Journal of Creative Media (JCM)
Centre for Media and Communication Research,
School of Media and Communication,
Pan-Atlantic University
Published by Pan-Atlantic University Press

Published July 2025 | https://doi.org/10.70553/pau.2025.1991.21

Pedagogy of African Journalism Education in Post-COVID-19 Digital Era: Contradictions and Realities

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ABSTRACT

Post-COVID-19 has birthed a profound digital era that is transforming journalism education across the continent of Africa, presenting both new realities and contradictions. Digital tools and learning platforms have expanded access to journalism professional training, as major challenges persist, which include infrastructural deficits, gaps in digital literacy and socio-economic inequalities. This paper critically examines the evolving pedagogy of African journalism education by exploring the contentions between traditional and digital teaching techniques, effective industry-based curricula and the role of the media industry in bridging the skill gaps. Adopting the contextual research method, which is based on the author's observation and experience of the media institutions (both in higher and industry workings), the study highlights how journalism educators navigate these contradictions while balancing innovation with practical challenges. The findings underscore the need for a contextualised, inclusive, and practice-oriented approach to journalism education that aligns with the realities of Africa's media landscape. This research contributes to ongoing discussions on decolonising African journalism curricula and fostering resilience in media training against the Global South.

KEYWORDS
African Journalism Education
Digital Pedagogy
Post-COVID-19
Media Training
Contradictions
Decolonisation

INTRODUCTION

The colonial heritage has continued to be a reference achievement for journalism practice in Africa, and ever since the independence of most African states, there have been no major feats to strengthen this heritage. The COVID-19 pandemic largely disrupted global education systems, forcing many institutions to embrace digital learning, which became a new normal and journalism education in Africa is not exempt from this reality. While these digital platforms provided new opportunities for appreciable learning, they also exposed rooted structural challenges, including inadequate digital facilities, internet connectivity and disparities in digital literacy among journalism students and educators. These contradictions have shaped the post-COVID-19 reality of journalism education in Africa, revealing both progress and persistent barriers to effective teaching and learning. History reveals that African journalism education has been influenced by Western models with significant emphasis on theoretical knowledge and hands-on practical training (Cheruiyot et al., 2019).

However, the rise of digital media is focused on skills-based learning, requiring journalism educators to integrate new media tools, data journalism and multimedia storytelling into their curricula. The COVID-19 pandemic hastened this shift by prompting a re-examination of traditional teaching techniques and the roles of digital pedagogy in media professional training. Despite these technological advancements, many contradictions remain. Many journalism programmes struggle with outdated curricula that do not reflect the rapidly evolving media landscape (Mutsvairo et al., 2021). Additionally, the reliance on virtual learning has widened the gap between students with access to digital resources and those without it. Furthermore, journalism education in Africa grapples with the broader issue of decolonisation, ensuring that training is rooted in local contexts rather than being dictated by Eurocentric perspectives.

Epidemics, endemics and pandemics are not new to man, but the COVID-19 pandemic came as a rude shock to the global community, bringing its health care, political, economic and social systems to a standstill (WHO, 2020; Basch et al., 2020). The effect is still being felt today in every aspect of life despite the discovery of vaccines to curb the spread of the virus. It is noteworthy that journalists in Africa played a key role in gathering and disseminating news about the pandemic and aiding in information sources since the outbreak (Banka, 2020; Jha, 2020). Data shows that there is always a substantial increase in news consumption in many parts of the world, including Africa, once there is any outbreak or pandemic, and journalists are always at the forefront of bridging the gaps in information dissemination in times as these (D'Angelo, 2002; Happier & Philio, 2013). Past events reveal that, during the Ebola outbreak in Africa, instead of the media focusing attention on medical facts and the actual viral outbreak, sensationalised coverage using less relevant content by news media outlets whipped up hysteria and fear in the United States of America (USA) and other countries of the world (Kilgo et al., 2019; Towers et al., 2015). This, notwithstanding, journalists cover events that provide news for their media organisations to win the right public acceptance and perception (Hoeve, Jansen & Roodbol, 2012; Joslyn, & Heider, 2002).

The major focus of this paper is to seek ways to fill the gaps identified in journalism education in Africa and make appropriate recommendations towards having a more institutionalised journalism practice in Africa, irrespective of the challenges identified. The paper identified factors such as motivation for

journalism education among undergraduate students, a political-economic structure which is greatly influenced by ownership, qualified manpower for training in universities, quality in minimum academic standard, well-structured curriculum and hands-on with modern state-of-the-art media studio, infrastructure, facilities and equipment, town-gown mentoring interaction between journalism students and those in the media industry amongst others. As journalism continues to adapt to a digital-first environment, it is crucial to critically assess how African journalism education can balance innovation with inclusivity. The post-COVID-19 era presents an opportunity to reimagine pedagogy in a way that prioritises both digital competency and critical thinking while addressing the socio-political and economic realities of African media ecosystems. This study explores these contradictions and realities, offering insights into the evolving landscape of journalism education in Africa.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF JOURNALISM IN AFRICA

Journalism in Africa is largely connected in historical context to its colonial heritage (Msimanga et al., 2019). This was the heritage that saw the end of colonialism in major African states that birthed self-rule led by indigenous leaders known as nationalists who used the instrumentality of the press to achieve this laudable transformation in political and governance structure (Ezumah, 2019). The drive for Independence across Africa in the late 1950s and 1960s was helped in part by post-war economic and geopolitical changes, as well as colonial administrators' efforts to liberalise colonialism (Mytton, 1983). While Western media 'repressfully' misled Sub-Saharan Africans, media in Africa with an independent stance helped them achieve political independence in the 1960s. African Nationalists, including Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Malawi's Kamuzu Hastings Banda used the media to voice their opinions on national freedom. To deal with the resistance of colonial authorities at different times, these African nationalists employed a variety of tactics such as going into hiding with both the media and liberation rhetoric via pamphlets, tracts, highly secretive radio and word of mouth, as well as other strategies known by various names in numerous parts of Sub-Saharan Africa (Fardon & Furniss, 2000).

Media networks in postcolonial Africa were analogous to one-party regimes in terms of structure. This was because, once in power, these nationalist governments expanded their mainstream media networks in the name of unity, progress and development for their African enclave. During the nation-building process, television management and control were more centralised than print media (Bourgault, 1995). Following independence, some previously westernised communication outfits and media networks were significantly indigenised. Under Mobuto Seseseko, for instance, the mainstream press was nationalised, and publication titles were changed. Most Sub-Saharan African media policies, particularly in Tanzania and Zambia, favoured radio over other forms of mass media because it had a greater connection with local and social life. It is entirely different for television, which is heavily reliant on programmes created in Western nations (Mytton, 2000).

With African independence came greater efforts by new states to not only own but also influence the mainstream media. For much of the time following the 1960s, weak African governments tried to stifle media critique through state control and harassment of journalists. Many African journalists were owed or

underpaid by the media they worked for, as the majority of media organisations were underfunded (Kasoma, 1994). Consequently, the heritage of Western media principles and practices is calling for change to satisfy the preponderance of Africans' expectations, as it has become a heritage of struggle which still thrives on survival due to a lack of strategic vision of its ownership since independence (Mutsvairo & Salgado, 2022). In the 1990s, the developing African media became critical to the new struggle for greater economic and political freedom. In response to foreign and domestic political organisations, a growing number of African countries have begun to open their media and telecommunications sectors (Wedell, 1986). Leading up to 1990, just a few African countries allowed commercial or non-state radio transmissions, including Gabon's Africa No. 1, Gambia's Radio SYD, Liberia's Radio ELWA and Swaziland's Trans-World Radio. By 2005, most African countries had liberalised their media sectors after years of state ownership and control (Nyamnjoh 2005).

The 1990s saw a rise in private, community and commercial radio stations in some regions, including West Africa, where 76 stations were established in less than 5 years up to 1996 (Nyamnjoh, 2003). The bulk of these new public service locations in Burkina Faso and Mali are all in remote regions, except Nigeria, which concentrated its radio establishments in major cities due to its commercial outlook. Other countries that have allowed private television include Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Namibia, Senegal, as well as Botswana. Following majority rule in 1994, South Africa made significant efforts to change and democratise the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) into a genuine public service network. The country's media sector has also grown considerably (Ronning, 1994). Zimbabwe, in contrast, is one of the nations that has yet to liberalise its television sector and has been less tolerant of private media for the majority of its independence from the British since 1980 (Mutsvairo & Bebawi, 2019). For example, in September 2003, Harare police invaded the Daily News offices and shut them down, purportedly because they refused to register with the government-appointed Media Information Commission (MIC). In general, the democratic surge of the 1990s brought 'multipartyism' and a degree of media freedom to many Sub-Saharan African countries (Honeyman, 2003). The media plurality is indeed a good omen for the development of democratic governance across African states, and this serves as the foundation for the thriving journalism education currently being experienced today.

PEDAGOGY OF JOURNALISM PRACTICE AND EDUCATION IN AFRICA'S POST-COVID-19 DIGITAL ERA

COVID-19 is an imported disease in Africa, as well as Western culture, which thrives through the instrumentation of the mass media. Formal education, as good as it is, in its entirety, was also a darling wife betrothed to Africa by the West, even though Africa had some form of informal education before any contact with the colonial masters. Over the years, Africa's framework for training would-be journalists or media practitioners has taken its bearings from the Western ideology of what journalism education should be. Africa's definition of news is not custom-built towards its cultural inclinations but as defined by the West. The elementary meaning of news as taught in journalism classes across Africa is that news must provide answers to 5 'Ws' and 'H', i.e.

what, who, where, when, why and how. Fundamentally, who says there cannot be more questions to improve on what becomes news to journalists and media space in Africa, aside from the six identified above?

Journalism in Africa has been playing the game of "I belong or we are together" with the West, as it continues to mirror what they define as news and journalism. Journalism started to gain ground in Africa because it came to inform people of the happenings around them, and it later became a vital tool in the hands of nationalists, which led to the liberation of many nations of Africa from the shackles of colonialism. COVID-19 gave an unexpected blow to the social structure of nations across the globe, where many organisations had to switch to online platforms for functionality and continuous running during lockdowns, but how many media organisations in Africa could measure up in terms of technology during that period? (Hew et al., 2020). This is indeed a lesson for future emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Africa as a continent is faced with countless social, political and economic developmental challenges, so should its journalism education and practice in its entirety. The inroads to meaningful and sustainable development that would have ample impact on journalism education outlook in Africa are participatory development journalism practice. When experienced journalists and credible media organisations partner with citizens across all divides on issues that pertain to development initiatives, their welfare and total well-being align with the media agenda, which in the long run becomes a public agenda. Continuous framing of such issues through the media would birth national consciousness that would eventually turn those issues into policy agendas on the part of the government. With this reawakening, journalism education and practice would wear a new look across Africa, as it would encourage students of journalism in higher institutions to see themselves as partners in progress as they climb the ladders of career progression right from school.

(ADAPTING SOCIAL LEARNING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (SLT) – THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN THEORY AND JOURNALISM PRACTICE

Albert Bandura is renowned for his numerous works in cognitive theories (Bandura, 2006a), but Social Learning Theory (SLT) is more connected to this paper as it places learning within the context of human interaction with his/her environment. Individuals do not just choose any profession without justifications, journalism inclusive, they choose based on their interaction within the environment they are found in alignment with the knowledge available to them. No environment exists in a vacuum; humans make up what an environment is, and human interactions within the context of an environment, to a large extent, influence the outcome of their decisions daily. Furthermore, SLT is based on the idea that social interactions with other people provide varied information. Individuals independently pick up similar behaviours by copying the behaviour of others within an environment or social context. An individual who decides to become a doctor, lawyer, journalist, politician, etc., chooses within the purview of social interactions and information available to such an individual, although the quality and volume of such information is another issue entirely. Many imitate and accept what others do as a way of life after witnessing it, especially if the observed behaviour has a form of reward in the long run. This theory is often referred to as a link between behavioural

learning concepts and cognitive approaches to learning due to how it takes into consideration concentration, memory and drive (Muro & Jeffrey, 2008). The proponent of SLT included a social component, contending that people can pick up new knowledge and actions through observation, imitation and modelling (Bandura, 1977).

Many journalism schools in Africa adopted e-learning platforms, webinars, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) during and after COVID-19. Students now observe and learn journalistic skills through recorded lectures, live demonstrations, and digital storytelling workshops. Social media platforms like Twitter (now X), YouTube, and LinkedIn serve as alternative learning spaces where students follow experienced journalists, analyse real-world reporting, and engage in professional discourse. While digital tools enhance access to diverse role models, the lack of personal interaction in virtual settings can limit experiential learning and immediate feedback, which are crucial for skill acquisition. SLT emphasises that learning is reinforced through rewards, recognition, and social validation. In traditional journalism education, reinforcement occurred through direct feedback from educators and industry mentors. A key concept in SLT is self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to succeed in a given task. The shift to digital journalism education has required students and educators to develop confidence in using new technologies. SLT also highlights the importance of contextual learning—students learn best when education is relevant to their cultural and social environment. Decolonising journalism education in Africa involves integrating local knowledge, storytelling traditions, and indigenous languages into the curriculum.

The grave impact of the COVID-19 pandemic notwithstanding, the author made use of contextual research methods, which are based on the author's observation and experience of the media institutions (both in the citadel of learning and industry workings). Being an active participant and with close to two decades of experience in journalism practice, this author takes a critical and analytical look at selected issues surrounding journalism education in terms of inert contradictions in historical context and what the reality is. Aside from young individuals' desire to take journalism as a profession based on observations within the African political and social milieu, other factors have been identified that must be in tandem with such desired expectations, and they are presented via the model below:

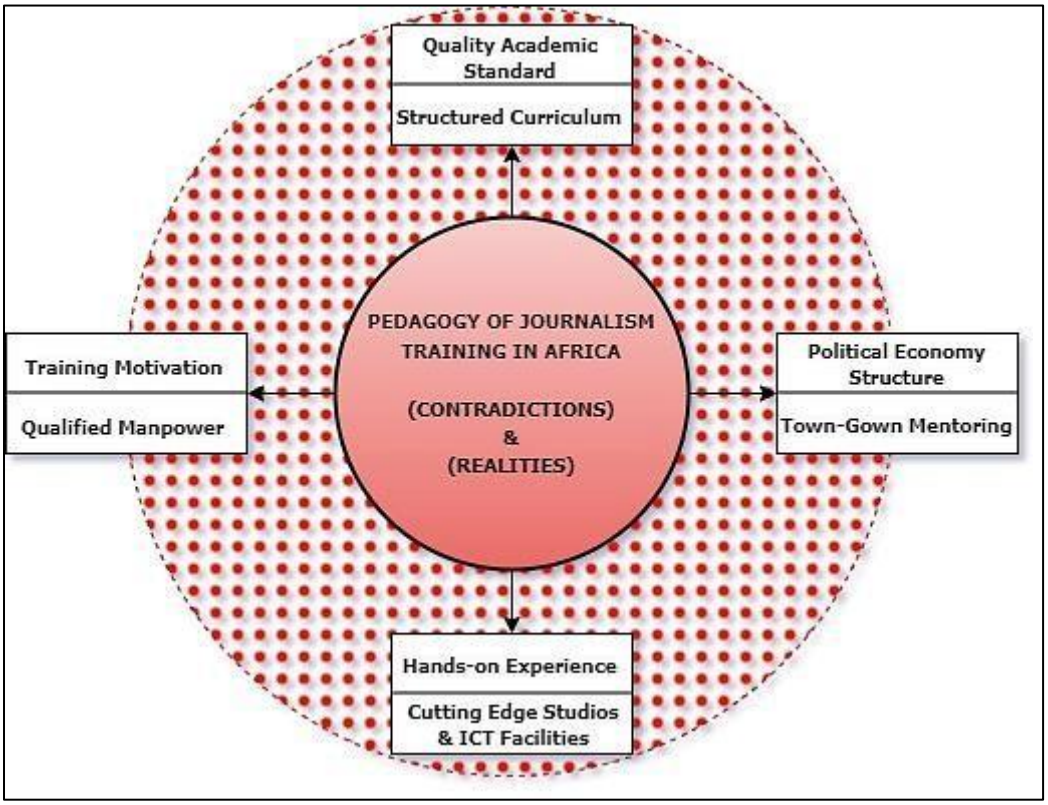

Figure 1: Showing the Praxis for African Journalism Education (Author's Model, 2023).

1. **Quality Academic Standard**

Education of any nation, be it journalism or otherwise, is a total reflection of such a nation's culture and structure within a social milieu. What drives quality academic standards is an institution's systemic framework of policies and protocols that guide learning activities in any University or School where journalism as a discipline is domiciled. If you have a society that does not have effective educational policies, as well as the effective implementation of such, which guides both learners and teachers, what you have in such a society is dysfunctional education (education with no goal in mind). The quality of academic standards is a reflection of a nation's disposition to education, and this starts with policies put in place to drive the system.

2. **Structured Curriculum**

Journalism curriculum has generated a lot of issues over the years because many scholars we have today in the field have one or two things to say about the aspect of journalism education that is more significant than the other. The 21st-century new media experience has given a new direction to journalism in Africa, especially in the post-COVID-19 digital era of the new normal. If some individuals want to talk about the media profession, they sometimes claim, they are not journalists. Some say they are public relations experts, broadcasters, advertisers and above all, some claim they are media practitioners. The fundamental question is, what is media without journalism? If African journalism education must remain relevant, its curriculum must be structured to take into cognisance these sequential and core areas of journalism practice as highlighted above. While emphasising the fact that journalism is the foundation for all forms of other media engagements or practice, this can only be achieved through continuous curriculum review and re-review. Recently, the National

Universities Commission (NUC) completed the review of the old Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) of 14 disciplines, which have been in existence since 2007, into those of Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) of 17 disciplines, which take effect from this year, 2023. It took the NUC 16 years (2007-2023) to have a new curriculum – a contradiction to acceptable academic standards, which should not be more than five (5) years.

3. **Hands-on Experience**
   Journalism education without requisite practical engagement is an exercise in futility. Journalists are known to be highly creative individuals the world over, with innovative thinking, technological and information skills, social engagement and teamwork. These are not skills that can be picked up in the classroom or in the course of academic activities. Most of these skills become real through hands-on/practical experience. Journalism educators must rise above the board to champion innovative assignments and practical projects that would improve the training of journalism students while they are still within the four walls of higher institutions. Courses such as Announcing & Presentation, Broadcast & Studio Management, Operations & Programme Production, Studio Practical and Production, etc., must be taught through practical engagement in a standard broadcast studio. Hands-on experience is like giving flesh to a skeleton, as this would open the students to interests beyond the classroom, widen their media horizon and improve learning.

4. **Cutting Edge Studio & ICT Facilities**
   What would make the journalism profession remain relevant for a very long time, aside from its socio-political influence on any nation, is the fact that it is an industry that is technologically driven. This technology must be reflected in the training of students for the discipline, and this calls for investment in modern Information & Communication Technology (ICT) gadgets and equipment. For instance, a modern broadcast studio worth its salt should be able to boast of 20 meters of space covered by selective chroma keys, LED lights, lighting effects, TV audio processor, TV & video drones, intercom systems, TV audio equipment, TV & video teleprompters, video recorders, video transmitters, TV automation software, encoders & decoders, video routers, audio & video monitors, digital cameras (studio ENG), PTZ (pan, tilt & zoom) cameras, video mixer/switcher, video walls, professional digital clocks, TV& video converters, truss for TV studio, trolley tripods etc. All these listed equipment and gadgets do not come cheap; they require a lot of capital, but this is a sacrifice institutions running journalism education in the post-COVID-19 digital era must make if they want to produce relevant and reliable graduates for the highly competitive 21st-century media market.

5. **Training Motivation**
   The practice of journalism is a call to the service of humanity, although the commercialisation of the media space has changed many narratives about journalism practice in Africa. The media now yield to give the highest bidder coverage time, either on air or in newspaper space. Bloggers who are mostly not trained journalists have become sumptuously wealthy by using their platforms to either carry fake news, hate speech, misinformation, disinformation or character assassination for their paymasters, and many young journalism students see that dark side of our national life as a motivation to be journalists.

This is not the right motivation that should be encouraged for any young ones seeking to be journalists. The right motivation is for them to see journalism as a profession that is devoted to the service of humanity, most importantly, protecting the interests of the vulnerable poor masses in society and holding the power that be accountable to them.

6. **Qualified Manpower**
   Commitment to excellent processes is the motivation of highly skilled personnel. Aside from having qualified faculty to teach the syllabi of journalism classes, skilled technologists who would take the students through hands-on practical experience in relevant studio work, projects and assignments are also highly required. The need for qualified and experienced manpower cannot be overemphasised because a trainer must have the skills to impact learners. If a university is running journalism education with quality academic standards, with requisite cutting-edge studio for hands-on, yet has inexperienced staff members, such would impede effective learning and it would in the long run have negative consequences on the end products of such institution, as they end up breeding half-baked graduates that cannot compete favourably in the 21st century highly competitive post-COVID-19 digital era media world.

7. **Political Economy Structure**
   Political economy is the superstructure upon which every other factor highlighted in this section lies. According to scholars in this line of thought, there is always a dominant idea in every society at every point of social or political life, and it is the idea of the dominant/ruling class. The media is the darling bride that propagates these dominant ideologies through media ownership inclinations. Media ownership in Africa has a great influence on editorial policy, news coverage, and network spread within a geopolitical boundary. Once those who control the means of production are left in the media business, then the objectivity and fairness that the media is known for would be tactically thrown in the waste bin. The advent of new media technology is indeed changing the narratives, as many citizen journalists have been able to expose many social ills and corruption practices among the ruling elites through the social media landscape. For a continent such as Africa that is envisioning to be among developed nations shortly, it must allow arrays of conversation to dominate the pace of its growth and development, not be defined by the ruling class/elite. If the voices of the minority, vulnerable or poor are silenced because of the dominant ruling class, then journalism, which is a profession that is dedicated to championing this cause, would lose its taste shortly. A journalist, based on his/her training, is meant to challenge the status quo and not to affirm or reaffirm it.

8. **Town-Gown Mentoring**
   A sustained mentoring programme between students of journalism in higher institutions and those in full-time journalism practice would go a long way in having a lasting impact on journalism education in Africa. Town-Gown Mentoring Programme (TGMP), which would comprise retired and practising journalists in both private and public media, can be instituted for students to adopt a mentor they admire or aspire to be in their desired area of specialisation. A mentoring programme would sharpen the vision and focus of young journalists who desire to be professionals shortly. Thriving media

organisations across African nations could adopt Journalism Departments in higher institutions, as well as mentors through industry linkage programmes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The reality of journalism education in Africa is that it is still within the framework of colonial heritage, which is at variance with current trends globally. Journalism educators and scholars in Africa need to look inward to break away from every contradiction that their historical heritage has bestowed on journalism education. The right pedagogy for journalism education should comprise a well-thought-out framework that captures the historical, social, political and economic uniqueness of each African state while adopting cutting-edge technologies to improve the training of journalism students in higher institutions. A bulk of what has affected journalism practice right from education is government negligence in funding journalism education with the standard facilities to train with, aside from their undue authoritarian influence on journalism practice, which is redefining and determining what we call 'news' and thus contradicts the principles of journalism taught in the classroom. Journalism in Africa is still underdeveloped compared to journalism in its Western counterparts. This is not farfetched from the fact that every institution is a product of the environment it operates.

While democracy is still in its nascent state in many countries in Africa, it has become institutionalised in Western nations, although not without challenges. Most journalists in Africa engage in selective-reactive journalism based on how they were trained in school. Selective-reactive journalism is a concept coined from the element of news, where journalists are only meant to focus on what makes the news that would interest the readers/audience, as the case may be. This is indeed audience chasing, and the media has advanced beyond this narrative, as many audiences now selectively choose what matters to them and not what the media defines as significant. If journalism education in Africa must come of age, it needs to refocus on projective and preventive journalism, which is more like citizen and data journalism. In this form of journalism, attention is placed on issues that have hindered the growth and development of Africa as a continent. Above all, the fundamental question is, should we continue to define news exactly the way the Western media defines it when we do not have equal experience in terms of history, politics, economics, technology, military power, etc. This is indeed a call for reflection on journalism education in Africa.

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