up around the drug scene and all of that type, alcohol scene, child abuse, sexually abused, violence, family violence. So to me that was normal, but to see a super star on the piss doing the same thing, you know I thought... this is a man just like me [Tane].

Helle-Valle (2008) viewed similar behaviors in football in Norway, suggesting that violence and conflict arises because of the high cultural value associated with the activity. In the All Blacks rugby consumption, we found:

I think it has to be confrontational, gladiatorial. There has to be a bit of blood and biff. [Karl]  
I think many rugby followers do enjoy the 'smash-him bro-ement.' [James].  
There's even sort of rituals. It is a ritual of running into the wall. And they line everyone up and they make you sprint and stop just before the wall. [Stanley]

Although violence is often associated with physical abuse, sometimes it was more psychological. On the more excessive and negative side, some fans noted behaviors in themselves or in others that was more troubling than simply wearing team memorabilia, for example, bullying on social media (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012). The anonymity and lack of meaningful supervision on the internet can lead to tragic outcomes (Dinakar et al., 2011). According to Will, bullying in All Blacks' context had reached extremes:

There is a lot of bullying and abuse as well that goes on Facebook...to the point where they copy pictures of, you know, you with your kid... [Will]

Lin et al. (2013) suggests that this type of consumer-to-consumer punishment is intended to establish social order and punish those in a subculture or community who violate subjective norms. Social order is not only present in the fan group, but enforced in ways that are dark and violent, leading to environments where one can feel isolated and ostracized if he or she does not go along with consumption norms.

### 5.2.2. Misplaced priorities

Fans indicated that devotion to the All Blacks comes before family but it is also a way to unite families. Take, for example, Will:

Obviously, my family comes first and stuff, but sort of, you know, my underlying passion's always been the All Blacks. Like every mate I have like known, who's a Kiwi, can say that they've got up at two am, three am, or whatever, we'd be like playing South Africa, with their dad or something. And, you know when you get older and dad's passed away and people might get a bit sentimental. [Will]

Sometimes, fans know their behavior goes overboard and they find themselves laughing it off, distancing themselves from others as to avoid embarrassment, or rationalizing it in a way that makes them appear less foolish and superficial:

Generally, I don't do a lot of games in public nowadays, just because I do feel it is a silly reaction, but I physically just can't help myself (laughter). [Dawn]

Though the previous examples of fan identification and misplaced priorities appear quite benign, some take a far more serious tone, creating more of a life-or-death path, emulating the dark side of fan support (Grove et al., 2012) where the more the fan identified the more excessive the behavior (Dimmick and Grove, 2005). For example, in one fan's house, the lead author noted the following in his field notes after the interview:

He had a lot of memorabilia...I thought what was interesting about this interview was the link at the beginning between the All Blacks and death. It's like a die-hard linkage to the All Blacks, you know, until death almost do us part.

Natarajan and Goff (1992) argue that this type of consumption (possession and collection) is deviant and compulsive and is often rooted in social class: "The collected items must have importance other than their possible utilitarian and/or esthetic values; they should take on a nonutilitarian, sacred status. Collectors attempt to permanently transfer symbolic properties of the collection to an immortal extension of the self" (p 39). In this evidence, possession and collection were also related to nostalgia (Zhou et al., 2012), particularly of deep past experience of family and watching rugby:

You like beating teams overseas and watching it with your dad. It's like a traditional thing for a lot of families. Like one of my groomsmen's dad was fanatical about the game. And he died 2 years ago. And he sort of struggled with it. The All Blacks sort of was always a hard thing to watch since his dad died. You have that extra passion and drive for them to win for some reason. [Will]

The allegiance noted in this case was noted to lesser degrees in other cases in our interviews, where fans would often admit to owning and donning All Blacks apparel and other memorabilia denoting their affinity to the team in more of a benign BIRGING fashion, where the success of the team was shared with fans to denote their own success as well, and where greater levels of identification appeared to lead to greater examples of said BIRGING (Wann and Branscombe, 1990):

People like to be associated with winning teams...Everyone wears the silver fern... [Dawn]

### 5.2.3. Flow

Evidence of flow was seemingly prevalent among many of our informants and as a result of explanations related to excessive fan identification. Though psychological flow is usually noted in a positive context, in this study it is associated as a negative

outcome due to its occurrence among those fans exhibiting excessive identification with the All Blacks. Flow is generally described as a process by which people lose themselves, or more precisely lose track of their self-awareness due to the fact that the activity in which they are involved is totally consuming, and it appeals to the autotelic dimension, whereby the activity is performed for its own sake (Csikszentmihaiyi, 1997). For example, Dawn's excessive support:

Most of my friends won't come out with me. I like to get in the moment and really, you know, shout, and cheer, and boo (laughter) when required [Dawn].

This getting into the moment indicates a measure of flow. Flow is not only spell-like and addictive (Celsi et al., 1993), but it can also occur in a broad-range of activities, such as chess, surgery (Csikszentmihaiyi, 1997), Hip Hop (Chalmers and Arthur, 2008), golf (McGinnis, Gentry and Gao, 2009), and skydiving (Celsi et al., 1993):

... I have no discipline to not watch sport ... It's just another screen for me. [Dawn]

### 5.2.4. Rationalization

The abandoned sense of flow is later captured by a process of rationalization. Consumption is a conflicted reality wedged between the underdog, patriot, self and world champion:

Yeah, so heartache with Rugby World Cup losses ... particularly the last one, the 2007 cause you know we all thought we were going to win that, and I think I slipped into a bit of depression, probably like the country but mine seemed to last quite a while. And then I kind of had to figure out how I would cope with the All Blacks losing. And so I came up with this plan that I would bet against them so that way I would win both ways. So if the All Blacks lost I won money, and if they won then I was happy. [Linda]

A further example of this process of rationalization is rooted deeply in New Zealand's physical and social isolation. Players that come from the Pacific Islands are Maori, and the All Blacks is a team of many cultures. However, fans perceive the team to be all New Zealanders. To achieve that sense of reality they engage in rationalization. This sense of social belief was challenged in the 1981 Springboks Tour of New Zealand. As a result of this collision, New Zealand society was split between two diverse sides. Societal concussion resulted for the: (1) Against: those that wanted the tour to not go ahead in the support of the abolishment of Apartheid and (2) For: those that wanted the tour to go ahead, not because they supported Apartheid, but rather they wanted politics out of sport. For New Zealand the tour was a civil rights movement (Richards, 1999). As James argued when talking about the Tour, we ignored the racial repression. We rationalized this conflicted reality through many processes. An important pathway was the belief in the All Blacks as a team of many cultures: New Zealanders all painted white:

Well we painted our guys white, they declared them honorary whites but they would not bring blacks here. [James]

Tane argued that the game and its related trappings created a melting pot of forgotten cultural identity. They become part of the game instant from their family and origins:

Once I got to Auckland I noticed there were a lot of people that were distant away from that culture, whether you're a Samoan, Tongan, and Maori. Maori were the predominant ones that I noticed like some of them didn't know where they were. So for me I made sure that if I am gonna be a rugby player. I'm gonna

know who I am and where I am from. [Tane]

Rationalization is also controlled by corporations and other brands that are related to the All Blacks brand biography. For example, the Adidas control of the haka:

Oh I believe that in corporations, they should just leave it alone, really. Did they actually consult with any Maori? I feel sorry for Piri Weepu and Jose Gear because those two were the ones that really portrayed that Kapa o Pango haka. But it was the media and then if you looked back at it, Adidas jumped on board and said yeah do not do it. [Tane]

Rationalization also extends to the internal discussion fans have about the interaction between Pakeha, Maori and Pacific players. This may link to the rationalization of whether rugby is New Zealand's, questioning, what a Maori is, why Pacific Island people play rugby and socioeconomic justification.

Maori are not excluded from playing in the All Blacks, and I suspect if they were short of a position in the Maori team they might find a white fellow. But what is a Maori? A Maori is someone who calls themselves a Maori.

Well they always will be because the Pacific people, probably even more than the Maori people, are very athletic, and they like rugby. There's money in it and they're coming from lower socioeconomic streams, and it is a career. If their body lasts out they probably finish up as rich... [James]

Therefore it is proposed:

P<sub>4</sub>: In fan consumption behavior, deviant fan behavior (violence, misplaced priorities, flow and rationalization) is a consequence of excessive identification.

### 5.3. Outcomes of excessive identification: capital formation and *communitas*

#### 5.3.1. Social and cultural capital

Though excessive fan behavior has negative outcomes the outcomes can also be positive in that it provides social and cultural capital (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson, 2013). Bourdieu (1986) provides three types of capital, which include economic, social and cultural. Social capital is using the influence of friends and social networks to maintain or establish power and significance (Kim, 2009). This may also extend to particular Maori tribes:

...with Maori rugby, we're there because we are Maori and we believe in it, and we wanna see it grow and succeed. [Linda]

McGinnis and Gentry (2009) note that name-dropping displays indicated a sense of network vitality and to determine whether the person with whom the exchange was taking place was worthy of being known. Fans noted how they got to meet many of the players in person, and in some cases boasted about receiving autographs. Wohlfeil and Whelan (2012) used personal introspection identity of a fan relationship as being akin to the feeling of knowing a friend in love. There were many examples of the informants citing admiration for some of the more popular players and examining their behavior in the popular press. They personalized (Holt, 1995) their knowledge of the players in such a way that indicated intimate knowledge of being more than just a spectator.

McGinnis and Gentry (2009) noticed in their study of golfers that in order to thwart this perception, golfers with high cultural capital carry in their bags special clubs that had been "around the block" and had unique stories attached to them. These same sorts of capital displays were often noticed with All Blacks fans as well. Fans routinely wore team memorabilia, dressed their kids in likeminded clothes, and decorated their domiciles with team

paraphernalia. In addition to visible markers, fans would also boast of experiences with viewership, games attended, and other such events to indicate depth of capital. For example, Olga, a new immigrant to New Zealand, felt an allegiance to the All Blacks as a necessity from an acculturation and symbolic standpoint, but it also made good business sense:

For me it works for our business. That's why I intentionally broadcast my relationship with All Blacks in some social media, to show that I am a part of this culture... [Olga]

She further added that her assimilation to her new country was aided by her knowledge of the All Blacks, demonstrating the cultural and social capital associated with such insider information. When it came to New Zealand, her prior knowledge about the Kiwi culture and All Blacks opened doors for her, allowing her patriotism for her new country to manifest itself:

Not only do fans use knowledge and markers to enhance their own capital (or BIRG), but also they note how others use All Blacks' markers to enhance their capital. In some cases, they describe the symbiotic relationships that exist between players and politicians in helping each other:

It is good for the politicians to be photographed with the rugby players. They are all feeding off each other. [James]

#### 5.3.2. *Communitas*

While flow in our study is associated with deviant fan behaviors, due to its more isolated experiences where fans are atypical to the overall fandom of the sport, *communitas* is more benign because of its social acceptability. *Communitas* or shared flow occurs when other participants are on the same page and experience transcendence together, or when social status is stripped away and people are allowed to experience a heightened sense of community without structure (Turner, 1982; 1969). Turner (1969) describes *communitas* as a situation where the social order is "an undifferentiated, homogeneous whole, in which individuals confront one another integrally, and not as 'segmentalized' into statuses and roles" (p. 177). Evidence of *communitas* comes in the form of how the fans reported transcendence, or different, positive mental states of being one with the crowd. A key point about rituals in establishing community is the "experience of belonging with similar human beings" (Chrisman, 1974, p. 360). For example, in the case below, a fan reported being in the zone, a comment often associated with flow, but due to *communitas* being akin to group flow, we include this comment as evidence.

I've got an All Blacks training jersey, special edition, it was given to me. I would get in zone by putting on my All Blacks training jersey just to participate. [Kramer]

Later in the same interview, the informant explained how donning the apparel made him feel a part of something bigger, again showing signs of transcendence associated with *communitas*. When asked how putting a jersey on made the fan feel, he commented:

It does make me feel like I'm supporting that team. That's my team... I suppose I feel part of the country, part of the greater group... [Kramer]

The latter part of the comment demonstrated that transcendence was experienced via the ritual passing of the memorabilia, demonstrating, too, that a transfer of capital in the form of cultural capital (i.e., in-depth knowledge and appreciate of memorabilia) had taken place. The jersey represented the values and traditions of the team, its meaning to New Zealand as a whole, and membership in the broader collective of fandom (i.e., social capital). The passing of his apparel had ritual-like elements, in that bestowing it to other



consumers had been accomplished with great care, where the recipient and sender both had to appreciate its special meaning, much like that done with other sacred components (Belk et al., 1989) and similar to the attachment Harley riders have with their bikes (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). The appreciation the recipient showed exhibits the shared meaning and *communitas* experienced:

I know that it meant so much to him that he had it; it meant more to me to give it to somebody that would really appreciate it . . . this kid was just so stoked to have it. [Claire]

The transfer of this shared meaning and currency, then, created a bond between sender and receiver that each understood and appreciated. The ritual gift giving of the jersey sacralised what would normally be considered a profane object, creating a special connection between sender and receiver (Belk et al., 1989). In the process of socialization, we contend that social capital was also established because of the shared social value and meaning of the object to the culture, arguing that those objects deemed important in a culture have more currency. An outcome of sacred consumption per McGinnis et al. (2012) is *communitas*, and if capital formation is also transferred during the socialization process it follows that it, too, should have a positive impact on *communitas*. Therefore, we propose that the less central they are to a person's identity, the more likely this person will be able to use their fan behavior in positive ways in cultivating different forms of capital and *communitas*. Therefore:

P<sub>5</sub>: In fan consumption behavior, capital formation and *communitas* (social, cultural, *communitas*) is a consequence of excessive identification.

## 6. Discussion

Based on this study, country self-perceptions and characteristics manifest themselves in the reasons why consumers identify with their noted sports teams, both at the local and national levels. New Zealand's All Blacks rugby fans indicated country characteristics as reasons for identification. Research has indicated that New Zealand is low on power distance, but relatively high on masculinity and individualism dimensions of culture (Hofstede, 2014). New Zealand is also self-perceived as an underdog, due to its remote location, low population base, and relatively low gross domestic product. Reasons for strong identification with the All Blacks resembled these characteristics. From a theoretical perspective, we add to the literature by demonstrating how country-wide factors and country of origin pride can be negotiated as a rationalization strategy for excessive fan behavior.

We also show how reasons for consumption from Holt's (1995) play perspective, should be expanded to include country pride and self-identification. Of particular interest in this study was the sense of patriotism experienced by the informants. In their study on differences between nationalism and patriotism, Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) note not only differences in meaning but also intentions. When people are nationalistic, they are more inclined to feel country superiority and support such things as nuclear armament policies. Nationalistic attitudes have led to some of the most negative events in world history (Kosterman and Feshbach, 1989). When people are patriotic they are less inclined to be bellicose and tend to be more welcoming of foreigners, suggesting more benign outcomes and attitudes with patriotism.

Due to its remote location and limited influence, New Zealanders might feel their power is suppressed. In order to exert influence and dominance, especially that which might be manifest in an individualistic and masculine culture, some members there might channel their need for aggression and competition through

the support of the All Blacks. In essence, feelings of nationalism might be suppressed, which therefore enables feelings of patriotism to become more excessive and harmful to the individual, harboring them and society as a whole. The fact that nationalism was not present in the current study indicates, though, that the fans might compartmentalize their exuberance, or at least place in its proper perspective, despite excessive identification being exhibited. Certainly more research in this area is needed.

We also found evidence of autotelic deviance, defined as structure, purpose and deviance: consumers interact directly with the object for an end to themselves (Holt, 1995). For example, alcohol consumption, violence and the wearing of team colors during game play may become the object of consumption that is ritualized—loyal brand and location (Grove et al., 2012; Philips, 1996). Internally the fan consumes to convince themselves into feeling that they are at the game and in a desired state.

Further, autotelic capital formation as structure, purpose and capital formation was observed. Interactions with other people in which consumption objects serve as focal resources for an end to themselves (Holt, 1995). The objective of this consumption is to establish and maintain power and significance through the influence of friends and social networks (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson, 2013). For example, groups of rugby fans may come to together in a rugby club to watch a game, drink alcohol and share stories about previous matches. Internal objectives may be to establish within the group a reputation for knowledge, or being the person who can consume the most alcohol.

Instrumental rationalization was also uncovered in the consumption practice of fans that interact directly with the object for some further end. The objective of consumption is to rationalize: fans in New Zealand who are Pakeha may engage often with Pacific culture in New Zealand in an effort to embrace the fact that the All Blacks are made upon of players from Pacific nations. The cultural engagement may normalize the differences and make fans feel that Pacific culture is part of New Zealand culture.

Finally, instrumental *communitas*, defined as interactions with other people in which consumption objects serve as focal resources for some further end (Holt, 1995), was present. The objective of consumption is related to a shared experience (transcendence) without structure or social status (Kim and Walker, 2012; Hopkinson and Pujari, 1999). The example provided from the evidence relates to consumption practices prior, during and post (to this day) the 1981 Springbok Tour to New Zealand. It could be argued that in this situation the main focus of instrumental consumption is rationalization and *communitas*. We argue that consumers may be seeking through the shared interpersonal interactions a relief, escape (justification) of autotelic deviance and/or building from the power and significance created by autotelic capital formation.

## 7. Research implications

The major implication of our work is that this is part of the first stage of the theory development journey. Hence, our preliminary conceptual model is based on an inductive and grounded theory approach. Future research should build from our foundation, using methodologies that are more consistent with the positivist orientation.

Our conceptual model could be extended through the extension of country-related factors in different countries and excessive sport contexts. We also suggest that further work be done to understand assemblage and the types of different purifying practices that consumers engage in to preserve the romantic notion of excessive consumption (Canniford and Shankar, 2013). This may help us understand how to counteract the justification of sport-related

alcohol consumption and violence in society. Further investigation could proceed to understand how to control violence and rage (Grove et al., 2012) and how fan temperament and triggers might be managed. The role of social media sub-culture interactions warrants further exploration in terms of the stability of the instrumental purpose, particularly when members become dependent on the community for social resources (Davis et al., 2014). There may also be the need to further explore gendered behavior (Kane and Maxwell, 2011; McGinnis et al., 2008) and the fan consumption of women's sports (Rozin et al., 2012).

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