



*Research Article*

## **Brown Envelope Journalism and Broadcast Media Ethics in Nigeria: A Library-Based Review**

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### **About Article**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Brown envelope journalism has remained one of the most persistent ethical challenges confronting journalism practice in Nigeria. The practice, which involves the acceptance of money, gifts, or other material benefits by journalists in exchange for favourable news coverage or the suppression of information, undermines the ethical principles of objectivity, fairness, independence, accountability, and credibility that underpin professional journalism. This study examined brown envelope journalism and its implications for broadcast media ethics in Nigeria using the library research method. Specifically, the study reviewed existing literature to examine the prevalence of brown envelope journalism, identify the factors responsible for its persistence, evaluate its implications for broadcast media professionalism and public confidence, and highlight strategies recommended by scholars for addressing the practice. Relevant information was obtained from textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, government publications, policy documents, and other credible scholarly sources. The reviewed materials were analysed using qualitative content analysis by comparing, synthesising, and interpreting existing scholarly arguments and empirical evidence. The reviewed literature revealed that poor remuneration, commercialisation of news, political interference, ownership influence, and weak enforcement of professional ethics remain the major factors sustaining brown envelope journalism in Nigeria. The literature further indicated that the practice compromises journalistic objectivity, weakens editorial independence, erodes public trust in the media, and diminishes the watchdog role of journalism in democratic governance. The study concluded that strengthening ethical regulation, improving journalists' welfare, promoting continuous professional development, and safeguarding editorial independence are essential for restoring professionalism and public confidence in the Nigerian broadcast media.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The media constitute one of the most important institutions in every democratic society because they facilitate the dissemination of information, promote public debate, shape public opinion, and hold governments and public office holders accountable. Through these functions, the media contribute significantly to transparency, accountability, national development, and democratic governance. Among the various media platforms, broadcast media comprising radio and television occupy a strategic position due to their extensive audience reach, immediacy, and ability to communicate information simultaneously to diverse segments of society. Consequently, broadcast journalists are expected to adhere to the highest standards of professional ethics in the performance of their duties (McQuail, 2010; Baran & Davis, 2021).

Media ethics refers to the moral principles and professional standards that regulate the conduct of journalists and media organisations. These ethical principles include truthfulness, objectivity, fairness, accuracy, independence, accountability, and respect for the public interest. According to Ward (2019), ethical journalism requires media practitioners to report facts accurately and impartially without allowing personal interests, financial incentives, or external pressures to influence editorial decisions. Adherence to these principles enhances public confidence in the media and strengthens journalism's role as the watchdog of society.

Despite the existence of professional codes of ethics, journalism practice continues to face numerous ethical challenges globally. One of

the most persistent challenges in many developing countries, particularly in Africa, is brown envelope journalism. Brown envelope journalism refers to the acceptance of monetary or material inducements by journalists from news sources, politicians, corporate organisations, or individuals in exchange for favourable news coverage or the suppression of unfavourable information (Skjerdal, 2010). Although the term originated within African journalism practice, similar practices are recognised internationally under concepts such as paid news, cheque-book journalism, and news commercialisation.

In Nigeria, brown envelope journalism has attracted considerable scholarly attention because of its implications for media professionalism and democratic governance. Scholars have argued that the practice undermines journalistic objectivity, compromises editorial independence, weakens media credibility, and erodes public confidence in journalism (Omenugha & Oji, 2008; Nwabueze, 2015). The persistence of the phenomenon has been linked to several institutional and structural challenges, including poor remuneration, increasing commercialisation of media operations, political influence, ownership pressure, and weak enforcement of ethical standards (Akinfeleye, 2010; Nwabueze, 2015). These conditions have created an environment in which some journalists become vulnerable to financial inducements that may compromise their professional judgement.

The implications of brown envelope journalism extend beyond the media profession. Since citizens depend on credible information to make informed decisions and participate effectively in democratic processes, any practice that undermines the

integrity of news reporting poses a threat to accountability, transparency, and good governance. When journalists allow financial considerations to determine news selection and presentation, public trust in media institutions is diminished, while misinformation and biased reporting become more likely. Consequently, addressing brown envelope journalism remains essential for strengthening ethical journalism and preserving the democratic functions of the broadcast media.

Although numerous scholars have examined brown envelope journalism from different perspectives, the available literature remains dispersed across journal articles, books, conference papers, and professional reports. There is therefore a need to review and synthesise existing knowledge to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This study therefore adopts the library research method to examine brown envelope journalism and broadcast media ethics in Nigeria by reviewing existing scholarly literature on the subject. The study focuses on the prevalence of brown envelope journalism, the factors responsible for its persistence, its implications for media ethics and professionalism, and the strategies proposed for addressing the practice.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Journalism is widely recognised as a profession founded on the ethical principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, fairness, independence, and accountability. These principles enable the media to fulfil its responsibility of informing the public, promoting transparency, exposing wrongdoing, and supporting democratic governance. However, over the years, scholars have identified brown envelope

journalism as one of the major ethical challenges confronting journalism practice in Nigeria and many other African countries. Brown envelope journalism, which involves the acceptance of monetary or material inducements by journalists in exchange for favourable news coverage or the suppression of information, has been reported to compromise professional ethics, reduce media credibility, and weaken public confidence in journalism (Omenugha & Oji, 2008; Skjerdal, 2010; Nwabueze, 2015).

To address this ethical challenge, several stakeholders have introduced measures aimed at strengthening professionalism within the Nigerian media industry. The Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), journalism training institutions, and media organisations have developed codes of ethics, regulatory frameworks, professional training programmes, and disciplinary measures to encourage ethical journalism. Similarly, scholars have consistently recommended improved remuneration, continuous ethics education, stronger institutional regulation, editorial independence, and enhanced welfare packages for journalists as strategies for reducing brown envelope journalism and promoting professional integrity (Akinfeleye, 2010; Ward, 2019; McQuail, 2010). Despite these efforts, concerns regarding unethical journalistic practices continue to feature prominently in scholarly literature on Nigerian journalism.

Although numerous scholarly publications have examined brown envelope journalism from different perspectives, the available literature remains scattered across books, journal articles, conference papers, and

professional reports. Consequently, there is limited synthesis of existing knowledge regarding the prevalence of the practice, the factors responsible for its persistence, its implications for broadcast media ethics, and the strategies proposed for addressing it. This gap makes it difficult for scholars, policymakers, media practitioners, and journalism educators to access a comprehensive understanding of the subject. It is against this background that this study adopted the library research method to review and synthesise existing literature on brown envelope journalism and broadcast media ethics in Nigeria.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study was to examine brown envelope journalism and its implications for broadcast media ethics in Nigeria through a review of existing literature.

The specific objectives were to:

1. for addressing brown envelope journalism examine the prevalence of brown envelope journalism as reported in the reviewed literature;
2. identify the factors responsible for the persistence of brown envelope journalism in Nigeria;
3. evaluate the implications of brown envelope journalism for broadcast media ethics, professionalism, and public confidence; and
4. examine the strategies recommended in the literature in Nigeria.

### 2.1 Research Questions

The following research questions are to guide the study:

1. What does the reviewed literature reveal about the prevalence of brown envelope journalism in Nigeria?

2. What factors are responsible for the persistence of brown envelope journalism according to the reviewed literature?
3. What are the implications of brown envelope journalism for broadcast media ethics, professionalism, and public confidence?
4. What strategies have scholars recommended for addressing brown envelope journalism in Nigeria?

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the library research method to examine brown envelope journalism and its implications for broadcast media ethics in Nigeria. The library research method was considered appropriate because the study relied on existing scholarly literature to generate knowledge and provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject rather than collecting primary data from respondents. The method enabled the researcher to critically examine, compare, synthesise, and interpret the views and findings of different scholars on brown envelope journalism and media ethics.

Relevant information for the study was obtained from both print and electronic sources. These included textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, theses, dissertations, government publications, policy documents, newspapers, and reports from professional media organisations. Electronic materials were sourced from reputable academic databases and digital repositories, including Google Scholar, African Journals Online (AJOL), JSTOR, Scopus, and institutional repositories of universities.

The retrieved materials were critically evaluated to ensure their relevance,

credibility, authenticity, and consistency with the objectives of the study. Priority was given to scholarly publications that addressed issues relating to brown envelope journalism, media ethics, broadcast journalism, journalistic professionalism, and media accountability in Nigeria and other African countries.

The reviewed literature was analysed using qualitative content analysis. The information obtained from the various sources was carefully examined, compared, synthesised, and organised into thematic areas corresponding to the objectives of the study. The themes included the prevalence of brown envelope journalism, factors responsible for its persistence, its implications for broadcast media ethics and public confidence, and the strategies recommended for addressing the practice. The synthesis of the reviewed literature formed the basis for the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations of the study.

## **4.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **4.1 Concept of Brown Envelope Journalism**

Brown envelope journalism is one of the most widely discussed ethical challenges confronting journalism practice in Nigeria and several other African countries. The term refers to the acceptance of money, gifts, favours, or other material inducements by journalists from news sources in exchange for favourable media coverage, suppression of unfavourable information, or undue prominence in news reporting (Skjerdal, 2010). The expression "brown envelope" originated from the common practice of presenting cash to journalists in sealed brown envelopes after news conferences, political events, corporate functions, or public ceremonies. Over time, the concept has

become synonymous with unethical journalism and financial inducement within the media profession.

According to Nwabueze (2015), brown envelope journalism represents a serious violation of professional ethics because it compromises journalists' independence and objectivity. Rather than serving the public interest, journalists who accept inducements may consciously or unconsciously allow financial considerations to influence news selection, interpretation, and presentation. Such practices undermine the credibility of journalism and weaken public confidence in the media.

Similarly, Omenugha and Oji (2008) argued that brown envelope journalism is closely associated with the commercialisation of news. They maintained that increasing economic pressures on media organisations and journalists have contributed to the growing tendency to treat news as a commercial commodity rather than a public service. This situation encourages journalists to compromise ethical standards in pursuit of financial benefits.

Beyond Nigeria, Skjerdal (2010) observed that financial inducement of journalists has been reported in several African countries, including Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Cameroon. Although the forms and frequency of the practice differ across countries, the ethical consequences remain largely similar. The author noted that brown envelope journalism weakens editorial independence, promotes biased reporting, and reduces public trust in media institutions.

Scholars generally agree that brown envelope journalism should not be viewed solely as an

individual moral failure but also as a consequence of broader institutional and structural challenges. Factors such as poor remuneration, inadequate welfare packages, political interference, ownership influence, weak enforcement of ethical standards, and increasing commercialisation of the media have all been identified as conditions that encourage unethical journalistic practices (Akinfeleye, 2010; Ward, 2019). Consequently, addressing brown envelope journalism requires both personal commitment to professional ethics and institutional reforms capable of promoting integrity and accountability within the media industry.

#### **4.2 Concept of Broadcast Media Ethics**

Broadcast media ethics refers to the moral principles, professional standards, and codes of conduct that guide the activities of radio and television journalists in gathering, processing, and disseminating information. Ethical broadcasting requires journalists to uphold the principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, fairness, balance, impartiality, accountability, and respect for the public interest (McQuail, 2010).

Ward (2019) explained that journalism derives its legitimacy from public trust. Consequently, ethical decision-making should always prioritise truth, transparency, independence, and responsibility over personal, political, or commercial interests. Ethical journalism therefore requires broadcasters to verify information before publication, avoid conflicts of interest, distinguish facts from opinions, and resist undue influence from advertisers, politicians, or other powerful actors.

In Nigeria, broadcast media ethics are

regulated through the Code of Ethics of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Nigerian Broadcasting Code issued by the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC), and other professional guidelines established by media organisations. These codes expressly prohibit journalists from accepting gifts, money, or other inducements capable of influencing editorial judgement. They also require journalists to maintain professional independence, fairness, and integrity in the discharge of their responsibilities.

Despite the existence of these ethical frameworks, scholars have continued to express concern over the persistence of unethical practices within the Nigerian media industry. Brown envelope journalism remains one of the most significant ethical issues because it directly contradicts the principles of independence, objectivity, and accountability upon which professional broadcast journalism is founded.

### **5.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **5.1 Social Responsibility Theory**

This study is anchored on the Social Responsibility Theory, which was developed by the Commission on Freedom of the Press (popularly known as the Hutchins Commission) in 1947. The theory emerged as a modification of the Libertarian Theory of the press after concerns that unrestricted press freedom without corresponding ethical responsibility could negatively affect society. The theory maintains that while the media should enjoy freedom of expression, such freedom must be exercised responsibly and in the interest of society.

According to McQuail (2010), the Social Responsibility Theory emphasises that the media have an obligation to provide truthful,

accurate, balanced, objective, and comprehensive information capable of enabling citizens to make informed decisions. The theory further argues that media organisations should avoid practices capable of misleading the public or promoting personal, political, or commercial interests above the public good. Journalists are therefore expected to uphold ethical standards, respect professional codes of conduct, and remain accountable to society in the discharge of their responsibilities.

The theory further posits that media practitioners should serve as watchdogs by exposing corruption, promoting transparency, protecting public interest, and providing a platform for diverse opinions. To achieve these objectives, journalists must maintain editorial independence and resist external influences capable of compromising professional judgement. The theory therefore encourages media self-regulation through adherence to professional ethics and institutional accountability rather than excessive government control.

The Social Responsibility Theory is relevant to this study because brown envelope journalism represents a direct violation of the ethical principles upon which the theory is founded. The acceptance of money or other material inducements by journalists compromises objectivity, fairness, independence, and accountability. Instead of serving the public interest, journalists who engage in brown envelope practices prioritise private gain over professional responsibility. Consequently, the theory provides an appropriate framework for understanding the ethical implications of brown envelope journalism and the need to strengthen

professionalism within Nigeria's broadcast media industry.

## 5.2 Empirical Review

Several scholars have examined brown envelope journalism, media ethics, and journalistic professionalism in Nigeria and other African countries. Their studies provide useful insights into the causes, implications, and possible solutions to the phenomenon.

Omenugha and Oji (2008) examined the relationship between news commercialisation, ethics, and objectivity in journalism practice in Nigeria. Using documentary analysis, the authors found that increasing commercialisation had significantly influenced editorial decisions and encouraged journalists to compromise professional ethics for financial benefits. The study concluded that improving journalists' welfare and strengthening ethical regulation would reduce unethical journalism. Although the study provided valuable insight into commercialisation, it focused mainly on news commercialisation rather than providing a comprehensive review of brown envelope journalism.

Skjerdal (2010) reviewed brown envelope journalism across several African countries, including Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Cameroon. The study revealed that financial inducements had become common in journalism practice because of poor remuneration, political influence, and weak institutional regulation. The author argued that the practice had reduced media credibility and weakened public confidence in journalism. However, the study concentrated on African journalism generally without specifically reviewing the

Nigerian broadcast media sector.

Nwabueze (2015) examined brown envelope syndrome and media objectivity in Nigeria. The study revealed that financial inducements significantly affected editorial independence, fairness, and journalistic credibility. The author identified poor remuneration, inadequate welfare packages, and weak ethical enforcement as major contributors to the persistence of brown envelope journalism. The study recommended improved journalists' welfare, ethics education, and stronger professional regulation. Nevertheless, the study focused on the phenomenon itself without synthesising evidence from broader literature on broadcast media ethics.

Akinfeleye (2010) investigated ethical challenges confronting journalism practice in Nigeria. Through documentary analysis, the study found that corruption, political interference, commercial pressure, and declining professional standards had adversely affected journalism practice. The author advocated improved journalism education, institutional reforms, and better remuneration for journalists. Although the study addressed ethical issues comprehensively, it did not focus specifically on brown envelope journalism within broadcast media.

Pate (2011) examined professionalism and ethical challenges among journalists in Northern Nigeria. The study found that ownership influence, economic hardship, and political patronage negatively affected journalistic independence. The author recommended continuous professional development and stricter enforcement of

ethical standards. The study, however, was region-specific and therefore cannot be generalised to the entire Nigerian media industry.

Okunna (2003) examined media ethics and professionalism in Nigeria. The study observed that inadequate remuneration and poor working conditions exposed journalists to unethical practices. The author emphasised that ethical journalism depends not only on personal integrity but also on institutional support capable of protecting journalists from economic pressures.

Ward (2019) examined ethical decision-making in contemporary journalism from an international perspective. The study emphasised that truthfulness, accountability, transparency, and independence remain fundamental principles of professional journalism despite increasing political, technological, and commercial pressures. Although the study was not conducted in Nigeria, its findings reinforce the importance of ethical journalism within all media systems.

### **5.3 Summary of the Reviewed Literature**

The reviewed literature demonstrates that brown envelope journalism remains one of the most persistent ethical challenges confronting journalism practice in Nigeria and other African countries. The literature consistently identifies poor remuneration, commercialisation of news, political interference, ownership influence, and weak enforcement of professional ethics as the major factors responsible for the persistence of the practice. Similarly, scholars agree that brown envelope journalism undermines editorial independence, compromises

journalistic objectivity, reduces public confidence in the media, and weakens journalism's democratic watchdog role.

Despite the considerable body of literature on the subject, previous studies have largely examined individual aspects of brown envelope journalism, media ethics, or news commercialisation. There is limited literature that integrates these issues into a comprehensive review focusing specifically on broadcast media ethics in Nigeria. This study addresses that gap by reviewing and synthesising existing scholarly literature to provide a broader understanding of the relationship between brown envelope journalism and broadcast media ethics.

#### **5.4 Discussion of the Reviewed Literature**

The discussion in this section is based on the objectives and research questions of the study. It synthesises evidence from the reviewed literature on brown envelope journalism and broadcast media ethics in Nigeria.

#### **5.5 Prevalence of Brown Envelope Journalism in Nigeria**

The first objective of the study was to examine the prevalence of brown envelope journalism as reported in the reviewed literature. The literature reviewed consistently indicates that brown envelope journalism remains a persistent ethical challenge within the Nigerian media industry. Scholars such as Omenugha and Oji (2008), Skjerdal (2010), and Nwabueze (2015) observed that journalists are often exposed to financial and material inducements during political campaigns, press conferences, corporate events, and public ceremonies. Although the frequency and magnitude of the practice vary across

media organisations, the reviewed literature suggests that the phenomenon continues to undermine ethical journalism in Nigeria.

The implication of this evidence is that the continued existence of brown envelope journalism threatens the credibility and integrity of the media. Journalism derives its legitimacy from public confidence, and any practice capable of influencing editorial decisions weakens the media's ability to serve the public objectively. This position supports the Social Responsibility Theory, which maintains that journalists should exercise their freedom responsibly and remain committed to truth, fairness, and accountability in serving society.

#### **5.6 Factors Responsible for Brown Envelope Journalism**

The second objective sought to identify the factors responsible for the persistence of brown envelope journalism in Nigeria. The reviewed literature identified several interrelated factors responsible for the practice. Poor remuneration and inadequate welfare packages emerged as the most frequently reported factors. According to Nwabueze (2015), journalists experiencing financial hardship are more susceptible to accepting inducements that compromise their professional judgement. Similarly, Omenugha and Oji (2008) associated the practice with increasing commercialisation of news, while Akinfeleye (2010) and Pate (2011) identified political interference, ownership influence, and weak enforcement of ethical standards as major contributors.

The implication is that brown envelope journalism is not merely an individual ethical failing but also a manifestation of institutional and structural deficiencies

within the media industry. These observations are consistent with the Social Responsibility Theory, which emphasises that responsible journalism depends on both individual ethical conduct and institutional mechanisms that support professional integrity.

### **5.7 Implications of Brown Envelope Journalism for Broadcast Media Ethics**

The third objective of the study was to evaluate the implications of brown envelope journalism for broadcast media ethics, professionalism, and public confidence. The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that brown envelope journalism compromises objectivity, fairness, editorial independence, and professional credibility. Scholars generally agree that journalists who accept financial inducements are more likely to produce biased reports, suppress important information, or give undue prominence to particular individuals or organisations.

The literature further indicates that such practices erode public trust in the media and diminish journalism's capacity to perform its watchdog function. When audiences perceive that news coverage is influenced by financial considerations rather than public interest, confidence in media institutions declines. These observations reinforce the assumptions of the Social Responsibility Theory, which argues that the media should operate in a manner that promotes truth, transparency, and public accountability.

### **5.8 Strategies for Addressing Brown Envelope Journalism**

The fourth objective examined the strategies recommended in the literature for addressing brown envelope journalism in Nigeria. The

reviewed studies proposed several complementary measures. The most common recommendation is the improvement of journalists' remuneration and welfare conditions to reduce their vulnerability to financial inducements. Other recommendations include continuous ethics education, regular professional development programmes, stronger enforcement of ethical codes by professional bodies, improved editorial independence, and stricter sanctions against unethical practices.

The implication of these recommendations is that sustainable solutions require collaborative efforts involving journalists, media owners, professional associations, regulatory agencies, educational institutions, government, and civil society organisations. These recommendations are consistent with the Social Responsibility Theory, which advocates responsible journalism through ethical self-regulation, accountability, and unwavering commitment to the public interest.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

This study reviewed existing literature on brown envelope journalism and broadcast media ethics in Nigeria using the library research method. The reviewed literature revealed that brown envelope journalism remains one of the most persistent ethical challenges confronting journalism practice in the country. Evidence from the literature indicates that the practice is sustained by poor remuneration, commercialisation of news, political interference, ownership influence, inadequate welfare conditions, and weak enforcement of professional ethical standards.

The literature further revealed that brown

envelope journalism compromises objectivity, fairness, editorial independence, and professional integrity. Consequently, it weakens public confidence in the media and diminishes journalism's capacity to perform its constitutional responsibility of promoting accountability, transparency, and democratic governance.

The persistence of brown envelope journalism, despite the existence of professional ethical codes and regulatory frameworks, suggests that ethical compliance alone cannot eliminate the problem. The reviewed literature indicates that meaningful progress requires institutional reforms, improved journalists' welfare, stronger regulatory enforcement, continuous ethics education, and greater editorial independence. Addressing these underlying structural challenges will contribute significantly to strengthening professionalism, restoring public trust, and enhancing the credibility of broadcast journalism in Nigeria.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the reviewed literature, the study recommends that:

1. Media organisations should improve journalists' salaries, welfare packages, and working conditions to reduce financial vulnerability.
2. Professional bodies such as the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC), and the Nigerian Press Council (NPC) should strengthen the enforcement of ethical standards through regular monitoring and appropriate disciplinary measures.
3. Journalism training institutions should place greater emphasis on media ethics, professional responsibility, and integrity in both academic programmes and continuing professional development.
4. Media proprietors should guarantee editorial independence by protecting journalists from political, commercial, and ownership interference.
5. Government agencies, civil society organisations, and media stakeholders should support initiatives that promote ethical journalism, press freedom, transparency, and accountability within the Nigerian media industry.

## **7.1 Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive synthesis of scholarly literature on brown envelope journalism and broadcast media ethics in Nigeria. Unlike many previous studies that focused on specific aspects of the phenomenon, this review integrates existing knowledge on its prevalence, causes, implications, and possible solutions. The study therefore provides a valuable reference for scholars, journalism educators, media practitioners, policymakers, and regulatory agencies interested in promoting ethical journalism and strengthening media professionalism.

### **7.1.1 Limitations of the Study**

The study was limited to published and accessible scholarly literature obtained through the library research method. Consequently, unpublished studies and materials that were inaccessible at the time of the review were not included. Despite this limitation, the use of diverse and credible

academic sources ensured a comprehensive and balanced review of the subject.

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