

Effectiveness of Mass Media in the Fight against Drug Abuse among undergraduates of Tertiary Institutions in Imo State

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of mass media in the fight against drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State. The study was anchored on the theory of reasoned action and the research design adopted for this work is the survey method. The population consists of 81,000 undergraduates of the select higher institutions in Imo State. A sample size of 382 was arrived at after the application of the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator. The accidental sampling technique was employed in this study. The percentage method was used to analyse the data. Findings revealed that the level of awareness among respondents towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse is moderate. Further finding revealed that at an average of 49.9% of the respondents confirmed that the mass media campaigns have not been effective in curbing the menace of drug abuse amongst undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State. It was therefore concluded that the mass media campaigns are not effective in the fight against drug abuse among undergraduates of higher institutions in Imo State, owing to the fact that the campaigns have not helped in curtailing the menace as students still engage in it and this may likely be connected to the level of awareness among the undergraduates of these higher institutions in Imo State. It was recommended that the mass media should intensify their publicity and commitment on drug abuse so as to be able to create more awareness on the danger of drug abuse in the society. The mass media should be more creative in their content and in some cases they should employ fear appeal so as to be able to influence good numbers of youths positively and make them shun drug abuse.

Keywords: Mass media, drug abuse, higher institutions, undergraduates, Imo State.

Introduction

Recent interest in the graceful movements of the human body, holistic health care, physical fitness and natural foods seem to be making people to be more aware of the need for improving their health status and preventing health problem. Although, individual's role and governmental effort in promoting health and preventing disease is becoming more of a daily message, yet it should be noted that people make personal life-style choices within the society on how best they can live glamorising many hazardous behaviours through education, advertisement and mass media (Udofia, 2014). Since the early times, herbs, leaves and plants have been use to heal and control diseases. The use of drugs in itself does not constitute any danger, because drugs correctly administered have been a blessing.

Falco (1988) as cited by Sambo (2008) viewed that “chronic use of substances can cause serious, sometimes irreversible damage to adolescent’s physical and psychological development. The use of drugs could be beneficial or harmful depending on the mode of use.

Drug abuse is a major public health problem all over the world (UNODC, 2005). The use and abuse of drugs by adolescents have become one of the most disturbing health related phenomena in Nigeria and other parts of the world (NDLEA, 1997). Several school going adolescents experience mental health programme, either temporarily or for a long period of time. Some become insane, maladjusted to school situations and eventually drop out of school. According to Fawa (2003), drug is any substance, which is used for treatment or prevention of a disease in man and animals. Drug alters the body functions either positively or otherwise depending on the body composition of the user, the type of drug used, the amount used and whether used singly or with other drugs at the same time. NAFDAC (2000) as cited by Haladu (2003) explained the term drug abuse as excessive and persistent self-administration of a drug without regard to the medically or culturally accepted patterns. It could also be viewed as the use of a drug to the extent that it interferes with the health and social function of an individual. World Book Encyclopedia (2004) defined drug abuse as the non-medical use of a drug that interferes with a healthy and productive life. Manbe (2008) observed that drug abuse is the excessive, maladaptive or addictive use of drugs for non-medical purpose. In a similar vein, Abdulahi (2009) viewed drug abuse as the use of drugs to the extent that interferes with the health and social function of an individual. In essence, drug abuse may be seen as the arbitrary overdependence or misuse of one particular drug with or without a prior medical diagnosis from qualified health practitioners. It can also be viewed as the unlawful overdose in the use of drug(s). Odejide (2000) warned that drug abusers who exhibit symptoms of stress, anxiety, depression, behaviour changes, fatigue and loss or increase in appetite should be treated by medical experts and

counsellors to save them from deadly diseases. The rationale and justification why people use drugs are as numerous and diverse as there are people. But, by and large, there are quite a few recurrent ones, such as curiosity, peer pressure, to produce a feeling of well-being; produce a good mood; increase self-confidence; remove inhibitions; make people more sociable; relieve anxiety; increase sexual desire, etc

Substances and drug abuse are used interchangeably by people, however, drug refers to medicine prescribed by doctor, while substances abuse may include chemicals other than drugs e.g gasoline, cocaine, glue among others. Substance was considered abused if it is deliberately used to induce physiological or psychological effects for a purpose other than for therapeutic purpose. Farhadinasab, Bashirian and Mahjoub, (2008) noted that substance abuse mostly initiates with smoking and alcohol consuming in adolescence. However, drug abuse among students could be as a result of interaction between the peer groups, availability and nature of the substance. Some environmental factors that contribute to drug abuse are cultural, parents' behaviour, regulations and policies, which restrict access to the drugs. Transition from childhood to adolescence is a delicate period and in many cases the initiating of drug abuse may occur. The adolescents may abuse substances due to various reasons such as lack of adequate knowledge about the harmful effects of the substances, presenting personal independence, peer pressure, satisfying the curiosity, low levels of self-confidence, inability in maintaining inter-personal communications, and reducing stress. Among other dependents, the presence of substance abuser in the family is major factors of substance abuse by adolescents. The health educator has no doubt that drug and alcohol abuse among secondary school students have become a matter of concern to Nigerians and Imo State in particular. These substances not only alter the functioning of the body and mind but also affect the dimension of health. However, Encomium magazine, (2013) stated that the use of illicit drugs is not

a new trend, rather it is growing at an alarming rate with more “leaders of tomorrow” embracing drug abuse for varying reasons. Today, drug addiction is one of the major problems that almost all the countries have faced in the world including Nigeria. NAFDAC, (2008) reported that the abuse of illicit drugs is forming a student sub-culture in Nigeria. The consequence of such addiction, abuse, trafficking or even cultivation can be devastating; unfortunately the youths are the most vulnerable on hard drugs and this brings a lot of adverse effects on the community (Ajibulu, 2014).

Media does not have a magic baton to resolve a complex problem as drugs. But keeping in view, the magnitude of drug dependence, media must take the moral responsibility to make masses aware about drugs, their use and abuse, de-addiction facility, models and strategies etc. by focusing more on the disease along with other issues. It can provide direction and be the moving spirit for a national drug information and education. All over the world, the press has influenced public opinion. Media can help in pronouncing a regular assessment of the nature and magnitude of drug use and abuse and drug related problems in the society. Media indulges in promotion of various types of drugs advertently through advertising various products and sometimes may be inadvertently by glamorising the addicts. Commercial advertisements are information as much as social, economic or political remarks. What is more, advertisements shape attitude and ways of life at least as much as other kinds of information and comment. The truth is, any society where drug abuse is prevalent the chances for social vices will be high and people lives will be at risk, in such situation the media is saddled with great responsibility to fight the issue of drug abuse through its content and make the society a better place to stay.

Therefore, this study sought out to find out how effective the mass media have been in curbing the menace of drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State

Statement of the Problem

According to United Nations Office on Drug and Crimes [UNODC] 2021 report 14.4% of Nigerians are presently engaged in drug abuse. In a report by Vanguard newspaper in 2021 Mr. Oliver Stolpe, UNODC country representative said 27.7% of the 14.4% of those concerned were youths. The rise of drug abuse in Nigeria particularly, Imo State portends great danger in the society because most crimes that happen are usually associated with drug abuse (UNODC, 2019). The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) in 2022 expressed concern over the high rate of drug abuse among youths in Imo State (Okeoma, 2022). The statistics are worrisome due to the fact that the more the youths engage in drug abuse the more crimes are bound to happen.

Be that as it may, why are the youths still engaged in drug abuse? Does it mean they are not aware of the mass media messages on drug abuse or do mass media campaigns against drug abuse have not been effective? It is against this backdrop this study sought to investigate mass media effectiveness in curbing the menace of drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State

Research Questions

This study was guided by these questions

- 1) What is the level of awareness of the undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse?
- 2) How effective have the mass media campaigns been in curbing the menace of drug abuse amongst undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State?

Review of Related Literature

Conceptualising Drug

Drugs are said to be as old as man himself. Use and abuse of drugs had had a long history in many cultures and societies (Musk & De Klerk, 2003). Natural plants like opium, coca and cannabis among others have been in use for many years. A drug is defined as any natural or artificial substance, other than food that by its chemical or physical nature alters structures or functions in the living organization (Dorwick & Maline, 2007). It is also defined according to their use; in pharmacology, as a chemical substance used in the treatment, cure, prevention, or diagnosis of disease or used to otherwise enhance physical or mental well-being.

Drugs are also used as food supplements like vitamin and we necessarily benefit from drugs in terms of ill health, though prescribed by doctors (Elizabeth, & Martin, 2007). On the contrary, drugs are harmful and fatal if they are used wrongly. Substances and drug abuse are used interchangeably by people, however, drug refers to medicine prescribed by doctor, while substances abuse may include chemicals other than drugs e.g gasoline, glue among others. Substance was considered abused if it is deliberately used to induce physiological or psychological effects for a purpose other than for therapeutic purpose. The word abuse means wrong or bad use. Pairing these words, Drug Abuse could be seen as making bad use of drugs, wrong usage of drugs; violation of laid down pharmacological use of drugs; or using a drugs in a manner that deviates from the approved medical or social pattern. Farhadinasab, Bashirian and Mahjoub (2008) noted that substance abuse mostly initiates with smoking and alcohol consuming in adolescence. However, drug abuse among students could be as a result of interaction between the peer groups, availability and nature of the substance. Some environmental factors that contribute to drug abuse are cultural, parents' behavior, regulations and policies, which restrict access to the drugs.

Commonly Abused Drugs

There are seven categories of drugs commonly abused they are grouped based on their physiological effects. However, most psychoactive drugs are stimulants, narcotics, cannabis, depressants, analgesics, sedatives, performance enhancing drug, hallucinogens and inhalants. They include:

1. **Stimulants:** They are commonly used to increase the activities of the central nervous system (CNS) with increase heart rate, blood pressure and the rate of brain function. The users feel uplifted and less fatigue. Examples of stimulants include caffeine, cocaine, nicotine and amphetamine: Caffeine, Cocaine, Amphetamines.
2. **Narcotics:** These are among the potent dependence producing drugs, used medically to relieve pain and induce sleep. Narcotics are derived from plants such as opium, morphine, codeine and heroin. They are extremely addictive and can be inhaled, (snorted), injected, or smoked (Gate Way Foundation, 2013), Heroin, Opium, Morphine, Codeine, Tramadol:
3. **Cannabis:** This is a drug prepared from Indian hemp plant (cannabis sativa) also known as pot, marijuana, hashish and bhang. It has little therapeutic value and its nonmedical use is illegal. Cannabis, popularly known as marijuana is one of the drugs frequently abused in Nigeria especially the youths. The Nigerian soldiers returning from the World War II were the ones who introduced Marijuana (Odejide, 2009).
4. **Depressants:** These are agents that reduce the normal activity of any body system or function. They are also known as sedative, slowing down the CNS function. It produces tolerance in abusers as well as strong psychological and physical dependence. Drugs include alcohol, barbiturate, tranquilizer and rohypnol.
5. **Hallucinogens:** This is one of the oldest drugs used by mankind that is capable of producing hallucination. They are called psychedelics, dissociative or delirants (mind) vision (Nichols, 2004). Psychedelic brings about evident cerebral excitation in the form of illusion,

hallucination and vision. Dissociative produces analgesia, amnesia and catalepsy at anesthetic doses thus disassociation from his environment. Deliriant as the name implies induce a state of delirium in the user, characterized by extreme confusion and inability to control one's action (Dyck, 2005). They are used within medicine, religion and traditions around the world for ceremonies, healing and rituals of syncretistic movement: Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD).

6. Inhalants: These are breathable chemical vapors or gases that produce psychoactive effects when abused or misused (National Inhalant Prevention Coalition [NIPC], 2012). They include volatile organic solvents, fuel, gases, nitrites and anesthetic gases (chloroform, nitrous oxide and ether), commercial solvents like gasoline, kerosene, glue, and typewriter correction fluid among others. The abusers inhale the toxic chemical products which result to low blood pressure, dizziness, loss of hearing, damage to the lung and heart: Solvents, Gases and propellants
7. Aphrodisiacs: These are substances that arouse sexual desire or increase a person's capacity for sexual activities (Greenberg, Bruess & Haffner, 2003). It is also known as libido boosters and popularly called manpower in the streets. The agents enhance the sexual drive performance and lead to greater sexual satisfaction.

Mass Media and Drug Abuse Control

Both the drug abuse and its control have always remained as complex issues. In fact, for curbing this menace no one method or strategy is successful in all the situations. Generally, of the two schools of thought for control of drug abuse, one proposes to control the supply side (illicit supply and trafficking) and the other to curb the demand side. Prevention, treatment and rehabilitation are considered as best alternatives. Many claim that despite massive expenditures, they have not been

able to reduce addiction yet one cannot conclude that there is no need to strive for drug abuse control. Many people express deep pessimism about their ability as nation to deal with drug abuse. In fact, prevention is supposed to be the best alternative and this can best be achieved through multiple strategies that address the unique characteristics, cultural diversity and structure found in each community.

The mass media comprise all technological or mechanical devices engaged by a source with the intent of reaching a diversified and heterogeneous audience with messages simultaneously. Okunna (1999) believes that mass media are a variety of channels through which mass communication takes place. Media does not have a magic baton to resolve a complex problem as drugs. But keeping in view, the magnitude of drug dependence, media must take the moral responsibility to make the masses aware about drugs, their use and abuse, de-addiction facility, models and strategies etc. by focusing more on the disease along with other issues. It can provide direction and be the moving spirit for a national drug information and education (DeJong & Winsten, 2017). It can highlight both macro and micro level factors that have contributed to the rise of this malaise and mobilize community participation in preventing the escalation of drug abuse problem (Udofia, 2014). Globally, the press has influenced public opinion. The mass media can help in pronouncing a regular assessment of the nature and magnitude of drug use and abuse and drug related problems in the society. Media can help in galvanising the people regarding the disastrous impact of drug dependence (Odorume, 2015).

Role played by media till date in drug abuse prevention has been rarely appreciated and the prevailing feeling is that it has done a lot less than it could have done and sometimes it has done more than it could have done, but in the wrong direction. Solidarity still tends to depict a drug addict as a social martyr and flawed public perception and myths still rule high (DeJong & Winsten, 2017).

It is instead blamed for popularising drug use to a large extent. Anyhow, there is an overwhelming consensus that media can change the whole scenario and curb this malaise successfully. The media can support in founding and upholding of the drug problem on the national agenda by providing simple and implicit messages aimed to gain the steadiness of the population. Awareness through education and mass media exposure increases knowledge. Media advocacy should target areas for psychotherapy for combating this problem (Udofia, 2014). But while emphasizing the harm associated with drug use, media must be careful to provide information about possible help centres. Hence, there is an imperative need for an extensive publicity campaign through the mass media, regarding dissemination of information on the ill consequences, legal provisions, availability of the clinical and counseling services for the treatment and social rehabilitation of the addicts detoxified (DeJong & Winsten, 2017).

Empirical Review

In a study entitled administration of drug abuse among secondary school students in Nigeria by Udofia (2014), the study focuses on the administration of drug abuse among secondary school students in Nigeria. The analysis of the findings indicated that secondary school students know of the existence of certain drugs and their effect if abused, mostly through all the available channels of information (education, radio, television, newspaper, magazines and others). The study indicates that many students are seriously involved in drug abuse but with effective administration and planning in schools the bad habits can be reduced drastically. Recommendations are made to both students, parents and guardians as well as to the government to organise health talk in line with drug and drug abuse regularly. Government and educational administrators to design more programmes for youth that can serve as inspiration to the students to avoid drug abuse.

In another study entitled drug abuse among Nigerian adolescents strategies for counseling by Fareo (2012) it was revealed that adolescents prefer an autonomous and independent life that is free from adult control, there by engaging in various delinquent acts (drug abuse, rape, robbery, cultism and vandalism) that are dangerous to the home, community, school and the nation. It was further revealed that the impact of drug abuse among adolescents has been a stigma of moral decadence, violence, thuggery, assault, madness, murder and the menace of drug abuse has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society; however, with effective counselling programmes, the problems can be tackled through campaign against drug abuse by government and other relevant authorities. It was recommended that drug control counselling centres should be established in every community and qualified health counselors should be employed in helping drug addicts by giving them special advice on how to go about the withdrawal system. Drug awareness units to be set up in all states by the federal, state and local government not to try people who use drugs as criminals, but to help solve their sociopsychological problem.

In another study also entitled curbing the menace of drug use among secondary school students in Nigeria by Obiechina and Isiguzo (2016) the study was of the view that the initiation to drug and alcohol abuse early in life has exposed adolescents to voluntary drug consumption, smoking, drinking and substance abuse which have become a threat to our nation. This paper focused on curbing the menace of drug use among students. It discussed some drugs that are commonly abused by the adolescents under the slangs or common name, route of administration and possible effects in terms of physical, psychological, social and emotional. The health implications of adolescents' drug behaviour were also explored. The paper concluded that there should be more serious concern, and worried that more students in our secondary schools are fast joining the drug train, drinking and smoking away their future for the pleasure of getting high, hence, poses a threat

to the health and safety of the adolescents, family, their community and the country. Recommended among others is that Ministry of Education and Culture in-collaboration with National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) should improve arrangements for sensitising particularly students on the adverse effects of drugs and alcohol abuse. Also, teachers should be provided with skills on how to handle students with behavioural problems.

Theoretical Foundation

The theory of Reasoned Action was developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen as an improvement over Information Integration theory (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). There are two important changes. First, Reasoned Actions adds another element in the process of persuasion, behavioural intention. Rather than attempt to predict attitudes, as does Information Integration theory (and several others), Reasoned Action is explicitly concerned with behaviour. However, this theory also recognizes that there are situations (or factors) that limit the influence of attitude on behaviour. Therefore, Reasoned Action predicts behavioural intention, a compromise between stopping at attitude predictions and actually predicting behaviour. Because it separates behavioural intention from behaviour, reasoned action also discusses the factors that limit the influence of attitudes (or behavioural intention) on behaviour. This theory is relevant to this study because it sought to find out how drug abuses and addiction can be reduced to its barest minimum among undergraduates in Imo State using the power of the media.

Research Methodology

The study employed the survey research design. This design was employed because it is the best research design for this study; it allows respondents opinions to be sampled regarding issue on drug abuse and mass media campaigns (Tayo-Garbson, Njoku & Etumnu, 2019). The population of this study consists of a combination 81,000 students of Imo State University Owerri, (IMSU), Federal

University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Owerri and Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo. Specifically they are IMSU-20,000, FUTO-22,000, FPNO-16,000, AIFCE-13,000 and Imo Poly-10,000 (Admission Units, 2020).

A sample size of 382 was arrived using Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator See screenshot below:

Figure 1: Sample Size Calculator

Sample Size Calculator

Confidence level: 95% 99%

Margin of error (%):

Population size:

Sample size needed:

Steps

1. Confidence level: Click desired level
2. Margin of error: Enter desired %, such as 4.9 or 5.0
3. Population: Enter size if finite; otherwise, leave blank
4. Hit calculate button

The researcher adopted the accidental sampling technique to distribute questionnaire to respondents in respective institutions. The instrument adopted in this study was the questionnaire administered through face to face basis. Data were analysed in percentages.

Data Analysis and Presentation

From the 382 copies of questionnaire distributed to respondents 379 (99.2%) was retrieved meaning 3 (0.8%) copies were lost. The analysis carried out in this study was done based on the 379 copies of questionnaire that were retrieved from field work.

Table 1: Respondents level of awareness towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse?

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Very high	45	11.8
High	68	17.9%
Moderate	161	42.4%
Low	70	18.4%
Very low	35	9.2%
Total	379	100

Source: Field survey, 2022

Analysis of data from table 1 above revealed that 42.4% of the respondents confirmed that the awareness level towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse is moderate. This implies that many of the respondents agreed that the level of awareness towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse is at moderate level.

Table 2: Respondents' responses on mass media campaigns on drug abuse have helped in curtailing drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	143	37.7%
No	210	55.4%
Can't say	26	6.8%
Total	379	100

Source: Field survey, 2022

Analysis of data revealed that 55.4% of the respondents confirmed that the mass media campaigns on drug abuse have not helped in curtailing drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State. By implication of this it means that mass media campaigns on drug abuse have not helped in curtailing drug abuse among undergraduates of tertiary institutions.

Table 3: Respondents' responses on mass media campaigns have been effective in curbing the menace of drug abuse amongst undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Very effective	32	8.4%
Effective	51	13.4%
Moderate	89	23.4%

Low	167	44.4%
Very low	40	10.5%
Total	379	100

Source: Field survey, 2022

Analysis of data of table 3 above showed that 44.4% of the respondents confirmed that mass media campaigns have not been effective in curbing the menace of drug abuse amongst undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State. This implies that many of the respondents affirmed that mass media campaigns have not been effective in curbing the menace of drug abuse amongst undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State.

Result and Discussion of Findings

Finding from data analysed revealed that the level of awareness among respondents towards mass media campaigns against drug abuse are moderate as seen in table 1. From this finding it is clear that undergraduates' level of awareness on mass media campaigns on drug abuse is neither high nor low. It implies that they are not totally ignorant of the mass media efforts in the fight against drug abuse especially among youths who are undergraduates of various higher institutions in Imo State. This finding is in consonance with that of Udofia (2014) study which revealed that students know of the existence of certain drugs and their effect if abused, mostly through all the available channels of communication such as radio, television, newspaper, magazines among others. This is why Odorume (2015) noted that the mass media can help in exposing the people towards the danger of drug abuse when they engage in it. But the fact that respondents are moderately exposed they may be at disadvantage in the sense that they may not get all the vital messages from the mass media that can help them change their attitude towards drug usage and abuse. Based on the theory of the reasoned action, the level of awareness of the undergraduates of Imo State higher institutions towards mass media campaign messages by may limit the influence of attitude change among them.

Further finding from data analysed revealed that at an average of 49.9% of the respondents confirmed that the mass media campaigns have not been effective in curbing the menace of drug abuse amongst undergraduates of tertiary institutions in Imo State. This could be one of the reasons the issue of drug abuse is still alarming among the youths of higher institutions. This finding is in tandem with that of Fareo (2012) who revealed that adolescents engage in various delinquent acts such as drug abuse, rape, robbery, cultism and vandalism that are dangerous to the society and that the menace of drug abuse has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society. Similarly, Obiechina and Isiguzo (2016) in their study revealed that the initiation to drug and alcohol abuse early in life has exposed adolescents to voluntary drug consumption, smoking, drinking and substance abuse which have become a threat to the nation. This worrying finding could be as a result of the level of awareness of undergraduates of various higher institutions in Imo State. In line with the theory of reasoned action that holds that persuasion can induce behavioural change that is to say when the mass media campaign against drug abuse is not effective it will affect behavioural change of people

Conclusion

Drugs on its own is not dangerous as often times with prescription from a license well trained personnel are advised to take certain percentage of drugs for one health issue or the other, but the issue of drug abuse is not to be taken lightly because those who are engaged in it are threats to the society and when the society is under threat by these drug abusers a whole lot of things go wrong. Based on the findings, it can therefore be concluded that the mass media campaigns are not effective in the fight against drug abuse among undergraduates of higher institutions in Imo State, owing to the fact that the campaigns have not helped in curtailing the menace as students still engage in it and this may likely be connected to the level of awareness among the undergraduates of these higher institutions in Imo State.

Recommendations

1. The mass media should intensify their publicity and commitment on drug abuse so as to be able to create more awareness on the danger of drug abuse in the society.
2. The mass media should be more creative in their content and in some cases they should employ fear appeal so as to be able to influence good numbers of youths positively and make them shun drug abuse.

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