

The Polish Amiga Scene as a Brand Community

[Amiga Commodore Poland brand community consumption demoscene home computer piracy](#)

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This article investigates the construction of rituals, shared identities and moral responsibilities of a community of Commodore Amiga computer users in early post-communist Poland. My primary aim is to examine the usefulness of the concept of brand community for consumer culture research to study the phenomenon of the emotional engagement of its users with the Amiga. Drawing from my empirical evidence, which includes analysis of Amiga related periodicals, disk magazines and other demoscene materials, I will provide an historical overview of the emergence of the Amiga in Poland, and discuss how the brand community was structured through club activities, numerous periodicals and disk magazines, and the activity of the demoscene. I will further investigate how the community constructed its rituals and shared identity, and finally focus on the social responsibilities of the community members and discuss the normative constructs of a “true” and “faux” member.

Introduction

This article investigates the construction of rituals, shared identities and moral responsibilities of a community of Commodore Amiga computer users in early post-communist Poland.[\[1\]](#)

This case study refers to the analytical framework of “brand community” proposed by consumer research scholars Albert M. Muñoz and Thomas O’Guinn (2001). This concept is an analytical framework that can be applied to provide a better understanding of how

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consumers engage with brands. The authors define it as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand.” (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001, 412).

A study of such a community offers valuable insights into the role of users and intermediary actors in the co-production of computer technology (Jasanoff 2004). Moreover, a Polish case study can particularly contribute to the scholarship of the cultural history of computers. Due to the emerging market economy, the manufacturer lacked control over the distribution and retail of home computers, and so the Amiga emerged here as the dominant hardware platform due to the activities of local entrepreneurs, computer clubs and the demoscene, without any significant contribution from Commodore Ltd. and the short-lived Commodore Polska (1992-1994). Thus, this case can shed more light on the cultural logic of the phenomenon of the Amiga as a community project (Maher 2012), which was, and still is, substantially supported by dedicated brand users.

Here I argue that the emergence of such a local grass roots brand community without any significant contribution from the manufacturer, and its local branch, substantially impacted on the community’ ethos. In this ethos the Amiga was redefined from a consumer product into a community project. The community not only had its own rituals, but also shared the burden of the moral responsibility for supporting, continuing and even expanding the Amiga, when it was abandoned by the manufacturer. I pay particular attention to a range of intermediary actors that constituted this community and shared the same agenda of promoting the brand and keeping it alive despite the manufacturer’s failure. The community was usually referred to as the “Polish Amiga scene” (orig. *polska scena amigowa*), which included a range of Amiga users, who were using this platform in some sort of creative work such as programming, music and graphic design, or applying it in the routines of the office environment. This name can be misleading since the term “scene” in computer culture jargon frequently refers to the demoscene (Reunanen 2009; Reunanen & Silvast 2014). Here the local demoscene was a part of the broader “Polish Amiga scene”.

However, as I will show, the local demoscene became a key intermediary actor which contributed to the popularity of the Amiga, but also projected its script of pursuing technical mastery over hardware and using the Amiga to make demos. Aside from the demoscene, the

community also included user clubs, numerous Amiga related periodicals, importers of hardware and pirated software, local garage hardware and software industries, and those who used the Amiga in their professional careers, particularly for “creative” work. The status of users who used the Amiga merely as a gaming machine was controversial and tensions about gaming, as one of the scripts of using the Amiga (Westlake 2015; Maher 2012, 207-248), will be investigated below. During the same period in Poland there were other similar communities surrounded by similar practices, but there were much smaller. In the early 1990’s there were still prolifically active communities of 8-bit platforms: the Commodore 64 and Atari XE/XL. There was also a small Atari ST community that included mostly professional or semiprofessional musicians and the desktop publishing community. The Amiga community was definitely the largest both in terms of number of locally produced software artifacts, computer periodicals, events, as well as mainstream media coverage.

This paper contributes to this special issue of *WiderScreen* twofold. First, I demonstrate how using a theoretical framework from consumer culture studies, supported with concepts from science and technology studies, can enrich our understanding of the cultural logic of computer-oriented subcultures. Second, this paper focuses on a local perspective by showing how a specific nation-wide Amiga brand community emerged as a rather secluded community cut off from Western Europe by cultural and economic differences. Originally, the brand community concept was used to explore the engagement of consumers with brands in long lasting and stable market economies. My study, however, explores how such a community could define and perform its role in the context of an emerging market economy, with loosely shaped power relations between the actors who participated in the consumer culture. Such seclusion led to the development of a form of technological autarky – the conviction that during the fall of Commodore Ltd. and the rapid decline of the popularity of the Amiga in the West, the Polish Amiga scene could still thrive, supplied with software and hardware upgrades by local companies. Thus, the analysis of this community offers a new perspective on the process of the globalization of high technology markets in the 1980s and 1990s. The seminal study of the history of the Sony Walkman (du Gay et al. 1997), as well as accounts on the global expansion of high-tech multinational enterprises (for instance Henderson 2003 [1989]), focus on the successful building of companies’ global presence by establishing thriving “global-local nexuses” (du Gay et al. 2003 [1997], 78-80). This paper

rather shows how a community of brand users reacted to a short lived and unsuccessful attempt of building such nexus with Commodore Polska.

The shift from state socialism to the market economy forms the backdrop to this study. I situate my case in this cultural and economic background of the emerging market economy, which lacked well-established power structures, that govern relations between manufacturers, retailers and consumers. However, it does not address the broader aspect of the political change beside the introduction of the market economy, that enabled both the massive expansion of the local private business sector, and the possibility of taking part in the economic globalization of the 1990s. While doing so I intentionally challenge the popular notion of the omnipresent impact of the political sphere on society and culture in Eastern Europe. This paper primarily focuses on a short period between 1987 and 1995, which begins with the first testimonies about the local presence of the Amiga and ends at the point which can be approximately identified as the beginning of the decline of its popularity. The empirical evidence for this article includes content analysis of a range of Polish contemporary Amiga related periodicals and disk magazines, analysis of printed and audiovisual materials from Amiga “brand fests” such as an Intel Outside party, and interviews with prominent members of the Amiga community from the retro computing website *Polski Portal Amigowy* and *Commodore & Amiga Fan* magazine. The paper is organized as follows. First, I outline the concept of brand communities and discuss its usefulness in studying the phenomenon of the emotional engagement with the Amiga. I then provide a historical perspective on the emergence of the Amiga in Poland, and the process of community building by its users, through club activities, numerous periodicals and disk magazines, and the activity of the demoscene. Next, I investigate how the community constructed its rituals and shared identity. Finally, I focus on the social responsibilities of the community members and discuss the normative constructs of a “true” and “faux” member. The overarching goal of all three sections is to provide insights into the key role of a computer brand plays in the process of the forming a community of computer users.

Brand communities and computer users

The original study by Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) is based on empirical evidence from their fieldwork among consumers who owned Ford Broncos, Saab cars, and Macintosh computers. The authors examine such evidence with the use of sociological studies of the notion of community. While doing so, they focus on investigating how brand communities are structured upon three substantial elements of the community: shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001, 412). Their study refers to a previous study about the “subculture of consumption” of Harley Davidson owners (Schouten & McAlexander 1993; 1995). They note that Schouten and McAlexander “employ a structuralist analysis that describes a brand with a socially fixed meaning” and they outline the difference of their own approach: “We, however, see brand communities having an active interpretive function, with brand meaning being socially negotiated, rather than delivered unaltered and in toto from context to context, consumer to consumer“ (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001, 414).

Muñiz further continued his work on this subject and in 2006 published a study of the brand community of the Apple Newton, an ill-fated PDA from the late 1990s (Muñiz and Schau 2005). This study investigated how a community kept a technological product alive, supported its use, as well as found new possible ways of using the Newton long after Apple discontinued its support. This approach emphasizes the interpretative role a community of users can play, and attributes to them agency, instead of considering them as consumers who passively adopt cultural meanings prescribed by manufacturers and marketers. This approach can be particularly useful in explaining how users of the Amiga negotiated cultural meanings of this platform, ultimately reinventing it as a community project which lasts to this day. Information about the current developments of this community can be found on the website of the developers of the [AmigaOS project](#).

Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001, 415) note that “[brand] communities may form around any brand, but are probably most likely to form around brands with a strong image, a rich and lengthy history, and threatening competition”. They analyze the community of Macintosh computer users and provide a cursory investigation of how the widely shared and reproduced history of

Apple contributed to the formation of identity among the members of the community. This issue has been further comprehensively explored in the paper entitled “The Cult Macintosh” (Belk & Tumbat 2005).

It is no coincidence that the Amiga also became a brand around which a devoted community has formed. Jimmy Maher (2012) comprehensively discussed the image and history of this platform. While discussing the strong commitment to the Amiga by users, he used the term “platform nationalism” (Maher 2012, 185), which is consistent with the sense of shared identity among members of brand communities. Maher’s term is used somewhat metaphorical since there is a difference between a love for one’s country and one’s computer. But, if we refer to Anderson’s (1991 [1983]) classic work on nationalism and ‘imagined communities’ we will see that nations were built as imagined communities based on several factors such as common language and culture, but also on imagined scientific and technological prowess. So here we can see “platform nationalism” as a belief in technical prowess of one’s computer juxtaposed to the inferiority of the competing hardware platforms. The Amiga fits into a utopian story of a technology imagined and designed by a single enthusiast, who helped “creative types” to express their creativity with graphics, animation and sound editing tools. However, according to the widely shared belief held by members of the Amiga community, aside from the competition from Atari Inc., and later the PC platform, the real threat to the Amiga came from the within. Amiga-dedicated websites (for instance <http://www.amigahistory.co.uk/>) that constituted contemporary forums for this brand community extensively discuss how Commodore Ltd., with a gallery of top managers, were considered as villains, driven by short-term profits, which greatly contributed to the demise of the Amiga.

Studies concerning the engagement of consumers with brands from the 2000s coincided with a trend in science and technology studies and design history to shift their attention from technology designers to the users and intermediary actors (Oudshoorn & Pinch 2003; Lees-Maffei 2009). In a seminal collection of essays, *How Users Matter*, which substantially contributed to this trend, we can find Lindsay’s (2003) paper on contemporary users of the 8-bit TRS-80 computer who continue to support and use this platform as a productive tool. As

she (2003, 30) explains, she approaches the life of a technology as a process in which users took an active role:

This chapter shows that the co-construction of users, user representations, and technology is not a static, one-time exercise by the designers of the TRS-80, but is a part of a dynamic ongoing process in which many different groups, including the users themselves, participate.

Such a remark is also true for the Amiga's technology in which users actively participate and even provide this platform with a long afterlife after the manufacturer's demise. Lindsay's chapter was published in the book section titled "Users and Non-Users as Active Agents in the (De-)Stabilization of Technologies." I will further outline the role of users in a similar context and explain how in a specific context the communities tried to first locally "stabilize" the Amiga, and then later to prevent its de-stabilization. Lindsay uses the term "co-construction," which for the sake of brevity here can be described as a synonym for "co-production" (Jasanoff 2004), which has become a widely used term in science and technology studies. Its introduction and spread was related to the postulate of attributing social actors, other than designers, with agency in shaping technologies. With my research background in the history of technology I also find this concept as a suitable framework for discussing the agency of different social groups in shaping the development of computer technologies. Here, I would like to discuss the possibility of using the brand community concept of Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001), but not to analyze a homogeneous social group of end users.

The rise and decline of the Polish Amiga community

The first trace of the Amiga in Poland can be found in the pages of the popular *Bajtek* computer magazine (1985-1996). The magazine actively collaborated with local state sponsored computer clubs and regularly covered their activities. I have previously discussed (Wasiak 2014) the role of *Bajtek* and the state sponsored computer clubs in the shaping of the local Polish computer culture. In January 1987 the magazine published an article about the technical details of the Amiga 1000 computer with a short note that "Maniak" in Warsaw, one of the most prolific clubs, already had it available since November 1986 (Silski 1987, 15). This computer was plausibly brought privately from the West by one of club members who made it available on the club's premises at the local culture center to other members. In *WiderScreen 2-3/2020: Home Computer Cultures and Society Before the Internet Age (vol. 23 no. 2-3)*

1988, a small circle of owners of this computer model, which was a rarity in Poland due to its prohibitive price, established their own user group named the Amiga Commodore Club in the city of Kraków. Marek Hyła, the Club's founding member, described the trajectory of learning about this computer through personal networks:

First I saw the Amiga at my friend's place in Norway in 1987. One year later the A500 was sitting on my desk along with a color monitor and twenty floppies. This purchase was also inspired by another friend [...] who replaced his C64 with the Amiga few months earlier. Together [...] we became the founders of the Amiga Commodore Club, the first "movement" of Amiga users in Poland. (Hyła 2007)

The Club, active in the years 1988-1990, had an estimated number of members of about a dozen in 1988, and about one hundred in 1990. It aimed to support current Amiga users with software, program manuals, and programming books, as well as to encourage computer owners to buy the Amiga. Thus, the club played two crucial communal missions outlined by Muñoz and O'Guinn (2001, 424): integrating and retaining members and assisting in the use of the brand. The most notable club activity were regular copy parties where Amiga users could share their software libraries. In an interview for the prominent periodical *Amigowiec* (Polish term for Amiga user), another club activist romanticized the early Amiga users:

There was something phenomenal about this small group of Amiga owners, it were about one hundred of them in Poland at that time. [They] purchased this computer not because of fashion [...] Those days people were buying the Amiga because they authentically had felt in love with her. (Kokoszcyński 1991, 15)

It is important to explain the specific meaning of the phrase "not because of fashion". In the late 1980s, both important computer magazines *Bajtek* and *Komputer* (1986-1990), aside from short notes about the Amiga, primarily promoted the Atari ST as the future dominant 16-bit platform. Particularly the *Komputer* editors, with personal links to the DTP industry, regularly published promotional materials of Atari Inc. and promoted the Atari ST as a professional computer. In one *Komputer* issue we can even find locally made computer graphics with the message "Adios Amigo" ("Amigo" form is a Polish inflection of Amiga) (Fig. 1). The editors of *Komputer* also regularly boasted about the technical prowess of the

Atari ST. For the emerging Amiga community such a bias helped to shape the image of the Amiga as a computer popularized in Poland by the grass-roots community outside of the mainstream dominated by the Atari community.

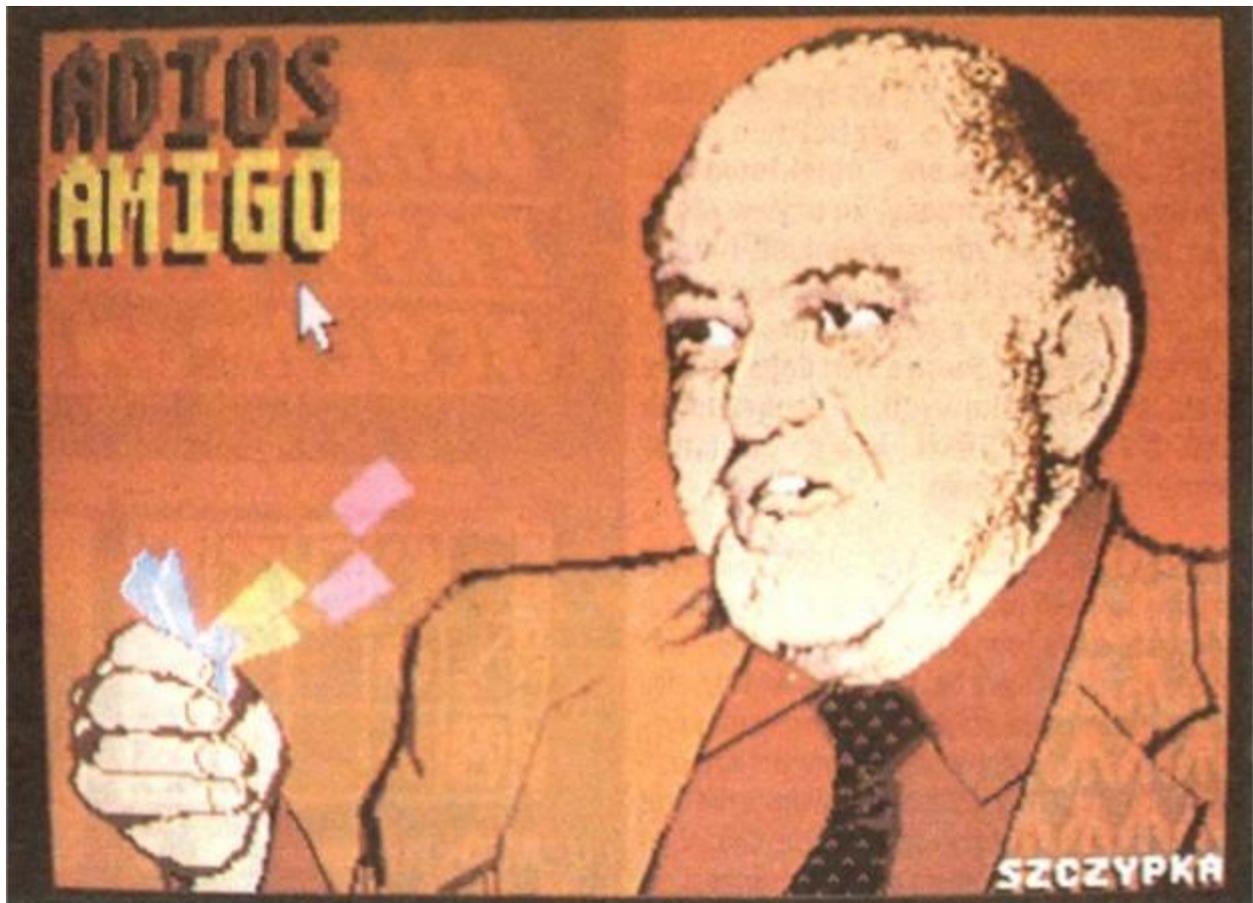


Figure 1. Jack Tramiel, who moved to Atari Inc. to develop the Atari ST, destroys the Amiga rainbow checkmark logo in a locally made computer graphics. This graphics included a copied scan of Tramiel's face. *Komputer* 1986, no.8, 26.

The Amiga started to achieve much wider popularity around 1989, when the introduction of the market economy stimulated the massive growth of private trade. However, at that time Commodore Ltd still did not have an official local trading partner, thus the Amiga computers available for Polish consumers were distributed by small-scale importers and traders. One such trader provided a detailed account of the trade at a 'computer fair' (Wasiak 2014) in the city of Katowice. During such 'computer fairs' organized at the weekends in large cities one could purchase a second hand computer or equipment. However, the most prolific form of trade was the distribution of pirated software, usually copied on the spot.

One of our colleagues, with whom we were trading [in pirate software] at the fair, moved to West Germany with his parents [...] So now we had an access to hardware which was much cheaper than in Poland. At the beginning we were importing one-two Amigas and sold them at the fair (of course, we did not cease trading with Amiga software, it was always profitable since the games for the Amiga were sold in large numbers). By selling Amigas 500 with peripherals such as memory expansions, external floppy drives, monitors, digitizers and joysticks, I managed to earn enough to buy an A1200 [with expensive peripherals]. Our sales were growing every day – it was the time of the Amiga [the early 1990s] and everything for the Amiga was sold perfectly. (Ramos 2009, 89)

It is remarkable to note that this interview was published in a local retro-computing magazine called *Commodore & Amiga Fan* (2008-2013) in a section where usually the editors published interviews with the prominent members of the C64/Amiga demoscene or the authors of popular programs. This highlights an important feature of the local Amiga community. The traders who specialized in importing the Amigas and Amiga-related equipment, as well as those who facilitated the massive flow of pirated software from the West (fig. 2, 3, 4), contributed to the stabilization of the Amiga as the dominant hardware platform. Thus, they were identified as important members of the community.

For the sake of brevity, in this paper I can only briefly mention the controversy over the pirate software traders. In early years they contributed to the stabilization of the Amiga by assisting the use of brand with a massive selection of pirate software. But later they became considered as those who de-stabilized it by hindering the growth of local software publishers, who would have helped the Amiga to stay alive by providing a steady flow of locally made programs when the Amiga software market abroad steeply declined in the mid-1990s.



Figure 2. Computer fair in Warsaw, 1989. A stand with pirate copies of Amiga games. *Bajtek*, 1989 no. 10, 3.



Figure 3. Computer fair in Warsaw, 1991. A stand of a teenage software trader who offers floppies with Amiga software as well as a selection of Western and Polish Amiga related periodicals. *Enter*. 1991, Sept., 17.



Figure 4. A custom made pullover worn by a high profile software trader who specialized in Amiga software at computer fairs. “River’s Edge” website.

The period from 1990 to 1995 was the heyday of the Amiga in Poland. At that time, the community was structured through the knowledge circulated through numerous Amiga-related periodicals and disk magazines. In those years seven different Amiga related periodicals were published. By 1995 all of them were out of print except for the Polish edition of the German *Amiga Magazin* (1992-1999). Similarly, most of the over 250 local disk magazines preserved in the comprehensive archive “[Fat Magnus](#)” were published in the years 1991 to 1995. Lindsay (2003, 37) notes that computer magazine writers are important mediators who play a role in the co-production of technology by circulating knowledge about computer use. In this case computer brand-related magazines also played an important role for the brand community by providing information about new brand-related products, and by offering attractive scripts of computer use. Amiga related magazines not only offered such knowledge, but also provided users with extensive coverage of community events such as copy- and demoparties, as well as content that could strengthen their identity, particularly information about the superiority of the Amiga, and its application as a creative tool. What is particularly important here, such magazines also offered space to express users’ creativity by publishing computer graphics submitted by readers (Fig 5).

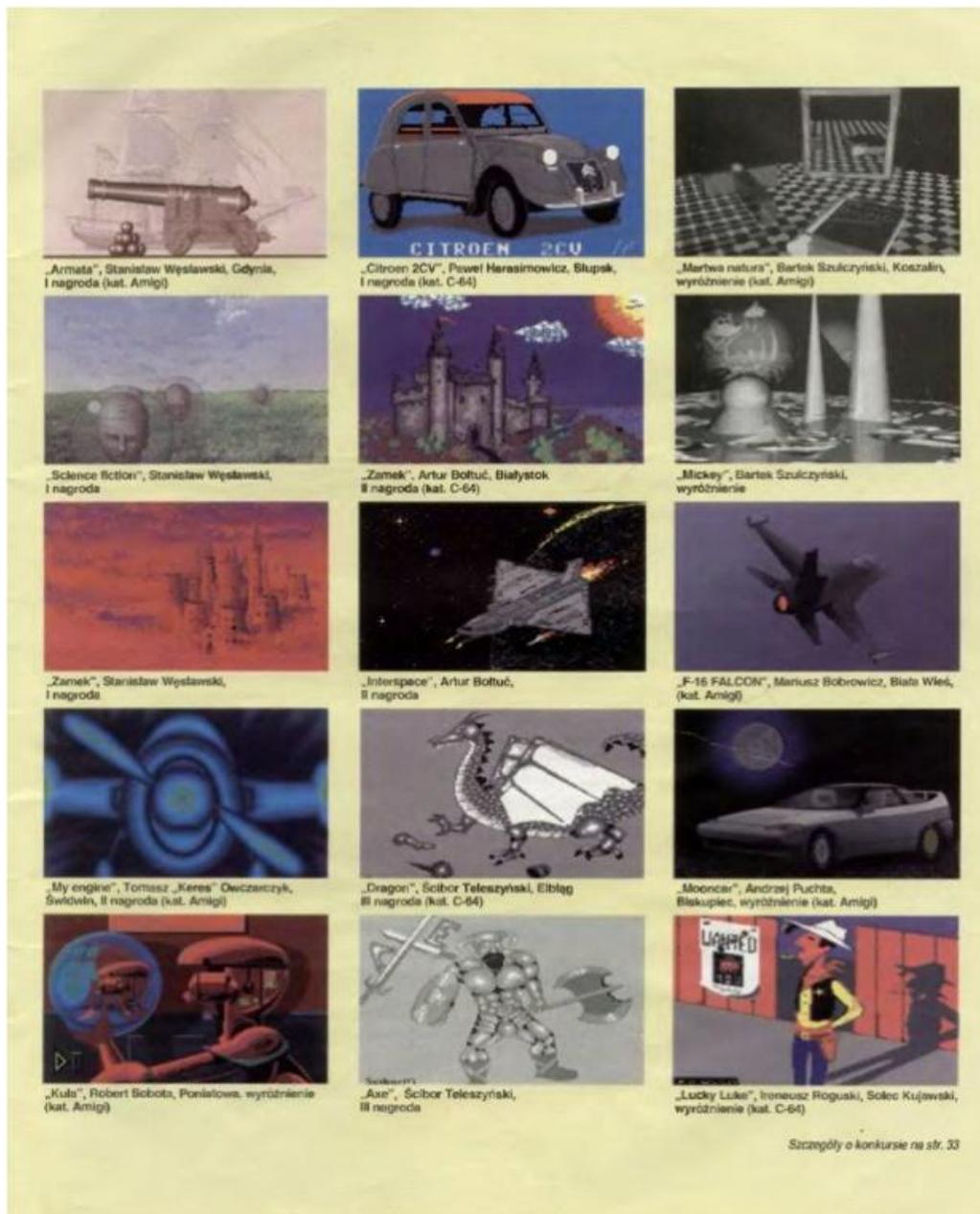


Figure 5. A gallery of computer graphics made with the C-64 and Amiga submitted by readers. *Commodore & Amiga*, 1993, no.8, 35.

In years from 1989 to 1991, some of those magazines, with rather low circulation, were primarily distributed through ‘computer fairs’ (cf. fig. 3.). Here we can see an interlock of intermediary actors: ‘computer fair’ traders and magazine editors who both contributed to the popularity of the Amiga. During the period of the popularity of the Amiga in Poland there were three major gatherings that can be considered brand fests: The Amiga Game Show (1991), Intel Outside (1994), and Intel Outside 2 (1995). The “Intel Outside” slogan, also widely used in Amiga community in the West, was a response to the “Intel Inside” campaign

of the branding of Intel processors (Norris 1993). There were several similar events in Western Europe, which attracted an international audience, but the Polish gatherings were rather secluded and there were virtually no guests from abroad.

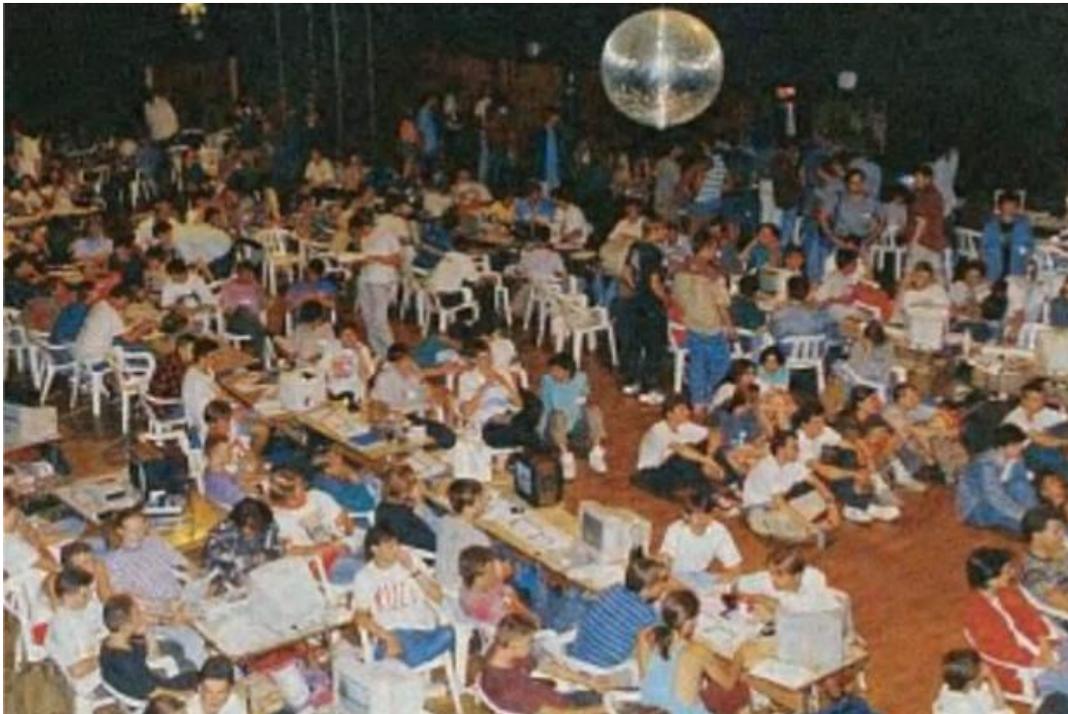


Figure 6. Intel Outside party, 1994. *Amiga Magazyn*, 1994, no. 10, 48.

The Intel Outside parties (fig. 6) were organized until 1998. However, after 1995 those events became much smaller. While the Amiga Game Show was organized mainly by the local distributors of legal software and computer magazines, the Intel Outside parties were organized by major demoscene groups. Aside from such events there were numerous smaller demoscene parties, for instance the regular Autumn Party and Mountain Congress party series. However, Intel Outside, despite the major role of demoscene events, was also a brand fest, which welcomed visitors with no demoscene affiliation and who were simply interested in the Amiga. The dual nature of the Intel Outside party as a demoscene event and a brand fest shows how the Amiga demoscene was deeply embedded in this brand community. I will argue that the demoscene played a pivotal role in shaping the community by promoting the Amiga as a demoscene machine and thus “configuring the user” (Woolgar 1991) as someone who learns about the Amiga architecture and programming in order to make demos.

According to a rough estimate made by Marek Pampuch, the editor-in-chief of *Amiga Magazyn* and arguably the most prominent figure in the Amiga community, circa 100,000 to 120,000 Amiga computers, all models included, were sold in Poland until the end of 1994 (Pampuch 1994a, 6-7). The year 1994, with the bankruptcy of Commodore International, preceded by the liquidation of the short-lived Commodore Polska, saw the beginning of the steep decline of the community, which responded by evolving into two different but closely interconnected communities.

The first one was a group of dedicated users who engaged themselves in grass-roots projects for the continuation of the Amiga, such as the AmigaOne. The second one was a dedicated Amiga demoscene which were still exploring the possibilities of making new audiovisual effects with the A500 and A1200 sound and graphic chips despite the fact that PC platform soon began to outpace the Amiga in such qualities. Here I can only note that the slow demise of the Amiga scene was accompanied with the emergence of the “PC scene” (orig. *scena pecetowa*). Some users who adopted PCs as game or demoscene machines expressed their brand affiliation to the PC platform with their own imagery (fig. 7) and rituals. Such rituals usually included boasting about the groundbreaking qualities of the Pentium processor and the superiority of *Doom* (id Software, 1993) over any Amiga game in terms of technical excellence, gaming experience and the immersion of the 3D world. Further analysis of the construction of the brand loyalty of PC users, and particularly the reconstruction of the loyalty of former Amiga users, could greatly contribute to better understanding the dynamics of computer subcultures, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.



Figure 7. The symbolic demise of the Amiga in 1994 in a cartoon published by a gaming magazine. The chainsaw is a reference to *Doom*, a “killer app” for the PC platform. *Secret Service*, 1994, no. 9, 13.

Community rituals

Here I focus on investigating the central imagery of the Amiga and highlight its role in making community rituals. Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001, 412) argue that brand community is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. Each of these qualities is, however, situated within a commercial and mass-mediated ethos, and has its own particular expression. Brand communities are participants in the brand’s larger social construction and play a vital role in the brand’s ultimate legacy.

Here I would like to emphasize that a range of user’s activities discussed in my paper such as sharing knowledge about computer use and circulating software can be considered not as specific rituals but as commonplace practical activities that took place in computer users’ communities worldwide. However, in communities of computer users with strong brand identities, such activities can be also considered as rituals that serve the social function of

creating and maintaining community (Bell 1997, 23-60). Moreover, below I will discuss a number of specific activities that substantially contributed to the creation of community.

While discussing the “cult of the Macintosh,” Belk and Tumbat (2005) explore the central role of the Mac imagery, which includes the story of building the first Apple computer in a garage, Steve Jobs’ India trip, the “1984” television commercial, and the minimalistic design of the Mac computer. While analyzing the Mac community from the early 2000s they argue that those are the core elements of the myth which underpins the shared consciousness of Mac users. The Amiga community had its own imagery. One of the key elements of this imagery was the superiority of the Amiga’s graphic and sound qualities over any other competing platform (Atari ST, PC, Mac) due to its ingenious and flexible architecture based on the coprocessor and custom graphic and sound chips (Maher 2012, 11-42). This supported a popular ritual of the Amiga community – the running of an impressive demo or a computer game to show these qualities to a larger audience. Running attractive demos for an audience was generally a popular custom among Amiga users worldwide. However, the specific case discussed below illustrates the role of ‘software fair’ traders in sharing the Amiga imagery by discussing the *Walker Demo* (Imaginetics, 1988), a commercial demonstration which aimed to show the quality of the digitizing tools for the Amiga. It was a highly popular animation of AT-AT vehicles from *The Empire Strikes Back* movie walking next to the A2000.

Year 1988. Wrocław, Sunday, computer fair. There is only one stand with the Amiga computer and there is a crowd of viewers there. Everyone is watching. No one is copying software at the moment. [...] An imperial AT-AT walker slowly moves on the color monitor – this is the Walker Demo. Two individuals are looking suspiciously. This is the competition from the stands with the Atari ST. ... They are simply starring in disbelief and anger. (Lifter 1991)

The aim of such a demo was to articulate a central theme of Amiga “platform nationalism”, the conviction that this computer can be used for creative work with astounding results. On the one hand, Amiga users could access such attractive audio-visual content in their own private space with demos and games. On the other hand, the Amiga was a tool for not only professional, but also amateur “creative types” (Maher 2012, 43) who were encouraged, or

even obliged, to use it to express their own creativity. I will discuss such obligation in the next section on users' responsibilities.

One of the most frequent features of both paper periodicals and disk magazines was a more or less elaborate list which informed readers about prominent cases of Amiga usage. Here I will focus on a specific elaborate article with such a list (BAD 1994, 43-44), which was published in *Commodore & Amiga* in 1994 and included an extensive list of the uses of the Amiga in Hollywood for producing special effects (Maher 2012, 132-142). The most popular point in this section was the *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) movie and *SeaQuest DSV* (1993-1996), a TV series which regularly appeared in materials of the Amiga community in order to highlight the potential of the Amiga. This list also included several musicians such as Paul McCartney, the Bee Gees and Billy Idol. In addition, this list also featured the use of the Amiga by the CIA (for unspecified educational purposes), the Israeli Air Force (for training pilots with combat flight simulators) as well as the use of CAD software for designing a stadium for the Summer Olympics in Atlanta. I have chosen this specific article because the author revealed the source of information provided above, a text file, which was most likely extensively circulated within the community both on floppies and Amiga BBSes. The circulation of such a list and the emphasis on such diverse creative and professional uses of the Amiga can be identified as one of central community rituals, which provided private, mostly young, owners with an imaginary bond with media industries, celebrities and well-known organizations and offered them a sense of being in their highly attractive orbit.

The aforementioned *SeaQuest DSV* as well as *Babylon 5* (1994-1998), which also included Amiga-made special effects, were aired on Polish television. Thus, Polish members of the community could strengthen their sense of identity with the fact that the state-of-the-art special effects, which they could regularly watch on popular TV series, were made with the same computer that they had at home. Of course, such effects were made with high-end A4000s with broadcast quality video equipment, while at home they had low-end A500 and A1200 models, but all those computers belonged to the same "strong" brand.

Here I would like to focus on one of the core features of the shared consciousness of the Polish Amiga community, namely the core distinction between "the world" and Poland. My empirical evidence suggests a difference between my case study and observations made by

Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001). As they note: “We see brand communities as liberated [...] from geography and informed by a mass-mediated sensibility [...] in which the local and the mass converge” (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001, 415). In the Amiga community the “mass-mediated sensibility“ has a special significance as most of the central themes of the Amiga imagery are related to its use in the media industries. So, the substantial part of the experience of the brand was the contact with media objects which could be somehow attributed to the brand. However, Polish Amiga users lived in a post-communist country and experienced significant cultural, social, and economic differences from the West. So, for my case the geography is definitely relevant. The aforementioned lists showcasing prominent examples of Amiga usage, while including some information on Poland, were always divided into “Amiga na świecie” and “Amiga w Polsce” – “Amiga in the world” and “Amiga in Poland”. Similarly, the ranking lists published by Polish demoscene media always used the same distinction.

The local Polish community at the same time appropriated and shared elements of the central imagery of the Amiga from the West, as well as building its own local imagery by providing media coverage for the creative uses of the Amiga in Poland. Here I can note some significant cases covered in *Amiga Magazyn*, which paid specific attention to the wide promotion of the Amiga in professional activities. Their list includes the use of the Amiga by TVP, the Polish national broadcaster, for making jingles, postproduction, as well as a much more mundane task of displaying questions in a quiz show (Bobek 1994, 12-13). Equally welcomed was the rather ingenious use of the A500 for post-production in a local private TV station in the city of Kraków (Pampuch 1994b) (Fig. 8). Another issue of *Amiga Magazyn* includes an interview with members of the popular techno/dance band Jamrose who used the A1200 both for editing music and making music videos (Korzeniewski 1994). In addition, it is also worth mentioning that Jamrose, as Amiga-related band, gave a concert during the Intel Outside party. An interview with the band was published in another issue, in which the main theme was making music with the Amiga. Apart from this interview readers could find several articles how to make music on their Amigas. The leader of the band also encouraged Amiga users:

Q: Could you, as professionals, give some advice to Amiga musicians?

A: You should not be discouraged with the hardware you own. I assure you that the concept, not the hardware, really matters here. Even if you only have the A500 and love music, just get to work! (Korzeniewski 1994, 37).

One of the processes which took part during the demise of the Amiga was the cessation of any new information about its creative use that would stimulate the community. Muñiz and Schau (2005, 739), while discussing the religious motifs in the Apple Newton community, note that such motifs “invest the brand with powerful meanings and perpetuate the brand and the community, its values, and its beliefs.” Similarly, the steady flow of information about the high-profile use of the Amiga in creative work from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s perpetuated the community. The lack of any further information about such use was a clear indication of its demise. My reading of *Amiga Magazyn* from the years 1995 to 1999 and disk magazines from that time shows that the community which previously embraced high profile uses of the Amiga, such as the production of TV jingles or high profile Sci-Fi TV series and movies, evolved into a much smaller self-referential community which was perpetuated primarily by news about niche developments of the AmigaOne which came from other dedicated members of the community. At that time the community evolved into a social structure similar to TRS-80 users discussed by Lindsay (2003) – a community with a much smaller number of members, in which there was only a small percentage of passive “computer users” since most of the community members took to some extent the burden of responsibility to play one or even more roles from Lindsay’s list of designers, producers, marketers, distributors and technical support.



Figure 8. A500 used for the postproduction in a TV studio of a small local television in the city of Kraków. *Amiga Magazyn*, 1994, no. 3, 11.

Responsibilities

The final section focuses on the moral responsibilities of the community members which are related to the rituals discussed above. Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001, 424) draw from classical sociological works, and note that “[m]oral responsibility is a sense of duty to the community as a whole, and to individual members of the community. This sense of moral responsibility is what produces collective action and contributes to group cohesion”. In general terms, from my research in periodicals and disk magazines, I can outline the community agenda as follows:

1. To “stabilize” the Amiga during the turnover of 1980s and 1990s as the dominant hardware platform by convincing non-users that the Amiga is the best replacement for the aging 8-bit computers or the best choice as the first computer for home and professional use.

2. To prevent the “de-stabilization” of the Amiga’s popularity caused by the expansion of the PC platform in both office and home environments by convincing users to stay with the brand, presenting it as a viable alternative to the PC, with its users being able to count on substantial support from the community.

One of the central tensions of the community was the legitimacy of using the Amiga as a game machine and users’ willingness to explore the technology, and a related distinction of separating users into legitimate and illegitimate members of the community. This issue was particularly acute for the community during the later years when simply playing games on the Amiga was considered as a mode of use which did not contribute to the prevention of the de-stabilization of the position of the Amiga. Muñiz and O’Guinn. (2001, 419) discuss the issue of legitimacy in brand community as follows:

Legitimacy is a process whereby members of the community differentiate between true members of the community and those who are not, or who occupy a more marginal space. In the context of brands this is demonstrated by “really knowing” the brand as opposed to using the brand for the “wrong reasons.” The wrong reasons are typically revealed by failing to fully appreciate the culture, history, rituals, traditions, and symbols of the community.

In the case of the Amiga “knowing the brand” has multiple meanings. The first meaning refers to the familiarity with the list of famous Amiga users mentioned above. The second meaning refers to technical knowledge, including about the canonical history of Jay Miner’s design of the Amiga, which included the *blitter*, the coprocessor which enabled modification of data within memory without burdening the CPU, and the three custom chips: Agnus, Denise and Paula. The users were required to learn at least the basics of computer science in order to successfully “share the brand” by, for instance, engaging in a technical discussion with a “non-believer”.

Here I can bring an exemplary case of “configuring the user” (Woolgar, 1991) by a demoscene member who, while providing an overview of different Amiga models available on the market, also discussed four categories of users: lamers, intermediate users, users interested in a specific professional purpose, and the “elite”, understood as hackers and demoscene members (Szczygieł 1993, 10). The author, who was a prominent demoscener

himself, used the demoscene jargon terms “lamers” and “elite”. The former term was originally used as a derogative term for mediocre demoscene coders, to refer to those who only used the Amiga for gaming and who are not interested in exploring the technology beyond mastering computer games. But here the author identified lamers as those who are “not interested in the mastering of computer science knowledge” (Szczygieł 1993, 10). This explicit expression of the tension over “lamers” is an instance of an important element of tensions over “real” and “faux” brand community members (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001, 419). Currently, the memory about the Amiga in retrocomputing is primarily constructed through the prism of an excellent 16-bit game machine (Westlake 2015). Originally, every contemporary Amiga periodical and disk magazine considered in my study included a smaller or larger section with computer game news and reviews. However, according to the normative imagined Amiga user, he was allowed to play games on the Amiga only if he was also using it for some other non-controversial purposes. Here I can also give an instance of such a normative model. In the second issue of *Amigowiec* the editor-in-chief announced that the periodical will publish an extensive tutorial for the popular graphic editing program *Deluxe Paint III* (Electronic Arts, 1988; Maher 2012, 43-81) with a claim that “obviously everyone eagerly makes computer graphics with the Amiga” (Redakcja 1990, 1).

The aforementioned highly normative overview of Amiga users made by a prominent demoscene member was included here to discuss a broader feature of the local Amiga community, namely a dominance of the demoscene in terms of projecting their own scripts of Amiga use onto other users. Importantly, a significant part of the content of Amiga related periodicals was written by demoscene members. They wrote detailed reports from parties and analyzed recent trends in demos aesthetics and quality, and also provided accessible tutorials on “how to make your own demos”. They also tried to “configure Amiga users” by emphasizing the importance of learning assembly language to become a coder or to eventually master sound or graphic editing software in order to become scene musicians or graphic designers.

The influence of the script for using the Amiga as a demo machine can be illustrated with the example of the Polish translation of the *Amiga Hardware Reference Manual*, an Amiga “bible” of sorts. The bootleg translation of this book was published with the title *Amiga*

Without Secrets – Make Your Own Demo (Amiga bez tajemnic – zrób własne demo). This shows how a local company, which published this translation, came up with a marketing strategy for convincing Amiga users that a hardware reference manual can be specifically used for mastering demo-making techniques.

Reunanen and Silvast (2014, 151) in their paper about the demoscene note its elitism:

the members of the demoscene wanted to distance themselves from the common uses of computers such as productivity or gaming. Instead of utility or entertainment, their interest lay in creative experimentation.

However, in this particular case study I can note two significant differences. Firstly, the Polish demoscene became much more deeply engaged in supporting the Amiga community. It is important to emphasize that demoscene members promoted the Amiga not only as an excellent platform for demoscene productions, but also as a game machine and an efficient productivity platform. Here we can attribute a higher level of moral responsibility for the brand expressed by the demoscene in Poland than in Western Europe. Secondly, the demoscene actively and widely “configured” Amiga users by encouraging or even obliging users to learn programming assembly language necessary for making demos.

Discussion

One of the main obstacles which I encountered while researching this study was the lack of any other comparative analysis of computer platform nationalisms” except for the two previously discussed studies on the “cult of the Mac” among the American middle class (Muñiz & O’Guinn 2001; Belk & Tumbat 2005). This gap however, is as an important field for future research, and I would like to emphasize the potential for further studies of different hardware platform situated in the context of specific regions. In this context, I would like to mention the recent monograph by [Jaroslav Švelch](#) (2018), which covers the gaming culture in communist Czechoslovakia, which focuses on the local popularity of the ZX Spectrum as the dominant hardware platform well into the 1990s. The book gives insights into some aspects of the local brand community of the ZX Spectrum. Before the global dominance of the “Wintel” platform, there were several 8 and 16-bit hardware platforms, which are now

completely extinct except for some small retrocomputing communities. We may assume that shortly before the acceleration of the processes of globalization in the 1990s, and the opening up of the Internet as a means of mass communication, there was a substantial number of different nationally based and region-wide brand communities, which shaped their own community rituals and responsibilities contextualized by a limited access to hardware, software and knowledge. I believe that the concept of brand community can be widely used to carry out such investigations of forgotten local cults of home computers.

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Notes

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