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Abstract

ASEAN becomes an important economic hub of the world. The study aimed to examine how advertisements, in terms of product category, plot, key message, type of light, duration, time, location, music, major character, minor character, and antagonist in the advertisements from Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand were comparatively presented. The content from Lao Star (Lao PDR), MRTV4 (Myanmar), and Channel 7 (Thailand) collected between 19.00 and 22.00 or prime time was analyzed. The findings revealed that generally speaking overall cultural gaps were found in these three ASEAN countries at a certain level.

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People living in Myanmar and Thailand shared some cultural similarities. Likewise, it was not so much difficult for Thai marketing communicators and advertisers to attract people living in Laos PDR. This study contributes to such marketing communicators and advertisers to consider the threesome's cross-cultural convergences and divergences.

Keywords : Advertising; Storytelling; Consumer Behavior; ASEAN

บทคัดย่อ

อาเซียนนั้นกำลังกลายเป็นศูนย์กลางทางเศรษฐกิจที่สำคัญระดับโลก ในการศึกษารั้วนี้มีจุดมุ่งหมาย เพื่อศึกษาการเล่าเรื่องของสื่อโฆษณาทางโทรทัศน์ในกลุ่มประเทศอาเซียนที่เกี่ยวข้องกับ กลุ่มของสินค้า โครงเรื่อง แก่นของเรื่อง การใช้แสง ระยะเวลา ความถี่ สถานที่ ดนตรี ตัวละครหลัก ตัวละครรองและตัวละครขัดแย้ง โดยเปรียบเทียบสื่อโฆษณาทางโทรทัศน์ระหว่างประเทศลาว ประเทศเมียนมาร์และประเทศไทย โดยเนื้อหาที่นำมาเปรียบเทียบนั้นนำมาจากช่องรายการโทรทัศน์ที่มีความนิยมมากที่สุดได้แก่ ช่องลาวสตาร์ของประเทศลาว ช่อง MRTV 4 ของประเทศเมียนมาร์และช่อง7ของประเทศไทย เป็นตัวแทนในการวิจัยและเลือกใช้เวลาในช่วงไพรม์ไทม์ซึ่งเป็นช่วงเวลาที่ผู้ชมมากที่สุดคือตั้งแต่เวลา 19.00น. - 22.00น. ผลการวิจัยพบว่า โดยภาพรวมแล้ว ช่องว่างทางวัฒนธรรมยังถูกพบอยู่ในสามประเทศอาเซียน ประชากรในประเทศเมียนมาร์ และประเทศไทยมีความวัฒนธรรมที่คล้ายคลึงกัน เช่นเดียวกัน ไม่ใช่เรื่องยากอะไรสำหรับนักสื่อสารการตลาด และนักโฆษณาของประเทศไทยในการผลิตชิ้นงานโฆษณาที่สามารถดึงดูดความสนใจให้กับประชาชนชาวลาว งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้มีประโยชน์สำหรับนักสื่อสารการตลาด และนักโฆษณาในการพิจารณาถึงความเหมือน และความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรมที่เกิดขึ้นของประเทศอาเซียนทั้งสามประเทศ

คำสำคัญ : การโฆษณา; การเล่าเรื่อง; พฤติกรรมผู้บริโภค; อาเซียน



Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN consists of ten countries; Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Because of huge return on investment forecasted (Kawazu, 2013), the emergence of this energizes many countries around the globe including Japan to invest in the market. Ipsos (2013) had foreseen that there would be enormous changes in population structure and proportion, socio-economic development, infrastructure advancement, betterment of wellness, and connection around the world. It was also mentioned that in future there would be more demand for natural and organic foods, demand for functional foods. In particular, those which were claimed to fortify with high nutrients and health support. As consumers demanded for healthy foods, and more novel foods, packaged foods were increasingly positioned as “smarter” or “better-for-you” products, It also discovered that, ‘nail art, eyelash obsessions, feel good body & the mind, skin whitening, and cosmetic surgery & medical tourism’ are the hot items nowadays.

JWT (2013) presented that, ‘consumers responded well to similar types of advertising, both in content and tone. Humour, story-telling and simple product demonstration had a high degree of resonance. It demonstrated that how a particular brand can attract customers. The use of celebrities, on the other hand, scored surprisingly low.

The studies above are consistent with the target of ASEAN as “one vision, one identity, one community”. From time to time, self-representation of a particular country’s infrastructure is arguably projected (for example, Frith, 2003; JWT, 2013). As JWT (2013 : 15) obviously underlined that “Southeast Asians are balancing traditional

values with growing economies rather successfully, they are not trading the old with the new". This study, therefore, aimed to examine how the advertisements' stories were told by comparing between those in Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand.

In summary, the meanings of the stories that were told by people were framed and constructed by an integral part of socio-cultural context of such countries (Havanon, 2009). Bell (2003 : 97) restated that broader the societal patterns of meaning, and so doing acknowledge the discursive context within which participants' stories were enmeshed'. To reach the goal, the study of product category, duration, frequency, basic plot, theme, lighting, music, location, and character, taken and applied from the study of Kaliszewski (2012) is mainly focused.

It is important to state at this point that even though the three countries studied share their geographical similarity, i.e. ASEAN area, their socio-cultural differences can be found at a certain level. And, that can affect on the meaning of the advertisements' stories told and presented. As a result of this, the researchers explain advertising and consumer behaviour country by country. The details are as follows.

Advertising and consumer behaviour in Lao PDR

Because Thailand and Lao PDR are closely interconnected, there is no odd when Laotian and Thai products are relatively similar and interchanged (Tangmeesang, 2013). Media consumption is also included. According to the study of Wiroonrat et al. (2013), Laotians enjoy watching Thai television programmes, especially on the Royal Thai Army Radio and Channel 7 and that can influence on their decision making on consuming Thai commodities. For example, the study of Koummalasy (2010) revealed that, due to perceived value, Laotians would like to buy Thai motorcycle brand rather than Chinese counterparts.



Advertising and consumer behaviour in Myanmar

Thanks to Envirosell, its research can provide consumer insight in Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand as follows. People in Myanmar love music and is, therefore, applied in all advertisements. They, likewise, 'can be divided into three groups: the conservative, the contemporary and the cosmopolitan'. The majority of them are the cosmopolitan. They are followed by the conservative and the contemporary, respectively. The cosmopolitan are extrovert, adaptable to a new thing, and rather modern whilst the conservative, as it is named, are nationalistic and are unlikely to accept changes. While the former group goes shopping in large shopping areas, the latter are addicted to markets situated within the area or the region they live. They are not crazy in shopping as do Thais, though (Tangmeesang, 2013). With the reason of ease of access and not too far from home, the Burmese people nowadays do not always shop at modern places, traditional ones, though since the first three places they go shopping are grocery stores, supermarkets, and roadside vendor or stores (Ho & Meng, 2016).

Quite similar to the ASEAN trend shown above, Burmese people has now enjoyed with the products like television, air-conditioners, washing machines, and skin whiteners (Tangmeesang, 2013). More presently, Burmese citizens have spent money on food and groceries, health care, mobile phones, equal to household products and new clothes, education, personal care products, equal to utility bills and transportation, eating out, equal to entertainment, house rent, and loan installments, accordingly (Nielsen, 2015). Even being not a high-tech society, also, trendy, smart mobile phones are also confirmed of high popularity among people in Myanmar (Kurabayashi, 2013; Pimolsaengsuriya, 2016). Influences from South Korea, Thailand, and Japan could be

reasoned (Anonymous, 2015). As for the matter of beauty, milk consumption could help Burmese citizens more beautiful and healthy when higher rate of milk is produced (American Dairy Products Institute, 2014). Because of having more concerns on saving money and staying healthy, likewise, they prefer living and cooking at home, not much smoking and drinking (Deloitte, 2016). Specifically, they love eating both national and international cuisine (Maw & Piansoongnern, 2014). Ho & Meng (2016) further revealed that ‘taste, quality and price are the top three attributes prioritised by Myanmar consumers when purchasing consumables such as Beverages, Confectionery, Packaged Foods, Personal Hygiene Products and Tobacco’. Although it is the digital era, personal media like friends, colleagues, and relatives are the most popular channel of seeking out for product and/or service information. It is followed by a mass medium like television, billboards, events, in-store promotions, print media, social media, radio, and others respectively. Especially for the tobacco category, information from persons is highly influential. More potential of television than personal platforms can be seen in the categories of beverages (non-alcoholic), packaged foods, and personal hygiene products.

In order to reach people in Myanmar effectively, above all, local language should be used (Tangmeesang, 2013). Effective, persuasive advertising content should also include the giving of unaware solving clarification; the presentation of self, even women; immediate, prompt response; local-knowledge and -belief attachment; the building of belief or trust in his/her own power and ability; respect to the advancement of technology, particularly trendy, smart mobile phones; the making of ordinary people as well-known stars, celebrities, and net idols; and the making of them feel escape from pressure (Pimolsaengsuriya, 2016).



Advertising and consumer behaviour in Thailand

By understanding advertising in Thailand, Pongsapitaksanti (2010) conducted a study comparing advertising in Thailand and Japan. Its findings can be considered in having much smaller advertising market in Thailand than Japan, in Western-styled advertising in Thailand while own-styled in Japan, in management and hierarchical diversity, and in no collaboration between Thai and Japanese advertising agencies. Nonetheless, Gannon and Pillai (2010 : 34) made clear about Thailand that ‘... its core values overlap with those of the United States. But it is clearly different from the United States, and the Thai Kingdom is an apt metaphor for capturing the essential features of this land of freedom’.

Thailand is rather an indulgent country because her inhabitants are of having hopes and believes that good things will happen in the future and saving their money for not further future, but for present happiness, i.e. taking a break (Nielsen, 2015). Their consumption is outstandingly changed and similar to their neighbouring country, i.e. Myanmar alike. Shopping online and cooking can rarely be seen. Rather, they prefer spending their lives in large shopping areas and ordering food to eat at home. Thai people do not believe in what they do not see by their own eyes. In contrast, trust and credibility can increase and be ensured by seeing products and/or services in reality, for the first matter. For the latter, this is not only because of convenience, but also its lower price than cooking by Thai people themselves and having low rate of waitresses (Kurabayashi et al., 2013). Thai people, likewise, somewhat, concern their health and wellness (American Dairy Products Institute,

2014; Kawazu, 2013) as American Dairy Products Institute (2014) revealed higher manufacture of milk product. Especially those who are living in cities are also a fashionista when they like buying clothing and footwear, consumer electronics, and appliances (Deloitte, 2017). As addressed by Nathalang (1998 : 246), '[i]t is wise, however, to make an intelligent choice of adaptation to things modern, and to add that to our own and encourage people to steer their own course of cultural changes and educational development'.

Even focusing on ladies whose socio-economic is middle and who are living in the seven capital and big cities and in the seven ASEAN including Singapore, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Bangkok in Thailand, Jakarta in Indonesia, Manila in the Philippines, Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam, and Yangon in Myanmar, more interestingly, specifically, and clearly, by considering how women consumers in such seven nations perceive, how they buy products and/or services, and how they engage into brand, Hakuhodo (2015) classified them into five types of brand-conscious cosmopolitans, smart careful shoppers, family and community first, fickle trendies, and sensitive selfies. Above all, the family and community first own the highest proportion while the brand-conscious cosmopolitans are found least. Although careful shopping style fails into these two group, as it is named, the latter group has the highest brand consciousness, but not for the former one. Family and community involvement products and/or services are of highest need among the family and community first.



The conceptual framework was as follows :

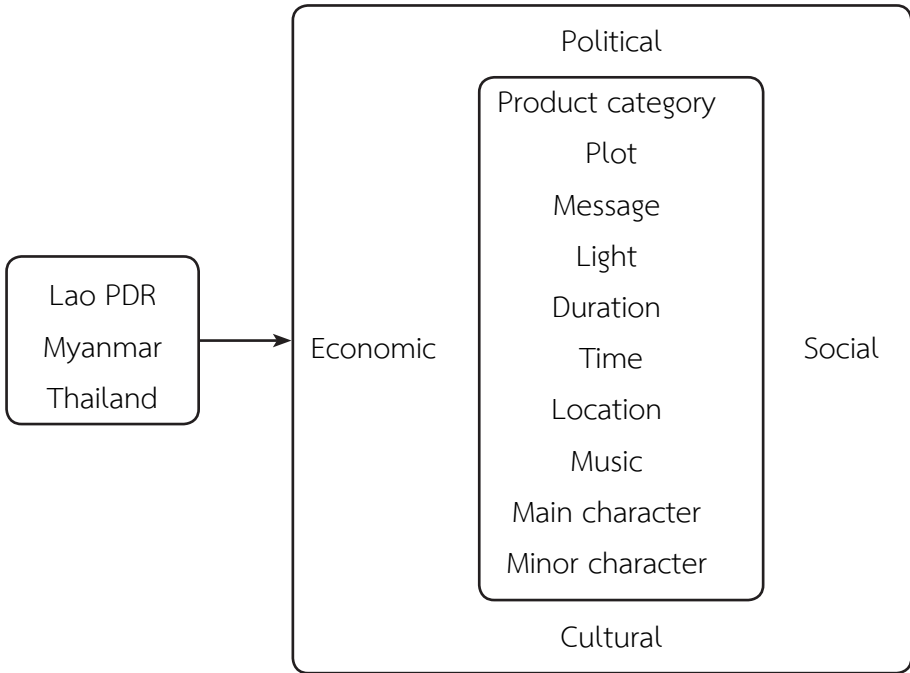


Figure 1: The conceptual framework

Methodology

Out of 10 ASEAN countries, only three countries including Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand gave access for videotaping via C-band width. In selecting the studied channels, popularity was the inclusion criteria. The highest-rating channels were Laostar (Lao PDR), MRTV4 (Myanmar), and Channel 7 (Thailand). Later on, the content from three-day advertisements broadcasted during prime time, i.e. 7.00 pm – 10.00 pm was scrutinised.

There were 238 advertisements in total. In details, those could be divided into 27 advertisements from Lao PDR, 145 advertisements from Myanmar, and 166 advertisements from Thailand. It was important to

bear in mind, once again, that, applied from the study of Kaliszewski (2012), data was analysed in product category, duration, frequency, basic plot, theme, lighting, music, location, and character. Especially product category was categorised into four groups including:

1. Food and dining category includes food and dining; and beverages.
2. Niche product category includes personal care and beauty; health and healthcare; shopping, retail and apparel; and children's products.
3. Information technology category includes automotive; telecommunications; and technology.
4. Daily life category includes travel services; sports, recreation, and hobbies; financial services; the home; and household product.

By referring to Christopher Booker, Changing Minds Organisation (n.d.), likewise, seven plots- overcoming the monster (i.e., 'hero and the bad guy'); rags to riches (i.e., 'success and crisis'); the quest (i.e., 'seeking and finding'); voyage and return (i.e., 'boldly exploring'); comedy (i.e., 'from confusion to enlightenment'); tragedy (i.e., 'the price of fatal flaws'); and rebirth (i.e., 'finding the personal light') were used and scrutinised.

As stated above, such advertisements' content was analysed. Based upon intercoder reliability coefficient presented by Holsti (1969), as shown below, the intercoder reliability coefficient value was 0.08.

$$\text{Reliability} = 2M / N_i + N_j$$

By M = The number of agreed items between the intercoder 1 and the intercoder 2

N_i = The total number of items for the first-time coding

N_j = The total number of items for the second-time coding

It was important to note at this point that due to accessibility to C-Band width, the television advertisements launched in the three ASEAN countries including Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand were studied only.



Findings

As stated above, the findings section was elucidated in nine parts, i.e. product category, duration, frequency, plots, theme, lighting, music, location, and character. The researchers shall draw a conclusive table for easy understanding as follows :

Table 1 : A comparative conclusion of how the advertisements' stories were communicated

Factor/Country	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Thailand
Product category	Information technology	Health and wellness	Food and drinks
Duration	31 – 60 seconds	30 seconds	
Frequency	Once		
Plots	Rebirth	Voyage and return	
Theme	Outstanding	Self-confidence	
Lighting	Very sunny, very bright, and playing with light		
Music	Original song, instrument, and electronic music style		
Location	Non-natural setting	Natural setting	
Main character	Human		
Minor character	Automotive	Cosmetics	Food

Table 1, in general, predominantly showed the similarities in storytelling between the advertisements in Myanmar and those in Thailand. There were some exceptions in product category launched during the studied period of time and minor character. Just across the borders, nonetheless, the Laotian advertisements were told quite different from their neighbours, in terms of product category, duration, plots, theme, location, and minor character. The country shared its

convergence with Myanmar and Thailand only in the lights of frequency, lighting, music, and main character. The details of a particular factor of analysis were elaborated as follows.

Product category

During that prime time, surprisingly, in Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand, product consumption was totally differently found. In details, Laotians enjoyed something modern, advanced commodities, information technology category at 47 per cent, for instance, Toyota motor, Lifan motorcycle, Unitel 3G phone network, and Win Phone Mobile. People living in Myanmar had more concerns on their health and wellness since niche products like personal care and beauty, health and healthcare, shopping, retail and apparel, and children's products were much higher consumed than other product categories at 66 per cent. The examples of the Burmese advertisements were Shwe Pyi Nan tanaka powder, Lactacyd White Intimate feminine hygiene, Listerlinie mouthwash, Alinamin-F supplementary food, and Revlon cosmetics. Thailand was likely to be an eating and drinking society in ASEAN because food and drinks advertisements were presented most at 37 per cent, for example, Coke soft drink, Yum Yum Cup instant noodle, and Ferrero Rocher chocolate. It was not too far from food and beverages category when niche products and information technology categories were equally launched at second, for example, Trakrataybin salol et menthol mixture, Cita skincare, I-Mobile smart phone digital television, and AIS mobile network.

Duration

Advertisers in Thailand and Myanmar should create and develop an advertisement whose length was not longer than half minutes. Shortest concentration and memory was exploded among Thai when



almost all Thai advertisements studied, i.e. at 99 per cent were created and launched less than 30 seconds. Quite close to Thai people, i.e. 86 per cent, it was Burmese advertisements. Longer concentration and memory was, i.e. 31-60 seconds, nevertheless, discovered first among Laotians at 64 per cent and more than 60 seconds acquired second. Such differences could be reasoned by low advertising cost and completeness. A long-form advertisement was not of popularity, though.

Frequency

With budget and time constraints and more prominence of digital advertising nowadays, probably, advertisements of these triple countries were predominantly launched only once. Thailand ranked first at 84 per cent and was followed by Myanmar at 71 per cent and Laos PDR at 52 per cent, respectively. Even having a very little number, only in Lao PDR, Toyota Motor, Singh Corporations and Manchester United advertisements were broadcasted up to four times. Brand recognition and remembrance could vitally be reasoned.

Basic plot

All Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand might be discovering from political and economic sufferings and reform, voyage and return and rebirth were the top two storylines primarily employed in advertisements. This was because these two techniques could lighten up their lives and make them more positive, entertained, and excited. Their lives and societies were not as bad and tragic that tragedy plot must be represented in these three countries advertisements. Likewise, Thailand probably was in a worse political and economic position than their neighbouring counterparts when comedy plot was recalled only in Thailand.

A small difference was found between these three countries, in terms of voyage and return and rebirth storylines. That was to say,

voyage and return was plotted most in Myanmar and Thailand at 59 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively. It was the other way round for Lao PDR when rebirth plot was created most in this country at 31 per cent. The ranks were changed, i.e. while rebirth plot was used at second in Myanmar and Thailand, voyage and return one was ranked second for Lao PDR.

Theme

Following to the situation described in the product category and the basic plot, Burmese and Thais had probably a need of boosting self-confidence, especially in Myanmar at 19 per cent (in Thailand) and 42 per cent (in Myanmar). That was to say, personal care and beauty was of high concern among Burmese citizens in order to make them more confident. For example, Nivea roll on in Myanmar and Nature Gift coffee in Thailand.

In contrast, Laotians would like to be more outstanding than the past. The example of the commercial was Beer Lao Gold.

Lighting

As discovered above, voyage and return plot and rebirth was most enjoyable among Laotians, Burmese, and Thais. It was not odd when dark light and scene were not presented in advertisements, from very sunny, very bright to playing with light, though. The Changing Minds Organisation (n.d.) explained the voyage and return that ‘may start light and pleasurable but after a while confusion and darker problems appear. Being in a strange land, the hero has to trust locals, who do not all turn out to be trustworthy and archetypal characters.’ and rebirth stories that ‘tell of change, renewal and transformation. They start with the hero under the shadow of a corrupting influence that may make the hero seem evil or at least misguided’ (Changing Minds Organisation, n.d.).



Music

Music was considered in three perspectives including originality of a song, instrument, a goal of using the song, and music style.

The use of an original song, that of an instrument, and electronic music style were of high acceptance in these three ASEAN countries at 80 per cent, 59 per cent, and 35 per cent for Lao PDR, 89 per cent, 57 per cent, and 19 per cent for Myanmar, and 95 per cent, 83 per cent, and 22 per cent for Thailand.

Myanmar and Thailand got along well to each other because their citizens enjoyed listening to something that could encourage their mood and sentiment. In contrast, those people in Laos PDR needed a deeper feelings and action of not only empathy, but also sympathy.

Location

Natural setting, like home could attract Burmese and Thai consumers most whereas Laotians appreciated non-natural setting, like graphics. A graphic scene could produce a vivid, real, and modern picture and that could make information-technology products that Laotians fell in love more attractive and best buy. The example of the commercial in Lao PDR was Lao Toyota retailers.

Character

Three types of characters, i.e. main character, minor character, and antagonist character were scrutinised. Although location for production was somewhat different, being played by a human was triggered. Following to this, also, Laotian advertisers only used other major characters like gift, smart phone, place, telecommunications, and agricultural crops, accordingly. A very little use of agricultural crops as a major character was reflected in Burmese commercials.

In terms of a minor character, it varied according to a particular country's popular product category. In details, as a technology lover,

automotive, unsurprisingly, was predominantly used as a minor character most in Laotian commercials. Likewise, as a personal care and beauty fan, Burmese advertisers employed cosmetics as a minor character. Food was treated as a minor character in Thailand because her citizens loved eating.

Conclusion and discussion

Cultural gaps were found in these three ASEAN countries at a certain level, generally speaking. People living in Myanmar and Thailand shared some cultural similarities. It was probably surprising that those living in Lao PDR were pleasantly exposed to Thai television programmes, especially aired on the Royal Thai Army Radio and Channel 7 (Wiroonrat et al., 2013). Also, 70 per cent of people from Lao PDR liked consuming Thai commodities. On the one hand, the country was dominated by a single party system. It was usual that the country's media were under control. On the other hand, production of consumer product was limited, importing from other countries, especially from Thailand, instead. It was easily for Thailand to launch products and/or services in Lao PDR (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, 2013). However these research findings revealed the odds of its cultural differences from their neighbouring countries, especially a storytelling. Cultural restraint, i.e. conserving some national culture and traditions- its national custom could be reasoned.

As consistently projected by Tangmeesang (2013) and Nielsen (2015), in terms of product category, totally different, Burmese citizens fell in love with beauty and personal concern. It could be reasoned that Thai cuisine was one of the outstanding benchmarks of the country and it was one of the basic needs, Thai people developed food and beverage businesses and advertisements.



Because ASEAN populations were digital active users, Lao PDR and Myanmar accordingly were not listed as the top five digital-user countries (see Kemp, 2015), they were eager to be real digital active users. Such needs and wants drove generating mobile and high technology commercials. Especially for Burmese people, more consumption on mobile technology could be pictured (Kurabayashi, 2013; Nielsen, 2015; Pimolsaengsuriya, 2016).

Although Laos PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand share their physical region, this study contributes to marketing communicators and advertisers in designing and producing advertisements that can meet with the cross-cultural audiences. Otherwise, the company can waste its money and cannot make audience reacted to the products as expected and cannot optimise profits in return. As widely spoken, one who knows the enemy and knows himself will not be in danger in a hundred battles.

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