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Assessment of Risk Communication Strategies and Community Engagement on Banditry and Kidnapping in Taraba State

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of risk communication and community engagement as strategies to mitigate the pervasive issues of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria. The study is grounded in Situational Crisis Communication Theory. A descriptive survey was employed as the research design to collect data from 400 respondents across five local government areas in southern Taraba. The study found that media anti-terrorism campaigns and the issuance of early warning signals to communities were the most effective risk communication and community engagement strategies used to mitigate the spate of kidnapping and banditry in southern Taraba. However, the effectiveness of the aforementioned strategies was limited by inadequate support from the government and poor media collaboration with other relevant stakeholders. Among other recommendations, the study suggests that mass media should engage community members more frequently in discussions about security matters alongside security experts in order to narrow the communication gap between the two groups. Additionally, security agencies need to fully recognize the media as partners in progress in curbing

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insecurity in Nigeria, as traditional military approaches have proven insufficient in combating insecurity.

Keywords: Banditry, Communication, Community Engagement, Insecurity, Kidnapping, Risk Communication

INTRODUCTION

National security is inarguably a major backbone of national development the same way insecurity could also serve as a bane to development. Insecurity has become a multidimensional issue in Nigeria as well as other countries of the globe. Cases of insecurity are continuously on the increase and are taking different forms in the society. In Nigeria today, issues of insecurity manifest in terrorism, banditry, separatist agitations, are kidnapping for ransom and/or elimination, insurgency, communal clashes, ethno-religious violence among others (Abbare et al., 2023). In spite of the different efforts by successive governments to tackle the spate of insecurity in Nigeria, the situation seems to be intractable and in some instances even on the increase. The crescendo in the rate of insecurity has consequently gained traction among scholars and researchers to investigate the multidimensional nature of Nigeria's insecurity in the bid to proffering possible solution to them. Zubairu (2020) stated that the surge in insecurity is on the verge of being Nigeria's heritage as no single day passes by without one or more cases of insecurity recorded in Nigeria.

Globally, Nigeria is reckoned to be ranking topmost among countries with high cases of insecurity thereby earning the country a bad reputation that scares away investors. In the past, insecurity in Nigeria was limited to just the northern part of the country with pockets of cases elsewhere (Zubairu, 2020). However, in the recent times, insecurity has become a common phenomenon in the order of the day that is prevalent in every region of the country today. These ranges from separatist agitations in the South-East, banditry in the North-West and Boko–Haram insurgency in the North-East and kidnapping which has become rampart in every part of the country today (Dinnie et al., 2022). Among the diverse measures adopted by the government, the media have been consistently used to douse tensions and to de-escalate security situations in the country towards promoting security consciousness among the people in order to reduce the spate of insecurity in Nigeria. The

mass media in playing their surveillance role in the environment have been instrumental beaming their searchlight on cases on insecurity the world over thereby exposing those mishaps to limelight. This among other reasons has earned the media the fourth and fifth estates of the realm after the executive, legislature and the judiciary. Consequently, issues bordering on insecurity are given prime place as front burners on print media and top stories in the broadcast media (Nwabueze, 2014).

Be that as it may, the spate of insecurity continues to surge in Nigeria among other African countries. This has necessitated the deployment of different strategies in dealing with this imbroglio. Different scholars have established that the way and manner in which the media cover and report security issues could either mitigate or aggravate the level of insecurity. This was evidently seen during the Rwanda genocide of 1994 when the media reportage escalated the crisis in Rwanda (Akinyetun, 2023). This connotes that media reporting could be used to deradicalise and or radicalise aggrieved parties in a conflict situation thereby influencing the outcome (Chukwuere & Onyebuka, 2018). Different strategies are being used in communication to subtly influence the target audience into embracing peace and resisting violence.

Jazic (2010) stated that the best way to fight insecurity is by establishing a synergy cum cooperation between the government and media so as to boost the exchange information that promotes peace and stability. This also implies that media should be more involved in the public diplomacy. One of the prominent communication strategies used by the media during crises reporting is risk communication where the public are furnished with information about the dangers associated with crisis in order to spur them into resisting violence and embracing peace..

Risk communication involves the exchange of real time information between professionals and population facing a particular risk which in this case is the threat to safety of life and property occasioned by insecurity (Akande et al., 2022). During period of security threats, one of the major means to mitigating the potential threat of the insecurity is by adequately informing the population facing the risk with relevant messages that will promote their safety in the face of danger. This is the whole gamut of risk communication. Therefore, without risk communication, many uninformed and ill-informed audience will stumble into life threatening circumstances that effective risk communication and community engagement would have averted. This underscores why risk communication and

community engagement is highly essential in today's society most particularly within communities facing consistent threats to life and property (Dinnie et al., 2022). However, in spite of the overarching significance of risk communication and community engagement in cushioning the effect of insecurity, there are no sufficient empirical evidence on the application of these strategies and their effectiveness in most particularly southern Taraba where cases of kidnapping and other forms of insecurity have been recorded in the recent past (Abbare et al., 2023). It is against this premise that this study seeks to examine the effectiveness of risk communication and community engagement in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of risk communication and community engagement in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba. However, the specific objectives are to;

1. Identify the risk communication and community engagement strategies employed in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba
2. Examine the effectiveness of the risk communication and community engagement strategies used in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba
3. Assess the challenges affecting the use of risk communication and community engagement strategies in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba.

Review of Concepts

Risk Communication and Community Engagement

The concept of risk communication and community engagement has been used across different fields, disciplines and genres of communication especially health communication and security studies among others (Akande et al., 2022). In view of its multifaceted relevance and application, the meaning is dependents on the field where is applied even though certain denominators remain constant. In security studies, risk communication is concerned with the primary purpose of risk communication is to assist individuals, families, and communities in making informed decisions to protect themselves and others from health threats and their consequences. For risk communication to be effective, the values, beliefs, perceptions, and practices of the target population must be clearly understood and taken into account.

Risk communication and Community Engagement occupies a central place in security as it orients ordinary members of the public who are mostly naïve over security matters to make informed decision on matters that affect their personal safety during times of danger. The commotion and emergency that surround most security situations make it difficult for most people to make right decisions in the midst of such chaos. This buttresses why risk communication and community engagement occupies a prime place in responding to both health and security emergencies in the society due to the indispensable role it is playing.

Insecurity

The concept of insecurity brings to mind scary and dreaded scenes of communal clashes, kidnapping and banditry, insurgency, terrorism, ethno-religious crises among others. Owing to the high spate of insecurity in Nigeria, the concept has become common and multidimensional in nature. Insecurity relates to the absence of peace, safety, happiness and the lack of protection of human and physical resources or the presence of crisis. Adegbami (2013) described insecurity as monster hunting, haunting and inhibiting effective protection of lives and property as well as impeding on safety, law and order of a given society. Suffice to say that insecurity thrives in the displacement of law and order in a society and the perpetration of chaos and violence which could exacerbate into blood bath leading to loss of lives and property.

The issue of insecurity has become multidimensional in Nigeria as it manifest in ethno-religious conflicts, Boko Haram insurgency, separatist agitations of Biafra and Oduduwa nations, banditry, kidnapping, communal clashes among others. The increasing spate of these cases of insecurity has made many parts of the country to be either totally uninhabitable or not conducive for business activities (Ademola & Ogu, 2024). Although insecurity is a common phenomenon in Nigeria today, the issue is more prevalent in the northern part of the country and particularly the northeast sub-region (Abbare et al., 2023). Insecurity perpetuates instability in political and economic activities in any given society thereby retarding growth and development.

Review of Related Literature

Extant literatures were reviewed to provide rudimentary base for the study.

Risk Communication and Community Engagement employed in curbing insecurity in Nigeria

Nigerian communities are bedeviled with different cases of insecurity in the recent past. Oluwaseun et al (2024) averred that insecurity is a major problem that impacts communities globally, resulting in negative outcomes like decreased quality of life, financial declines, and tense social interactions. It includes a wide variety of difficulties such as crime, violence, cyber threats, and other types of instability that put public safety and well-being at risk. Systemic issues like poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and social inequality are often the underlying reasons for insecurity (Dinnie et al., 2022). To surmount these issues, it is necessary for community based approaches like RCCE to be deployed so as make concerted efforts that will yield long lasting result to this menace.

Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) are used to orient and caution target audience against threats to life and property so as to mitigate the concomitant effect of the danger. Combating insecurity demands beyond application of military might to the use of strategies aimed at boosting safety and mitigating risk associated with safety of lives and property. Onuche and Martins (2024) also buttressed that non-traditional security approaches like community engagement have significantly contributed to addressing banditry and kidnapping in Nigeria. The realization of the place of strategy and most especially use of communication strategies in curbing insecurity has necessitated its adoption in Nigeria and many other countries plagued by insecurity. These strategies are used to inform the people prone to security attacks on safety measures they need to adopt to avoid falling victims of such circumstances. As watchdogs, the mass media utilise RCCE disseminate relevant security information to vulnerable communities to enable them take precautionary measures in reducing the effect of the impending risk. It is apposite to note that RCCE plays a vital role in conscientising communities in the face of danger to make informed decisions towards securing their lives and property.

This strategy is participatory in nature as it involves the community in the formulation and implementation of the communication approach and not just to serve as mere recipients of communication messages (Alobele, 2024). This approach helps in delivering bespoke safety messages in a style and language that could be easily understood by the audience. As a

result, the target audience members are likely to adopt and utilise the messages delivered to them because they were carried along either directly or indirectly (WHO, 2025). In addition to that, RCCE utilises the influence of community leaders; both religious and traditional leaders that are held in high esteem by the people. The integration of community leaders in RCCE helps to transfer the trust the community members have for their leaders to the communication messages due to the fact that the people believe their leaders will not do anything to harm them. Where communication messages are coming directly from the media or via government agents and officials, those messages are taken with a pinch of salt as either political or mere propaganda because communities see every other person other than their leaders as third parties that should not be taken seriously (Shem & Asicus, 2023).

The advantages of RCCE in curbing insecurity and its concomitant effects cannot be overrated however stated. Many benefits could be gleaned from the use RCCE in raising security awareness before, during and after an uprising so as to mitigate the effect of the crises on the populace. Although extant literatures have shown that Risk Communication and Community Engagement have been greatly used for health communication in Nigeria and globally (WHO, 2025, there is dearth of literature on its usage for security reporting despite its promising potentials. There is therefore the need for the adoption and utilisation of RCCE in disseminating messages aimed at curbing kidnapping and banditry.

Furthermore, RCCE can also be used for deradicalisation process where a forceful indoctrination and counter-propaganda can be deployed to disabuse the minds of the kidnappers and bandits into subscribing to a new ideology which embraces peace. As the popular saying goes, "when you pick a book, you drop the gun." Risk Communication and Community Engagement can be used to design custom made messages to be sent to bandits and kidnappers to deradicalise them from being violent to embracing peace (Chukwuere & Onyebuka, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Situation Crisis communication theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study.

Situational Crisis Communication theory

Situational Crisis Communication theory was advanced by Coombs. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) was founded on the notion to help organizational efforts to determine and choose an appropriate crisis response strategies based on publics' crisis

perceptions and the goals of the organization (Bartman, 2018). The goals may include a change in perceptions about the organization or about the crisis and must be contextualized within an understanding of the crisis type, the organization's crisis history, and its pre-crisis reputation, where a good prior reputation is often considered a crisis asset. Coombs (2010) added that crisis management should be a proactive function of an organization. The theory also posited that institutions and organizations should be in a continuous process of learning from past crises to be better prepared for or to prevent future crises altogether, including having a current and vetted crisis communication plan. As an efficient crisis response mechanism, Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) have proven to be very effective in engaging community members towards preventing the repetition of a crisis as well as mitigating the effect on an on-going crisis. It is crucial for crisis communication to be planned in such a way that it appeals to the majority of the target audience (Bartman, 2018).

The rising incidents of kidnapping and banditry in Nigeria pose a serious challenge to national security and community well-being. The response to these challenges requires strategies that effectively engage both risk communication and community involvement and the conventional military approach. Situation Crisis Communication theory is explains how the flow of information about possible risks between the official authorities and the public should assist in informed decision-making and protective behavior. Central to this theory is the understanding that people's perception of risk is influenced by factors such as personal experiences, cultural beliefs, and the credibility of the information source. It follows, therefore, that effective risk communication requires clear, transparent messages tailored to the specific concerns and values of the target audience.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey method was used for this research because surveys can produce reliable and useful information. They are especially useful for collecting information on audiences (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; Wimmer & Dominic, 2011). According to Lavrakas (2008), survey research is a systematic set of methods used to gather information to generate knowledge and to help make decisions.

The population of this study consists of people within Southern Taraba which consists of five (5) local government areas, viz; Donga, Ibi, Takum, Ussa, Wukari which were the local

government areas that recorded high cases of insecurity in Taraba State (Abbare et al., 2023). Donga state has the population of 209,400, Ibi has the population of 143,600 and Takum has the population of 211,700, Ussa has population of 143,000 while Wukari has the population of 374,800 (NBS projected population, 2022). The total population for the five local government areas which constitute the population for this study is 1,082,500 (NBS, 2022).

The sample of this research is calculated by using Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1967) formula with 95% confidence level and 0.5 margin error in order to avoid sampling error. The calculation formula of Taro Yamane is presented as follows.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)2}$$

Where :

n= sample size required

N = number of people in the population

e = allowable error (%)

Substitute numbers in formula:

$$n=\frac{1{,}082{,}500}{(1+1{,}082{,}500(0.05)2)}$$

$$n = \frac{1{,}082{,}500}{(1 + 1{,}082{,}500(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{1{,}082{,}500}{(1 + 2{,}706.25)}$$

$$n = \frac{1{,}082{,}500}{2{,}707.25}$$

$$\frac{1{,}082{,}500}{(1 + 1{,}082{,}500(0.05)2)}$$

$$n = 399.85$$

$$n = 400$$

After calculating the sample size by substituting the numbers into the Yamane formula, the numbers of sample is 399.85 persons. In order to obtain reliable data, researcher has

approximated the sample size to 400 persons which was shared across evenly among the five local government areas with each LGA having 80 copies of the questionnaire administered.

RESULTS

The presentation and analysis is based on the data obtained from the questionnaire administered from the field work through the instrument of questionnaire that was across the five LGAs. Below is a tabular presentation of the data obtained. The researcher administered 400 copies of the instrument to respondents and all the 400 copies were completed and returned useable.

Age	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
18-25	230	57.5
26-35	140	35.0
36-45	30	7.5
Total	400	100
Sex	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	160	40.0
Female	240	60.0
Total	400	100
Local Government Area	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Donga	80	20.0
Ibi	80	20.0
Takum	80	20.0
Ussa	80	20.0
Wukari	80	20.0
Total	400	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

From the table above, it could be deduced that majority of the respondents fall within the age range of 18-25 and are mostly women. This implies that most of the respondents are matured and therefore rational and well positioned to provide valid responses for this study. The copies of questionnaire were administered evenly to give equal chances to all the respondents in the five local government areas.

Objective 1: Identify the risk communication and community engagement strategies employed in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba

S/N	Question Item	SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Early warning signals are used as a strategy in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba	131(32.75)	179(44.75)	50(12.5)	26(6.5)	14(3.5)
2.	Traditional and religious leaders are integrated in risk communication as one of the strategies in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba	86(21.5)	214(53.5)	56(14)	32(8.0)	12(3.0)
3.	Media campaign is used as a strategy in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba	109(27.25)	211(52.75)	56(14)	15(3.75)	09(2.25)

Source: Field survey, 2025

From the table, the risk communication and community engagement strategy employed in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in southern Taraba is majorly media campaign with an overwhelming affirmative response of 320 representing 80% of the total respondents followed by issuance of early warning signals.

Objective 2: Examine the effectiveness of the risk communication and community engagement strategies used in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba

S/N	Question Item	SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Risk communication and Community engagement strategies have consequently helped in reducing incidences of kidnapping and banditry in southern Taraba.	84(21.0)	256(64.0)	16(4.0)	23(5.75)	21(5.25)
2.	Risk communication and Community engagement strategies have helped in serving as deterrent to intending recruits of kidnapping and banditry in	72(18.0)	218(54.5)	71(17.75)	20(5.0)	19(4.75)

	southern Taraba.					
3.	Risk communication and Community engagement strategies have helped in increasing security consciousness and awareness in southern Taraba.	114(28.5)	246(61.5)	13(3.25)	18(4.5)	09(2.25)

Source: Field survey, 2025

Data from the above table indicate that Risk communication and Community engagement strategies have helped in increasing security consciousness and awareness in southern Taraba as stated by 360 respondents representing 90% of the total population. In addition, 340(80%) respondents affirmed that Risk communication and Community engagement strategies have consequently helped in reducing incidences of kidnapping and banditry in southern Taraba. This obviously shows that Risk Communication and Community Engagement have been very effective in curbing incidences of kidnapping and banditry in the state particularly in southern part.

Objective 3: Assess the challenges affecting the use of risk communication and community engagement strategies in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba.

S/N	Question Item	SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Poor media collaboration with relevant authorities is a challenge affecting the use of risk communication and community engagement strategies in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba.	112(28.0)	218(54.5)	37(9.25)	18(4.5)	15(3.75)
2.	Non utilisation of local language understood by the people is a challenge affecting the use of risk communication and community engagement strategies in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in	85(21.25)	225(56.25)	28(7.0)	36(9.0)	26(6.5)

	Southern Taraba					
3.	Poor government support is a challenge affecting the use of risk communication and community engagement strategies in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba	157(39.25)	183(45.75)	24(6.0)	20(5.0)	16(4.0)

Source: Field survey, 2025

The research data from the above table revealed that among other things, poor government support is the prime factor inhibiting the use of risk communication and community engagement strategies in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba as stated by 340 respondents representing 85% of the entire population. More so, poor media collaboration with relevant authorities poses another significant challenge restraining the use of risk communication and community engagement strategies in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba as affirmed by 330 respondents representing 82.5% of the total population.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were discussed in line the research questions in order to provide answers to the questions toward satisfying the overarching objective of the study.

What are the risk communication and community engagement strategy employed in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in southern Taraba?

In identifying the risk communication and community engagement strategy employed in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in southern Taraba, findings from the study revealed mass media anti-terrorism/crime campaign was the major strategy used in curbing the spate of kidnapping and banditry in southern Taraba followed by the issuance of early warning signals to nip pending threats at the latent state. The study found out that although, use of trado-religious leaders was also integrated in the strategy, the utilisation of these leaders was minimal compared to the other strategies adopted.

This is tandem with the studies of Dinnie et al. (2022) who stated that addressing the challenges of kidnapping and banditry has necessitated the implementation of various risk

communication and community engagement strategies. Prominent among the various strategies adopted in Nigeria is community policing. Community policing develops partnerships between a law enforcement agency and other organisations, such as government agencies, community members, nonprofit service providers, private businesses, and the media. The media represent a powerful pattern by which police can communicate with the community and as such play an important role in enhancing cordial police-public relations. The media are highly instrumental in keeping the general public abreast with security tips and early warning signals as risk communication and community engagement strategy to mitigate incidences of kidnapping and banditry in the bud.

In the same vein, Accord (2023) opined that educational and awareness programs also formed part of community engagement which is being promoted via different media channels particularly broadcast media which are accessible to those communities. Additionally, holding security workshops and seminars enable residents to recognise and respond timely to a number of possible security threats. This approach to community mobilisation over security threat via the mass media is instrumental in getting the community well informed against pending threats to cushion the effects. Also, outreach programmes try to build trust and cooperation between the residents and law enforcement agencies. This does not only empower individuals with knowledge but also helps foster a sense of collective responsibility for safety within the community.

How effective were the risk communication and community engagement strategies used in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba?

The study examined the effectiveness of the risk communication and community engagement strategies used and found out that Risk communication and Community engagement strategies have helped in increasing security consciousness and awareness in southern Taraba. Consequently, it was also discovered that the strategy was instrumental in reducing the incidences of kidnapping and banditry that were prevalent in the affected areas. This indicates that the media anti-terrorism campaign and early warning signals used as risk communication and community engagement strategies were effective in yielding the desired result.

The findings of the study agrees with Accord (2023) who stated that community involvement in proffering solutions to the problem of banditry in Nigeria has enormous advantages, right from effectiveness in terms of interventions through making sure the

resolutions are actually accomplished in a sustainable way. This is so because the community members have local knowledge and are better aware of the contextual and specific needs that assist in making sure the security interventions produce the expected outcome. Community based security initiatives helps in narrowing communication gap between security agencies and the members of a community who are vulnerable to security threat (Nigeria Health Index, 2024). This is made possible through the media who serve as the purveyors of information through which members of the public are both informed and mobilised.

What are the challenges affecting the use of risk communication and community engagement strategies in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba?

Furthermore, the challenges affecting the use of risk communication and community engagement were assessed, it was gathered that poor government support is the prime factor inhibiting the use of risk communication and community engagement strategies in mitigating kidnapping and banditry in Southern Taraba followed by poor media collaboration with relevant authorities. These challenges are limiting the effectiveness of the RCCE strategies used in curbing and/or even obliterating issues of kidnapping and banditry in the places affected.

This aligns with the opinion of Onuche & Martins (2024) who stated that there is the need for collaboration between relevant stakeholders to combat banditry in Nigeria. They further added that the effectiveness of risk communication and community engagement in curbing banditry has been limited by challenges such as lack of coordination, resource constraints, and inadequate addressing of structural injustices. However, integration of task forces, investing in technology-driven solutions, supporting community-led peace-building initiatives that promote dialogue and reconciliation at the grassroots level, and implementing targeted socio-economic development programs to address the underlying drivers of banditry and kidnapping, including poverty, unemployment, and marginalization should be given more priority(Abbare et al., 2023). Apparently, the security agencies must recognise the mass media as partners in progress towards resolving the seemingly intractable issue of insecurity in the country through risk communication and community engagement.

CONCLUSION

Inarguably, risk communication and community engagement plays a vital role in mitigating the incidences of kidnapping and banditry as evidenced in the findings of this study and other extant literatures. The utilisation of RCCE strategies like anti-terrorism campaign by the media and issuance of early warning signals were found to be topmost in reducing the spate of banditry in southern part of Taraba State which could be extrapolated to other places facing security threats. However, the efficacy of this strategy is however being limited by inadequate government support as well as poor collaboration between the media and other relevant security stakeholders. Not until these challenges are surmounted, the full potentials of risk communication and community engagement in curbing insecurity cannot be fully maximised.

Recommendations

1. It is apposite for the government and other relevant stakeholders to improve the utilisation of trado-religious leaders in risk communication and community engagement considering their vital role.
2. The mass media should engage members of the community more often in discussing security matters alongside security experts in order to narrow the communication gap between the duo.
3. Security agencies need to fully recognize the media as partners in progress in curbing insecurity in Nigeria as traditional military approach has proven not to be self-efficient in combating insecurity.

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