

**FACEBOOK CRIME AWARENESS AND VICTIMIZATION
AMONG CRIMINOLOGY AND SECURITY STUDIES
UNDERGRADUATES IN A NIGERIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY**

Philip N. Ndubueze, PhD

Department of Sociology,
(Criminology and Security Studies),

Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State, Nigeria.

Email: pnndubueze@gmail.com, philip.n@fud.edu.ng

Abstract

Like many other technological inventions in human history, the social media is employed by deviant and criminal elements to facilitate various kinds of illegal activities. This study therefore, examines the level of Facebook crime awareness and victimization among undergraduates. It used purposive sampling method to select 120 Criminology and Security Studies undergraduates enrolled in a public owned university in Nigeria. A 33-item questionnaire containing dichotomous, multiple choice, and open-ended questions was administered to the respondents. Descriptive statistics such as frequency (counts) percentages, and tables were used to describe the relationship between the variables. The study found that 98.3%, 96.7%, 93.3%, 89.2% and 79.2 % of the respondents were aware of harassment/treat/intimidation; hate speech propagation, posting of hostile materials/false information, password theft/Facebook account hijack and live streaming of crime/violence on Facebook respectively. It also found that 42.5% and 36.7% of the respondents believed that people preferred Facebook to physical space to perpetrate crime to avoid detection and physical confrontation respectively. Furthermore, the study found that 36.7%, 60.8%, 28.3%, 55.0% and 29.2% of the respondents had been repeatedly harassed/threatened/intimidated, received unwanted sexual advances, had false information posted about them, had pornographic comment or picture posted on their timeline, had their password stolen/hijacked through Facebook respectively. More so, 62.5% of the respondents believed that Facebook censorship can help curb the menace of crime on Facebook in Nigeria. The continuous enhancement of privacy setting by Facebook to make it difficult for criminals to carry out unauthorized activities on users account is recommended.

Keywords: Censorship; Crime; Facebook; Live-streaming; Social media; Undergraduates.

Introduction

The social media has dramatically changed the dynamics of crime in the 21st century world. The obsession with digital technology and tools, which is a fall-out of the digital revolution that is fast spreading around the world, is not peculiar to law abiding people. Expectedly, criminals like they have always done in ages past are maximizing the use of digital technologies/tools in victimizing vulnerable internet users.

Facebook was intended to be used by college students when it was created (Wolfer, 2017) and it is believed to be the most popular social networking site (Jabee & Alam, 2016; Siliotopoulos & Oakley, 2013). It has metamorphosed from a web-based site designed only for the use of college and university students, to a multi-purpose mobile-first platform that covers a wide range of services and partners across the web and open to the world (Sujon et al., 2018). Facebook has experienced a geometric rise in user population over the years with more than one billion active users (see, Seo & Ebrahim, 2016). This growth as impressive and functional as it is, has also had its backlash, prominent among which is the issue of control. Selinger and Hartzog (2016) assert that even though users have control over the content of their disclosure in mediated environments, they do not have control over how such disclosures are presented to others. There have always been some reservations about Facebook by some national governments. For example, Khosravi (as cited in Hajin, 2013) points out that new communication technologies and media is believed to be controlled by the Great Satan.

Facebook is widely patronized by youth especially students around the world including those in Nigeria. Many undergraduate students in Nigeria are on Facebook, which they easily access through their computer systems and smart phones. However, today, some criminal elements use Facebook platforms to carry out different kinds of cybercrimes. For some reasons, certain offenders may prefer to victimize their targets through the social media rather than through the physical space. For example, students may be bullied or stalked via the social media and they may eventually suffer psychological distress as a result of that victimization. In Nigeria cybercrime is criminalized by the Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention Etc.) Act, 2015.

With the seeming rise in Facebook crime around the world, there is need to examine the level of awareness of and prevalence rates of Facebook crime among young internet users who arguably constitute the bulk of Facebook users. There is a dearth of scientific research on people's awareness of Facebook crime and victimization prevalence rates particularly in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the level of awareness of undergraduates of Criminology and Security Studies on Facebook crime in a Nigerian public university. It is believed that with their academic background, these students would be able to provide valuable information on the subject of investigation.

This study is therefore guided by the following research questions:

- RQ 1: What is the level of awareness of Facebook crime among undergraduates of Criminology and Security Studies of the sampled university?
- RQ 2: What are the prevalence rates of Facebook crime victimization among undergraduates of Criminology and Security Studies of the sampled university?
- RQ 3: What are the students' views on why people prefer to perpetrate crime on Facebook instead of the physical space?

RQ 4: What are the students' views on the possible solutions to the problem of Facebook crime in Nigeria?

Problem Statement

There seems to be an upsurge of crime on social media platforms in recent times. Deviant and criminal elements are increasingly using the social media to perpetrate crime and violence. Jane (2017) narrates the pathetic story of a 23-year-old Australian woman, Olivia Melville who on 25th August, 2015, became a target of series of online abuse following the posting of a screen shot of her profile from the Tinder dating app on Facebook by Chris Hall. The post was accompanied with a derogatory caption that suggested that Melvia was a woman with appetite for both sex and food. Melvia and her friends commented on the post. This provoked a heated exchange on various Facebook platforms resulting in the receipt of rape and death threats by Melvia and her friends (Chalmers as cited in Jane, 2017). Jane further suggests that the comments posted by those who supported Hall and Olivia were 'graphically violent and threatening in nature' (p.7).

The above story is a typical example of how Facebook platforms can be employed by mischievous people to perpetrate criminal and violent behaviour. People who are active on Facebook would observe that this kind of behaviour is common in this age of social media where people seek to settle offline scores online. Deception, which is an age long malady in human interactions finds expression in social media platforms and is probably one of the underlying factors in most violent and criminal acts in the social media.

There is a risk of online propaganda being accepted as valid information and consequently influencing user perception of racial issues (Farkas, Schou & Neumayer, 2018). The social media has become one of the most veritable platforms for political participation in the digital age. However, given the likelihood for political discussion to turn confrontational, social media platforms including Facebook can engender violence. Mascheroni and Murru (2017) perhaps acknowledge this when they observe that research on online political interactions suggest that Facebook and social media are either risky or safer platforms for political conversations or the expression of political identities.

But, the whole issue of identity raises some critical questions as social media platforms allow people to create pseudo identities. Grasmuck et al. (2009) underscore the tendency for people to be more realistic and honest in *nonymous* websites as opposed to anonymous websites where people are likely to act like somebody else. They point out that *nonymous* settings are those environments in which identity claims have depth in offline realities. This argument which speaks to one of the propositions of the space transition theory of Jaishankar (2008) suggests that people will be truthful about their identities in offline setting but may tend to fake their identities in online settings. This is understandable considering the high level of anonymity and pseudonymity that the social media allows. This in turn allows deviants and criminals the space to perpetrate crime and violence in social media platforms.

Baccarella et al. (2018) identified examples of the dark side of social media to comprise: cyber bullying, addictive use, trolling, online witch-hunts, fake news and privacy abuse. A survey conducted in Finland using a nationally representative sample found that increased problematic social media use correlates with cybercrime victimization (Marttila et al, 2021). In the same vein, Vishwanath (2015) found that habitual Facebook use is the sole major predictor of individual victimization on social media attack. The above findings

suggest that social media victimization can be victim precipitated. This could be better appreciated when viewed within the context of seeming “care-free” use of social media platforms by young people. For example, in a bid to grow the friendship base, many young people accept friendship invitation from strangers and by implication put themselves at the risk of cyber victimization.

Literature Review

Crime in the Social Media Age

The popular social media sites include: Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Google+, and LinkedIn (Jabee & Alam, 2016). There are over 2.7 billion monthly active users in Facebook as at the second quarter of 2020 (Krasniak et al. 2021). Social media platforms allow for diffusion of content through technologically facilitated social network processes (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). It has been argued that social media-based information warfare is prevalent in times of conflict (Seo & Ebrahim, 2016). A study by Daspe et al. (2018) that sampled 92 youth (46 couples) found that Facebook jealousy was associated with intimate partner violence at high levels of partner Facebook jealousy. The researchers concluded that online behaviors can impact offline conflicts and aggression in intimate relationships.

Several studies have demonstrated the vulnerability of students in the social media. A study that investigated victimization of Facebook users using female students in Tangil, Bangladesh found that respondents had experienced several types of cybercrime on Facebook and that such experiences resulted in a state of insecurity, depression, fear, isolation and sometimes suicide (Alam et al., 2021). Another study which examined the spate of cyber bullying on social media platforms among university students in the United Arab Emirates found that 91% of the 200 students sampled confirmed that cyber bullying existed in the social media with Instagram having 55% and Facebook 38% (Abaido, 2020).

Furthermore, a quote from one of the 11 Danish Islamist Facebook pages that was reportedly published between March and September 2015 contained an aggressive and hostile language directed against Danes and Denmark. It provoked shares and comments with anti-Muslim sentiments and hostility towards Muslims and immigrants in Denmark (Farkas et al., 2018).

The spate of crime in the social media is a growing issue of security and safety concern around the world. Wood (2018, p.24) decries the position of Facebook on the problem: “Facebook’s permissive stance on violent material has also seen the growth of user-generated pages dedicated to creating more quotidian forms of violence. Among these are fight pages: easier generated Facebook pages dedicated to hosting recordings of street fight...” Contrary to the above assertion, it is believed that the popularity of social network sites (SNSs) has deprived social media companies like Facebook and Twitter the opportunity of censoring hateful content (Farkas et. al., 2018).

People’s Awareness of Facebook Crime

Several studies have examined people’s awareness and views about Facebook crime. A study of 190 adult Facebook users from Pennsylvania University by Wolfer (2017) sought to know the top three posts the respondents had seen on Facebook and thought they were inappropriate. Findings from the study indicated that sex/nudity, foul language and politics were believed to be inappropriate for Facebook. In the same view, Dunshy and Howes (2018)

used a sample of predominantly young educated Tasmanian participants and online qualitative survey investigated Facebook users' views and experiences of online naming and shaming. The study found that majority of the respondents was familiar with 'naming and shaming'. However, they reported that more than half of the respondents were against the online naming and shaming of people suspected or convicted of crime.

Strategies for Controlling Crime on Facebook

There exists a rich and diverse criminological literature on formal and informal mechanisms for crime control. Owen et al., (2015) distinguish between informal and formal social control. They point out that informal social control refers to the mechanisms employed to regulate behaviour, including controls that are exercised by family members, peer groups, communities and groups. According to them formal social control on the other hand refers to the strategies used by the government to regulate human behaviour so as to ensure that people obey the laws. Owen et al. posit that informal social control form the basis of the socialization process, while criminal justice and the criminal law are the most fundamental strategies for formal social control.

Control has also been viewed from a user perspective. In other words, from a self-regulation point of view. Selinger and Hartzog (2016) underline the limits of control over disclosure in mediated environments. They argue that control is fundamental to the debates over how to appropriately collect, use and disclose personal information online.

Several strategies have been proposed for the control of crime and violence in the social media. For example, Miskolci et al. (2018) identify some strategies suggested by online hate speech scholars and activists to include: educational and training activities, developing critical thinking skills to help unmask prejudices and hoaxes in children, youth or journalists; large media campaigns and active involvement as well as closing down various profiles on Facebook. Farkas et al. (2018) posit that the counter-action against cloaked Facebook pages should go beyond the shutting down of these pages to control this kind of propaganda in the social media. They urge Facebook to consider algorithmically preventing such pages and disclosing page administrators. Daniels (2009, p.661) defines cloaked websites as "those published by individuals or groups that conceal authorship or feign legitimacy in order to deliberately disguise a hidden political agenda".

Finally, it is worthy of note that Facebook in a bid to control crime on the platform came up with "real identity" policy which prohibits pseudonymous profiles. In his defense of the policy, Facebook founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Mark Zuckerberg defines personal integrity as follows:

You have one identity. The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly. Having two identities for you is an example of a lack of integrity (Kirkpatrick as cited in Healey and Potter, 2018, p.661).

There is no doubt that this real identity policy if fully implemented, will go a long way in reducing the use of Facebook by criminal elements to perpetrate crime. Identity verification and authentication processes are known for their potency in controlling fraud in the digital age. The use of pseudo names in the social media should be discouraged.

Materials and Methods

This contribution which is a descriptive study is based on the quantitative data collected from a sample of Facebook active undergraduate students of Criminology and Security Studies (CSS) of Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State. Nigeria. The study examines the level of awareness of participants of crime and violence on Facebook as well as their victimization on Facebook.

The study location was Federal University, Dutse, Jigawa State Nigeria. The University was established in 2011. The survey sample is made up of both male and female undergraduate students of Criminology and Security Studies of the University. The study which is an empirical inquiry used survey (questionnaire) method to measure the level of awareness of participants on Facebook crime and deviance. Purposive sampling procedure was adopted to select 120 respondents from the study area (between 28 to 32 respondents per level of study) to whom copies of a set of semi-structured uniformed questionnaire were administered in their respective classes.

Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Socio - Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

| Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 104 | 86.7 |
| Female | 16 | 13.3 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |
| Age | | |
| 16 – 20 | 24 | 20.0 |
| 21 – 25 | 62 | 51.7 |
| 26 – 30 | 27 | 22.5 |
| 31 - 35 | 3 | 2.5 |
| 36 and above | 4 | 3.3 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Single | 111 | 92.5 |
| Married | 9 | 7.5 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |
| Level of Study | | |
| 100 | 28 | 23.3 |
| 200 | 31 | 25.8 |
| 300 | 32 | 26.7 |
| 400 | 29 | 24.2 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |
| Religion | | |
| Christianity | 17 | 14.2 |
| Islam | 103 | 85.8 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |
| Place of Residence | | |

| | | |
|------------|-----|-------|
| On Campus | 19 | 15.8 |
| Off Campus | 101 | 84.2 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. It shows that majority of the respondents (86.7%) were males, aged between 21 to 30 years (74.2%) and single; (92.6%), of Muslim faith (85.8%) and resident off campus (84.2%). The level of study is nearly evenly spread among the respondents with levels 100 (23.3%) and 300 (26.7%) having the lowest and highest representation in the sample.

Level of Awareness of Facebook Crime

Table 2: Level of Awareness of Facebook Crime

| Awareness Index | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Aware of harassment, threats and intimidation on Facebook | 118 | 98.3 |
| Yes | 2 | 1.7 |
| No | 120 | 100.0 |
| Total | | |
| Aware of hate speech propagation on Facebook | 116 | 96.7 |
| Yes | 4 | 3.3 |
| No | 120 | 100.0 |
| Total | | |
| Aware of the posting of hostile materials and false information | 112 | 93.3 |
| Yes | 7 | 6.7 |
| No | 1 | 0.8 |
| No Response | 120 | 100.0 |
| Total | | |
| Aware of password theft and Facebook account hijack | 107 | 89.2 |
| Yes | 13 | 10.8 |
| No | 120 | 100.0 |
| Total | | |
| Aware of live streaming of crime and violence on Facebook | 95 | 79.2 |
| Yes | 23 | 19.2 |
| No | 2 | 1.7 |
| No Response | 120 | 100.0 |
| Total | | |

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents are aware of the spate of crime on Facebook. The study reveals that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (98.3%) are aware that some people repeatedly harass, threaten or intimidate others on Facebook. It also

reveals that majority of the respondents (96.7%) are aware that some people make hate speeches on Facebook. Similarly, the study reveals that majority of the respondents (93.3%) are aware that some people post hostile materials or false information about others of Facebook. Furthermore, the study reveals that majority of the respondents (89.2%) are aware that some people steal other peoples' password and hijack their Facebook accounts. Finally, the study reveals that majority (79.2%) of the respondents are aware that some people stream crime and violence live on Facebook.

Prevalence Rate of Facebook Crime Victimization

Table 3: Prevalence Rate of Facebook Crime Victimization

| Victimization Index | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| Have ever been repeatedly harassed, threatened or intimidated on Facebook | 44 | 36.7 |
| Yes | 76 | 63.3 |
| No | 120 | 100.0 |
| Total | | |
| Have ever repeatedly received unwanted sexual advances through Facebook | 73 | 60.8 |
| Yes | 47 | 39.2 |
| No | 120 | 100.0 |
| Total | | |
| Someone has ever posted of hostile and false information about you on Facebook | 34 | 28.3 |
| Yes | 85 | 70.8 |
| No | 1 | 0.8 |
| No Response | 120 | 100.0 |
| Total | | |
| Someone has ever posted a pornographic comment or picture on your timeline on Facebook | 66 | 55.0 |
| Yes | 54 | 45.0 |
| No | 120 | 100.0 |
| Total | | |
| Someone has ever stolen your password or hijacked your Facebook account | 35 | 29.2 |
| Yes | 83 | 69.2 |
| No | 2 | 1.7 |
| No Response | 120 | 100.0 |
| Total | | |

Table 3 indicates that slightly more than one-third of the respondents (36.7%) have been repeatedly harassed, threatened or intimidated on Facebook. It also shows that more than half of the respondents (60.8%) have repeatedly received unwanted sexual advances through Facebook. Also, slightly more than one-fourth of the respondents (28.3%) said that someone

has posted hostile and false information about them on Facebook. Furthermore, slightly more than half of the respondents (55.5%) confirmed that someone has ever posted a pornographic comment or picture on their Facebook timeline. Finally, slightly more than one-fourth (29.2%) of the respondents said that someone has ever stolen their password or hijacked their Facebook account.

Why people prefer to perpetrate crime on Facebook instead of the physical space

Table 4: Why people prefer to perpetrate crime on Facebook instead of the physical space

| Reasons | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| To speedily settle old quarrel | 6 | 5.0 |
| To avoid physical confrontation | 44 | 36.7 |
| To avoid 'detection' | 51 | 42.5 |
| To widely publicize their criminal action | 11 | 9.2 |
| Others | 8 | 6.7 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |

Table 4 indicates that slightly more than one-third (36.7%) and nearly half (42.5%) of the respondents believed that people preferred Facebook to the physical space to perpetrate crime to avoid physical confrontation and detection respectively. The findings suggest that the major reason why some criminals would rather use Facebook platforms to commit crime than do so offline is to avoid detection and physical confrontation from their victims or perhaps by-standers.

Possible solutions to the problem of Facebook crime in Nigeria

Table 5: Solution to Facebook Crime

| Solution Index | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Facebook censorship can help in the control of crime on Facebook | | |
| Yes | 75 | 62.5 |
| No | 15 | 12.5 |
| I don't Know | 30 | 25.0 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |
| Other possible solutions of Facebook crime in Nigeria | | |
| Rejecting requests from unknown persons | 13 | 10.8 |
| Enhanced Facebook privacy setting | 34 | 28.3 |
| Laws to protect victims and punish offenders | 36 | 30.0 |
| Enlightenment and awareness campaigns | 33 | 27.5 |
| No Response | 4 | 3.3 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |

The study revealed that majority of the respondents (62.5%) believes that Facebook censorship can assist in the control of Facebook crime. Top among the solutions proposed by the respondents for the control of crime on Facebook is a call on government to enact more

laws to protect victims and punish perpetrators of Facebook crime, Facebook enhancement of privacy settings as well as enlightenment and awareness on proper/good use of Facebook.

Discussion

It was found that the level of awareness of Facebook crime and violence was remarkably high among the sampled population. This is perhaps, because the sample comprised of undergraduate students who are relatively young and at home with digital devices and tools. For example, Hashem and Najjar (as cited in Hajin, 2013) assert that many Iranian youths' own computers and mobile phones which they use for various purposes. The story is not any different in Nigeria where many young people particularly undergraduates now own smart phones that allow them to remain active online, and of course, including the social media. Besides, these students are enrolled in the Bachelor of Science program in Criminology and Security Studies and are therefore familiar with emerging patterns of crime in the digital age.

Furthermore, the study also underscored the prevalence of crime on Facebook as some of the students confirmed that they have fallen victim of different forms of cybercrime through Facebook. This finding agrees with the result of some early studies. For example, a study by Alam et al. (2021) that examined the victimization of female students Facebook users in Tangil, Bangladesh found that respondents had experienced several types of cybercrime on Facebook which made them feel insecure, depressed, fearful, isolated and sometimes contemplate suicide. Similarly, a study by Abaido (2020) that interrogated the spate of cyber bullying on social media platforms among university students in the United Arab Emirates found that 91% of the 200 students sampled confirmed that cyber bullying existed in the social media with Instagram having 55% and Facebook 38%.

Another notable finding of the study is that participants believed that Facebook censorship will likely curb the menace of crime on Facebook in Nigeria. The issue of Facebook censorship has generated wide controversy in Nigeria. Recently, the Federal Government announced its intention to regulate the social media in order to checkmate the propagation of hate speech and fake news (Jimoh, 2019). The announcement provoked a heated debate with so many Nigerians applauding the initiative and others criticizing it. Those who criticized it believe that censorship would undermine freedom of press and freedom of expression that are guaranteed in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Moreover, even among those who welcome social media censorship; there are those who argue that government should have no business with censorship of the social media. They contend that the social media firms should be the ones performing this gate keeping function. White (as cited in Welbers & Opeghaffen, 2018) posits that the gate keeper from the traditional gate keeping literature perspective is a person who guards discrete gates to determine which news gets to the audience. This finding is in line with Schou and Neumayer's (2018) proposal for some kind of censorship by Facebook. It is important to note that social media firms such as Facebook try to regulate users' posts and activities in order to prevent misuse of the platform. For example, they can take down posts that they consider at variance with the users' community standards or even block users account for using the platform in ways considered inappropriate.

Finally, enactment of more laws to protect victims and punish offenders ranked topmost among the possible solutions proffered by the respondents to Facebook crime in Nigeria. This is understandable given that the problem of cybercrime is evolving. The Cybercrime

(Prohibition, Prevention Etc.) Act 2015, which is till date the major cybercrime legislation in Nigeria cannot cover certain future variants of cybercrime. Therefore, it needs to be periodically reviewed to keep it at par with legislations in other jurisdictions especially those of the global South.

The second proposed solution is the need for Facebook to continue to enhance its privacy settings. That way, it will be difficult for criminal elements to carry out unauthorized activities on users' account. The third proposed solution is enlightenment and awareness campaigns. This is very important in Nigeria and other countries of the global South where digital literacy level is still relatively low. Facebook has certain privacy settings that if properly applied by users, can help prevent them from falling victims of certain cybercrimes. But, the extent to which many Facebook users are aware of or use the privacy settings remains unclear.

Conclusion

In the age of social media, the boundaries of crime and violence are increasingly becoming fluid. Today, people take their fights and resentments off the physical space to the social media. This has resulted in the proliferation of graphically criminal and violent posts in the social media. But the extent to which social media users in Nigeria are aware of the spate of crime and violence in social media platforms remains largely unclear. This study examined this critically under researched area and found that the level of awareness of crime in the social media is high among the sampled Criminology and Security Studies students. It also examined the prevalence rates of Facebook crime victimization among sampled undergraduates and found that some of them have fallen victim of crime through Facebook platforms. These findings suggest that crime on Facebook is not a completely rare phenomenon for it to be widely noticed by the sampled respondents. Finally, the study adds to the emerging body of research on social media use and abuse in the 21st century Nigeria.

Recommendations

- (a) There is the need for Facebook to include a very stringent identity verification system for opening Facebook account. When users know that their real identity is known, it can discourage them from using the platform to perpetrate criminal activities.
- (b) The continuous enhancement of privacy setting by Facebook to make it difficult for criminals to carry out unauthorized activities on users' account would also help.
- (c) Users should be very mindful of what they post on Facebook. They should avoid sharing certain personal information on the social media. That way, they would avoid precipitating their victimization.

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