PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING *TSANGAYA* (*ALMAJIRI*) EDUCATION IN NIGERIA
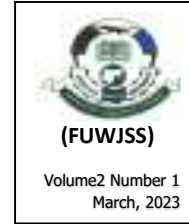
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Abstract

The *Tsangaya* education system, also known as the *Almajiri* system, is a traditional Islamic education system in Nigeria that faces significant challenges such as inadequate funding, infrastructure and negative societal attitudes towards the *Almajiris*. Effective communication and engagement strategies with key stakeholders are essential to address these challenges and promote the system's benefits. This prescriptive study examines the present state of communication strategies and public relations in Nigeria for promoting the *Tsangaya* education system and presents recommendations for enhancing these strategies. Findings suggest that various public relations and communication strategies such as media relations, crisis management, collaboration, and education are effective in addressing the challenges faced by the system, creating awareness among stakeholders, and building goodwill for the system. The study concludes that effective communication and engagement strategies with key stakeholders are essential to addressing the problems challenging *Tsangaya* education in Nigeria. Thus, the study recommends that policymakers and educational stakeholders adopt effective communication and public relations strategies to promote the *Tsangaya* education system and improve its quality, ultimately contributing to Nigeria's socio-economic development.

Keywords: *Almajiri*, communication strategy, education, public relations, *tsangaya*

Introduction

In Nigeria, the *Tsangaya* education system, also known as the *Almajiri* system, is a traditional form of Islamic education that has been in existence for centuries. The system involves sending young boys *(Almajiris)* to live

with Islamic scholars (*Malamai*) to receive education in Islamic studies. The education is based on memorization of the Qur'an and basic Arabic writing, and it is typically provided free of charge. The *Tsangaya* education system is an integral component of Nigeria's Islamic heritage and has undergone a gradual transformation over the centuries. As Oyebade (2014) notes, its origins can be traced back to the West African Islamic scholarship system that was prevalent during the 13th and 14th centuries. This system entailed the movement of Islamic scholars from North Africa to West Africa, where they established study centres for Islamic law and theology. These centres became hubs of Islamic scholarship, and over time, they evolved into the *Tsangaya* system that is presently practiced in Nigeria.

The *Tsangaya* education system has been a subject of discourse in many scholarly works in Nigeria. In a study by Gana (2019), he highlights the importance of the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria's socio-cultural and religious landscape. Gana notes that the system is a way of preserving Islamic culture and values, promoting religious tolerance and coexistence, and addressing the issue of illiteracy in the country. He further observes that the *Tsangaya* education system has contributed to Nigeria's human capital development, producing prominent Islamic scholars and leaders in various sectors. In the same vein, the importance of the *Tsangaya* education system cannot be overemphasized. It has been a source of Islamic education for generations of Nigerian Muslims and remains a critical element of the country's Islamic heritage. According to Ahmed (2018), the system has played a significant role in preserving Islamic culture and values in Nigeria, and it continues to provide access to Islamic education for children from impoverished backgrounds who would not have had the opportunity to receive an education otherwise. The system also provides a platform for the transmission of Islamic knowledge, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic history, from one generation to the next.Moreover, the *Tsangaya* education system is essential for Nigeria's socio-economic development. According to UNICEF (2019), Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world, and the majority of these children are in the northern region, where the *Tsangaya* education system is prevalent. The system provides a pathway for the education of these children, which is essential for their future socio-economic development.

The Tsangaya education system in Nigeria is an important aspect of the country's education sector and socio-economic progress. However, the system has been criticized for the welfare and security of the Almajiris. Umar (2016) highlighted that the Almajiris are often subjected to poor living conditions and are vulnerable to extremist ideologies. Despite ongoing reform efforts, the system still faces several challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and negative societal attitudes towards the

Almajiris. Addressing these issues and ensuring the well-being and security of the Almajiris is crucial for the Tsangaya system to thrive and contribute to Nigeria's development. According to Muhammad (2010), the issues with the *Tsangaya* education system are not related to the type of knowledge imparted but rather the problems associated with it. These issues include inadequate provision of feeding, clothing, shelter, and essential human needs for the *Almajiri*, which can lead to juvenile delinquency as small children may not be able to work elsewhere to feed themselves (Umar, 2016). Overpopulation in Quranic centres and the high number of pupils per Malam makes it difficult to control and can lead to congestion, poor environmental conditions, and insecurity (Umar, 2016).

The challenges faced by the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria have been extensively studied and documented. Umar (2016) delves into these challenges in a study published in the Journal of Social Sciences, highlighting the neglect of the system by policymakers and society at large, leading to inadequate funding and support for its development. To overcome these challenges, Umar stresses the importance of effective communication and engagement with stakeholders, which he argues is crucial for the success of any initiatives aimed at supporting the system.

Efforts have been made to reform and promote the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria through government initiatives aimed at providing better living conditions and education quality for the *Almajiris*, but their success heavily depends on effective public relations and corporate communication strategies. According to UNICEF, there are approximately 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria, with the majority in the northern region where the *Tsangaya* education system is prevalent. The UNICEF report emphasized the need for improved education opportunities for these children, including those in the *Almajiri* system, to reduce their vulnerability to exploitation and violence and promote future socio-economic development (UNICEF, 2019). Similar to *Tsangaya* traditional Islamic religious education in Nigeria, there are also similar institutions in other parts of Asia, particularly in Pakistan and Malaysia. These institutions provide education and training in Islamic religious studies and are known as *Madrassas*. According to Shah (2008), in Pakistan, *Madrassas* have been active for centuries. They are primarily focused on educating young men in Islamic religious studies and providing them with a deeper understanding of the religion. *Madrassas* in Pakistan are known for their strict adherence to traditional Islamic education and have played a significant role in shaping Islamic ideology and theology in the region. Nonetheless, in Malaysia, there are also traditional Islamic religious education institutions known as *Pondoks*. According to Abdul-Rahman (2016), these *Pondoks* have been around for over a century and have also played a significant role in

promoting the study of Islamic religious education in the country. Like *Tsangayas*, *Pondoks* are often situated in rural areas and are designed to cater to poor families who cannot afford to pay for secular education.

In both Pakistan and Malaysia, there have been efforts to standardize the traditional Islamic religious education system. In Pakistan, the government has introduced measures to improve the curriculum offered in *Madrassas*, particularly by including subjects such as science and mathematics (Shah, 2008). In Malaysia, the government has also introduced similar measures to modernize the traditional Islamic education system, by including secular subjects in the *Pondok* curriculum (Abdul-Rahman, 2016). These efforts have been made to ensure that graduates of these institutions can compete in the job market and contribute positively to the progress of their communities.

From the foregoing, the *Tsangaya* traditional Islamic religious education in Nigeria has similar counterparts in other parts of Asia, particularly in Pakistan and Malaysia, where traditional Islamic religious education is also offered in *Madrassas* and *Pondoks* respectively. These institutions have been active for centuries and have played a significant role in shaping Islamic ideology and theology in their respective regions. The governments in these countries have also introduced measures to standardize the traditional Islamic education system and improve the curriculum offered in these institutions. In response to these concerns, several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been working to support the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria. For example, the *Almajiri* Child Rights Initiative (ACRI) is a Nigerian NGO that advocates for the rights of *Almajiri* children and promotes their access to education, healthcare, and other basic needs. Similarly, the Education Sector Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN) is a UK government-funded initiative that aims to improve the quality of basic education in Nigeria, including in the *Tsangaya* education system.

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report also emphasizes the need for improved communication and engagement strategies in the promotion of the *Tsangaya* education system. The report identifies the critical role of involving the *Almajiris*, their families, and the *Malamai* in decision-making processes and addressing their concerns and needs in the design and implementation of programs. With this in mind, it is evident that effective communication and engagement strategies are crucial in promoting and developing the *Tsangaya* education system, and policymakers and other stakeholders must prioritize this in their efforts.

The UNDP (2017) highlights that promoting the *Tsangaya* system can reduce poverty, enhance social cohesion, and foster peaceful coexistence among diverse ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria. To achieve these benefits, enhancing the communication and public relations strategies of the system is vital. Effective communication and engagement strategies with

key stakeholders, including the *Almajiris*, their families, and the Malamai, can address the challenges facing the system. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the current state of public relations and communication strategies for promoting the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria and offer recommendations for enhancement.

Origins of the *Almajiri* System

The term *Almajiri* or *Tsangaya* has its origins in the Arabic word *Al Muhaajirun*, meaning a migrant from Mecca, which dates back to Prophet Mohammed and his companions who migrated to Medina to escape persecution Muhammad (2013). Before the colonial era in West Africa, the term was used to describe a traditional method of acquiring Islamic education through memorization and recitation of the Qur'an. This method became associated with young boys and men who lived with a Muslim teacher called *Mallam* to learn the Qur'an, and it was prevalent in Northern Nigeria, where parents sent their children to other communities to learn under the tutelage of a *Mallam* (Hannah, 2018). According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "The *Almajiri* system in Nigeria is characterized by its informality, its inability to meet the basic educational and social needs of children, and its often violation of children's rights to protection, development, and participation" (UNICEF, 2019). Before colonialism, the *Almajiri* system was held in high esteem as a traditional Islamic education system in West Africa. However, with the introduction of alternative forms of education, the system has declined, and children are left to beg and do menial jobs on the streets. Nowadays, *Almajiri* refers to children between the ages of 6 and 18 who are pupils in a Makarantar/*Tsangaya* and have become migrants wandering the streets in search of a means of survival, as stated by Hannah (2018).

According to Wara (2015), *Almajiri* or Almajirci refers to a traditional Islamic education system prevalent in Northern Nigeria, particularly among Hausa-speakers. The system involves young boys being sent to live with Islamic scholars (Malamis) in order to study the Qur'an, memorization of texts, and Islamic jurisprudence. However, the system has evolved and has been associated with roving-studentship whereby students travel from one Quranic school to another, seeking Islamic education from different Malamis. Wara (2015) further notes that the system has become associated with poverty as it is often poor families who send their children to become *Almajiris*. The *Almajiris*, in turn, are expected to fend for themselves by begging for alms, food, and clothing, and supporting their Malamis. The system has also faced criticism for the poor living conditions, lack of basic amenities, and the vulnerability of the children to abuse and exploitation. The focus of the study on the *Tsangaya* (*Almajiri*) education system in

Nigeria is relevant as it is a unique and traditional system of education that has been prevalent in Northern Nigeria for centuries. According to Abdullahi (2019), the *Tsangaya* system is a significant cultural and educational heritage of Northern Nigeria that has produced many renowned Islamic scholars. The system is also considered as an alternative for many poor parents who cannot afford to send their children to formal schools.

The *Tsangaya* (*Almajiri*) education system has received both praise and criticism from scholars and the public. One of the main criticisms of the system is its reliance on child labor, as students are often required to beg for alms to support themselves and their Malamis. In addition, there are concerns about the welfare of the children, as they are often exposed to abuse and neglect while living away from their families. However, some scholars have argued that the *Tsangaya* education system has played a vital role in preserving Islamic knowledge and culture in Northern Nigeria. In a study published in the Journal of Educational and Social Research, Mohammed Usman and Abdulrahman Sulaiman suggest that the system has helped to maintain the cultural identity of Northern Nigeria and has provided education to children from poor families who would not otherwise have access to education (Usman & Sulaiman, 2019). The *Almajiri* system, a traditional Islamic education system in Northern Nigeria, has attracted criticism due to poor living conditions, lack of basic amenities, and the vulnerability of children to abuse and exploitation. Folorunso and Adelani (2017) note that *Almajiris* are responsible for their own food and lodging and are required to beg for alms to support themselves and their Malami. However, the *Tsangaya* education system, which is the foundation of the *Almajiri* system, has been successful in producing knowledgeable clerics in Islamic scholarship. Aminu and Yusuf (2014) reveal that the system is designed to produce well-versed clerics, and that the *Almajiris* often become respected members of the community. Additionally, Lawal and Oluwagbemi (2019) suggest that the *Tsangaya* education system is unique in that it is based on the Qur'an and Hadiths, placing emphasis on Islamic values and ethics. Their study asserts that the system plays a crucial role in preserving Islamic knowledge and culture in Northern Nigeria. Therefore, while the living conditions of *Almajiris* have been criticized, exploring the traditional education system sheds light on the cultural and educational practices of a significant region in Nigeria.

In recent years, there have been efforts to reform the *Tsangaya* education system. According to a report by Al Jazeera, the Nigerian government announced plans in 2019 to ban the system and provide formal education for *Almajiris*, citing concerns about the welfare of the children and their vulnerability to exploitation and radicalization (Al Jazeera, 2019). However, the implementation of the ban has been met with resistance from some

Northern states, who argue that the system is an important part of their culture and heritage. Despite its criticisms, the *Tsangaya* education system has continued to be an important part of Northern Nigerian culture. In recent years, there have been efforts to reform the system and address its shortcomings, such as improving the welfare of the *Almajiris* and providing formal education alongside Quranic studies. However, the implementation of these reforms has been met with resistance from some Northern states, who view the system as an important part of their heritage. One study published in the Journal of Education and Practice notes that the *Tsangaya* (*Almajiri*) education system is a traditional Islamic education system that is prevalent in Northern Nigeria. According to the study, the system is based on the Quran and Islamic jurisprudence and is "structured to produce clerics who are well versed in Islamic scholarship" (Aminu & Yusuf, 2014). The study also notes that the system has been in existence for centuries and estimates that there are over 10 million *Almajiris* in Nigeria. Therefore, *Almajiri*/Almajirci can be conceptualized as a traditional Islamic education system that involves young boys being sent to study with scholars, but has evolved into a roving-studentship system that has become associated with poverty and the exploitation of children. A better understanding of this concept is necessary for contextualizing the challenges and issues facing the system.

Theoretical Framework

The stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) was an appropriate model to anchor this study, as it emphasized the importance of considering the needs and concerns of all stakeholders in decision-making processes (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The *Tsangaya* education system had multiple stakeholders, including the *Almajiris*, their families, the Malamai, NGOs, policymakers, and society in general, and effective communication and engagement with them were crucial for the success of any initiatives aimed at supporting the system (Musa, 2019). This was corroborated by the UNDP report (UNDP, 2019), which highlighted the importance of involving the *Almajiris*, their families, and the *Malamai* in decision-making processes and addressing their concerns and needs in the design and implementation of programs. Similarly, Umar's study (Umar, 2020) emphasized the need for effective communication and engagement with stakeholders in promoting the *Tsangaya* education system. Therefore, using the stakeholder theory as a lens to examine the current state of public relations and communication strategies in the promotion of the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria was appropriate, and the study could provide recommendations for improvement based on the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

Public Relations and Communication Strategies

According to Cutlip, Centre, and Broom (2013), public relations strategies are designed to create and maintain a positive image of an organization or brand through various communication channels, including media relations, community outreach, and collaboration. These strategies can be adapted to promote social causes such as education, with the aim of creating a positive image and building goodwill among stakeholders. In the context of the *Almajiri* education system, media relations strategies could be employed to raise awareness about the system and its benefits. According to a study by Lawal and Aminu (2014), media campaigns can be effective in promoting education and creating awareness among stakeholders, especially when combined with community outreach programs. The study suggests that media campaigns could be used to educate parents and the general public about the importance of the *Almajiri* education system and its role in promoting religious and cultural values. In addition to media relations, crisis management strategies could be employed to address negative perceptions or misrepresentations of the *Almajiri* education system. According to Kassing (2010), crisis management strategies are designed to minimize the negative impact of a crisis on an organization's reputation by providing timely and accurate information to stakeholders. In the context of the *Almajiri* education system, crisis management strategies could be used to address negative perceptions of the system, such as its association with poverty and street begging.

Collaboration with stakeholders could also be an effective strategy in promoting the *Almajiri* education system. According to a study by Tanimu and Ali (2018), collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and religious leaders could be used to promote the system and address its challenges. The study suggests that collaboration could be used to provide funding, infrastructure, and resources for the system, as well as to create awareness among stakeholders and address negative perceptions. Education strategies could also be employed to promote the *Almajiri* education system. According to a study by Musawa and Yusuf (2016), educational programs could be used to promote the system and address its challenges, such as low enrolment rates and poor quality of education. The study suggests that education programs could be used to improve the quality of education provided by the system, as well as to create awareness among parents and the general public about the benefits of the system. However, various public relations and communication strategies could be employed to promote the *Almajiri* education system, including media relations, crisis management, collaboration, and education. These strategies could be adapted to address the challenges faced by the

system, create awareness among stakeholders, and build goodwill for the system.

Public Relations and Communication Strategies for *Tsangaya* Education Promotion

The *Tsangaya* education system, also known as the *Almajiri* system, is a traditional Islamic education system in Nigeria that focuses on the study of the Quran and Islamic teachings. However, the system has been criticized for its lack of formal education, poor living conditions for students, and the potential for radicalization. In recent years, public relations and corporate communication strategies have been used to promote and improve the *Tsangaya* education system. Several studies have examined the effectiveness of communication strategies in promoting educational programs, including the *Almajiri* system. According to Omeiza (2019), public relations strategies have been used to create awareness about the *Tsangaya* education system and to change the negative perception that many people have about the system. These strategies have included media campaigns, community outreach programs, and the involvement of key stakeholders such as religious leaders and government officials. For example, in 2017, the Northern Nigeria Governors Forum (NNGF) launched a campaign to support the *Tsangaya* education system and to provide funding for the construction of schools and the training of teachers (BBC News, 2017). The effectiveness of these strategies has been the subject of some scholarly research. One study by Ahmed and Ahmad (2020) examined the impact of public relations strategies on the perception of the *Tsangaya* education system among stakeholders in Kano State, Nigeria. The study found that the use of public relations strategies had a significant positive impact on the perception of the system, with stakeholders reporting a greater understanding of the system and a more positive attitude towards it.

Communication strategies have also been used to promote and improve the *Tsangaya* education system. According to Omeiza (2019), communication strategies have included partnerships between private organizations and government agencies to provide funding and support for the system. For example, in 2019, the Dangote Foundation, a private charitable organization in Nigeria, donated N100m to support the *Tsangaya* education system in Sokoto State (Vanguard News, 2019).

The effectiveness of these strategies has also been the subject of some scholarly research. One study by Aliyu et al. (2020) examined the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria. The study found that CSR initiatives had a significant positive impact on the system, with increased funding and support leading to improved infrastructure and a better learning environment for students. In

a study published in the Journal of Education and Practice, Aminu and Yusuf (2014) evaluated the effectiveness of the *Almajiri* system in producing knowledgeable clerics in Islamic scholarship. The study found that the system is effective in producing well-versed clerics in Islamic scholarship, as intended. However, the study also noted that the system has faced several challenges, including inadequate funding, lack of government support, and inadequate infrastructure. Similarly, a study by Garba and Iliyasu (2017) examined the effectiveness of communication strategies in promoting the *Almajiri* education system in Nigeria. The study found that while several strategies have been employed, including media relations, community outreach, and advocacy, the system still faces significant challenges, including inadequate funding, lack of government support, and inadequate infrastructure.

Nonetheless, while several studies have examined the effectiveness of communication strategies in promoting educational programs, including the *Almajiri* system, the challenges facing the system cannot be overlooked. Thus, gathering data from relevant stakeholders will provide insight into the effectiveness of public relations and corporate communication strategies and the challenges facing the *Tsangaya* (*Almajiri*) education system. According to a study by Abdullahi and Ibrahim (2017) on the challenges and prospects of the *Almajiri* education system in Nigeria notes that advocacy and sensitization programs to government, parents, and community members on the need to support and improve the *Almajiri* education system are necessary for its survival and growth. Similarly, a study by Mohammed (2015) on the role of civil society organizations in promoting the *Almajiri* education system in Nigeria states that partnerships between civil society organizations and other stakeholders, including the corporate world, can provide the necessary resources and support for the education of *Almajiri* children.Furthermore, a study by Oloyede et al. (2020) on the integration of *Almajiri* education with western education in Nigeria notes that effective communication and advocacy strategies are needed to ensure that policymakers and government officials understand the benefits of integrating *Almajiri* education with formal education.These studies suggest that communication and advocacy efforts are crucial for promoting the *Almajiri* education system and garnering support from various stakeholders, including the government, civil society organizations, and the corporate world. The use of social media and partnerships with organizations and individuals can be effective strategies to improve the image of the system and provide necessary resources for its development.

Other Public Relations and Communication Strategies to Promote the *Tsangaya* Education System in Nigeria

Different approaches have been implemented to enhance the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria. These include media promotions, advocacy initiatives, collaborative ventures, engagement with local communities, utilization of social media platforms, and corporate social responsibility programs. The aim is to increase public knowledge of the system, establish a favorable reputation, and offer essential support to enhance the standard of education. Below is an evaluation of these strategies.

Media Campaigns

According to Adedokun and Aderonmu (2016), media campaigns have been used to promote the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria. The authors note that media campaigns have been used to create awareness about the system and its benefits. They further state that "radio and television stations have aired programs to sensitize the public on the importance of the system and its contributions to the development of Islamic education in Nigeria" (Adedokun & Aderonmu, 2016, p. 38). Additionally, newspapers have been used to publish articles and stories about the system.

Advocacy

Ogunwale, Adeyemi, and Adisa (2019) state that advocacy has been used to promote the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria. The authors note that advocacy involves engaging with policymakers, government officials, and other stakeholders to create policies and programs that support the system. They further state that "advocacy has helped to create a conducive environment for the *Tsangaya* system to thrive, and has led to the establishment of policies and programs that support the system" (Ogunwale et al., 2019, p. 65).

Partnerships

According to Sulaiman and Oyelere (2021), partnerships have been formed with organizations that support the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria. The authors note that partnerships have been formed with international organizations, NGOs, and community-based organizations. They further state that "these partnerships have helped to provide financial support, educational materials, and other resources to promote the system" (Sulaiman & Oyelere, 2021, p. 108).

Community Engagement

Adetunji and Jibril (2016) state that community engagement has been used to promote the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria. The authors note that community engagement involves engaging with traditional leaders, religious leaders, and other community members to raise awareness about

the system and its benefits. They further state that "community engagement has helped to create a sense of ownership of the system among community members, and has led to increased support for the system" (Adetunji & Jibril, 2016, p. 6).

Social Media

According to Haruna, Isyaku, and Bako (2018), social media platforms have been used to promote the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria. The authors note that social media platforms have been used to create social media accounts, share success stories, and engage with followers to create a positive image of the system. They further state that "social media has provided a platform for stakeholders to share information about the system and engage with a wider audience" (Haruna et al., 2018, p. 23).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Abdullahi and Abdullahi (2018) state that corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been used to support the *Tsangaya* education system in Nigeria. The authors note that CSR involves providing financial support, building schools, and donating educational materials to promote the system. They further state that "CSR has helped to provide the necessary resources to support the system and improve the quality of education provided" (Abdullahi & Abdullahi, 2018, p. 122).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The *Tsangaya* (*Almajiri*) education system in Nigeria faces significant challenges, including inadequate funding, infrastructure, and negative societal attitudes towards the *Almajiris*. Effective communication and engagement strategies with key stakeholders are essential to address these challenges and promote the system's benefits. Through this study, we have explored various public relations and communication strategies that could be employed to promote the *Almajiri* education system, including media relations, crisis management, collaboration, and education. These strategies can be adapted to create awareness among stakeholders, build goodwill for the system, and improve its standard. Therefore, it is recommended that policymakers and educational stakeholders adopt effective communication and public relations strategies to promote the *Tsangaya* education system and improve its quality, which will ultimately contribute to Nigeria's socio-economic development.

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