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Implications of Anthropology in the Corporate Sector of Bangladesh

This article's broad intention is to create the scope for anthropologists to use anthropological knowledge in corporate and business sectors in Bangladesh. Though, a large numbers of graduates from anthropology are working in Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), development research institutions, international parts of the United Nations and public and private universities in Bangladesh. Anthropologists are applying their significant skills: fieldwork with qualitative research methods, keeping holistic approach, keeping in-depth knowledge of cultures, analyzing gender issues, analyzing the links between globalization and local culture, etc. By using these skills, anthropologist can assume the consumer's values and satisfaction regarding the products and services provided by corporate or business sectors: public and private banks, mobile companies, treatment center, etc. Throughout this paper, I would like to show the argument about close relation between business and anthropology.

The open market economy, in particular, globalization welcomes many new concepts programming our life styles. Anthropology has been trying to capture those new ideas and its values by developing the fields, for instance, anthropology of indigenous knowledge, medical anthropology, anthropology of law, anthropology of education and many other fields providing the native's point of view regarding their local knowledge and practices which are directly related with native's culture. Is it the end point for advocating native's point of view as well as their interest in local practice? Also, anthropological insights locate

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that the local practices can be effective or ineffective in many ways. That is why anthropologists are hired to evaluate development projects and to list recommendations for better outputs from the projects.

The practice of consumerism changes the social and cultural settings. Consequently, it shapes the culture. So, corporate anthropology is needed to emerge to understand the consumer's viewpoint on any goods and the future impacts of the goods in community. However, the global culture cannot be understood without understanding the intervention of corporate in local culture. In this sense, culture cannot be found as untouched. Furthermore, the accompanying partner of modernity, such as industrialism, capitalism and individualism shapes the people's way of thinking.

Though Bangladesh is considered as a country of the Third World, the inhabitants of this country, in particular the urban and the sub-urban inhabitants have already attached themselves with the facilities engendered by capitalism and open market economy. These have shaped people's reactions and conceptualization to goods, facilities and services made availability by corporate groups. Nowadays, in Bangladesh, a lot of business sector is booming with public acknowledgment and material profit. For example, private banks, mobile companies, mobile handset companies, shoe companies, garment industry, etc. has established enchanting working spheres in Bangladesh. Most of companies recruit employees who have taken education from business faculty of universities. Thereupon, students are motivated to study bank and business related disciplines. It is practically believed that only business-discipline-graduate understands the company's purposes which reflect their expected benefits. Similarly, anthropology-discipline-graduate or employee with anthropological knowledge can contribute to implement the companies' profit-purposes. But, the methods and insights of anthropological knowledge are very different and exclusive. Because, besides other disciplines of social science "cultural anthropology is holistic and interdisciplinary by nature, for it combines a series of empirical, logical and intuitive inquires, field observations (phenomenological), critical historical (diachronic) and comparative (synchronic) analysis and, at the end, an organic interpretation. It attempts to explore and interpret the implicit patterns

and meanings underlying people's beliefs and behavior, communities and organizations.” (Pant and Alberti 1997: 2).

It is established in Bangladeshi corporate-employment climate that employees will be graduated from Economics and Business Administrations because of having mathematical, management and statistical knowledge. I would like to show that all kinds of goods or commodities enter into society in which people practice their culture. If members of cultures do not welcome the commodities, how those products are consumed. That is why some business firms hire anthropologists. Kane (1996) argues “in recent years, some of the biggest names in business have recruited highly trained anthropologists to understand their workers and customers better, and to help design products that better reflect emerging cultural trends. These companies are convinced that the tools of ethnographic research, minute observation, subtle interviewing, and systematic documentation- can answer questions about organizations and markets that traditional research tools cannot.”

Customer or Consumer: A Cultural Product

Studying ‘culture’ is the main aim of cultural anthropology. There are multiple definitions of the concept of culture. In anthropology, British Anthropologist Edward Taylor’s definition is very popular. According to Taylor, culture refers to “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by an as a member of society” (1871: 1). Downs defines the concept of culture as “a mental map which guides us in our relations to our surrounding and to other people” (1971: 35). Moreover, the well acknowledged definition is “the way of life of a people” (Hatch 1985: 178). By explaining those definitions of culture it can be revealed that a man is a social and cultural product. Culture is the way in which the identity and characteristic of social human being are manifested. Gary Ferraro tried to crystallize the concept of culture in an uncomplicated as well as comprehensive way. According to Ferraro “...the concept of culture as everything that people have, think and do as members of a society” (1992: 18). Therefore, culture directs the

customers or consumers habits, and desires to the products. If any company wants to launch goods and commodities in market; create demands to the products, that company should forecast the reactions of consumers. Also, the companies should consider the possible impacts on consumers' own cultural settings. In order to gain the acceptability of the customer, the companies' first attempt is to know the customers and their consuming map. In this case, the Corporate Design Foundation reveals:

"To understand real-life consumer behavior, more companies are turning to research firms staffed by anthropologists and social scientists. Skilled in ethnographic methods and theories, these anthropologists train designers, engineers and marketers how to observe and interview consumers in their own environment, whether at work, out shopping or in the home. Through audio and videotapes, they document their research. These studies go beyond watching consumers use and relate to a product in actual situations; they delve into cultural trends, attitudes and personal habits and get to the "why" of people's actions and choices. "We get into people's environments, try to understand those environments in their terms, build models, identify needs and then offer alternatives that satisfy those needs," explains Michael Barry, a principal in the research consulting firm, Point Forward". (www.cdf.org)

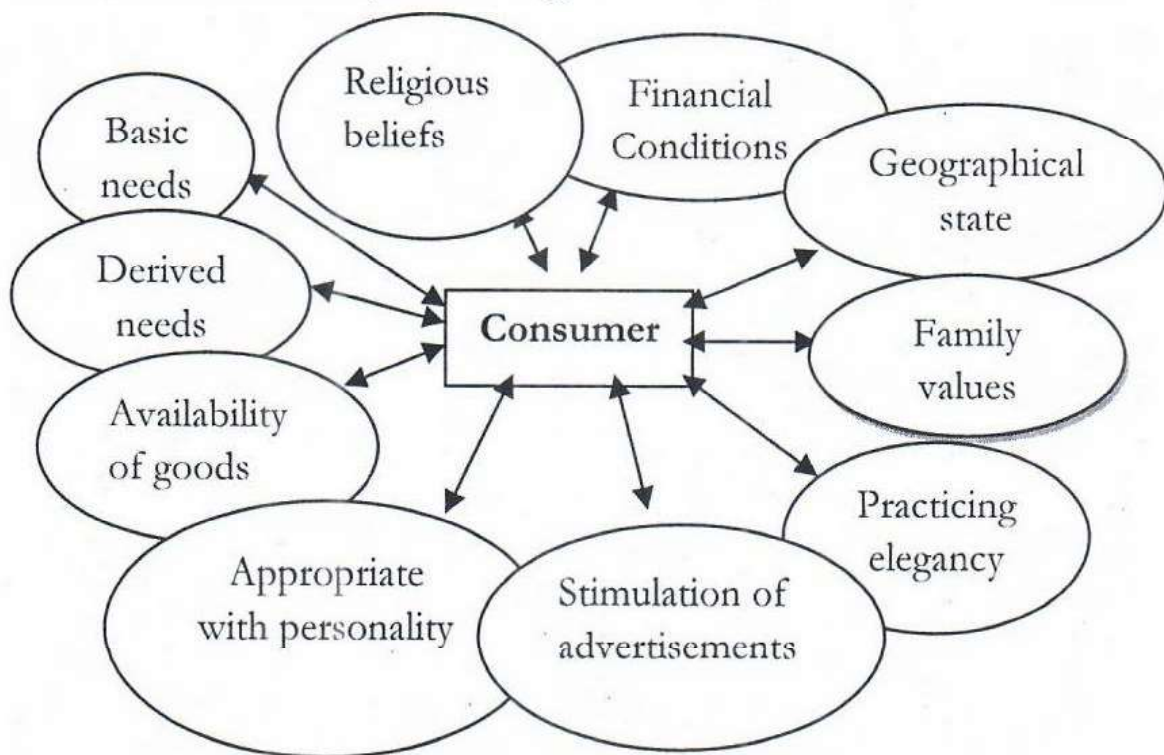


Figure 1: Consumer as Cultural Product

It is not meaningful that a customer merely expresses her/his demands to the particular products. Rather, customers show their demands and desires in the cultural way. Anthropological knowledge does not consider a consumer only a consumer. It offers insights to sellers about the genres of the customers; for example, 'rural customers', 'urban customers', and 'sub-urban customers' in terms of geographical place; 'poor customers', 'middle-class customers', and 'rich customers' in terms of financial condition; 'elite customers', and 'non-elite customers' in terms of elegance; furthermore, 'Hindu customer' and 'Muslim customer' in terms of religious beliefs. Let me show a popular example; Aromatic Natural (Milk Cream and Honey) and Aromatic Classic (Milk Cream and Vitamin E) 100% *Halal* Soap, this soap were very popular to the Muslim customers both rural and urban in Bangladesh because of the using Islamic word '*halal*'. The word '*halal*' is Islamic word refers to sacred to Muslims. So, in order to consider the customer's physical and mental world, sellers need to understand the customer's cultural world. The following figure can be considered the customer's cultural world.

Buyers and Sellers: A Reciprocal Relation

Cultural Anthropology concentrates on the various kinds of relations, such as socio-cultural relations and socio-economic relations. Purchasers go to market, scrutinize the goods and its qualities, and bargain with shopkeepers. A big or small conversation happens between buyers and sellers. A conversation could be objective (buy and sale on the basis fixed rate) or subjective (bargaining in order to buy and sale on the mutual rate). During the conversation, buyers and sellers share a common language or economic terms in which both the buyers and sellers have access. In some cases, many selling institutions use formal words during the conversation with purchasers. The purchasers will be embarrassed when the buyers or shopkeepers converse with very formal words. For example, in Bangladesh, it is appeared that sellers of superstores and shops in shopping mall use some foreign words during conversation with purchasers, such as 'excuse me sir'; 'excuse me madam'; 'thank you'; etc. It is needless to say that every purchaser does

not comfort with these words during conversation. Sellers need to consider that it is not only the reciprocal relation with purchasers in terms of selling goods, but also the reciprocal relations in terms of sharing views about goods and exchanging dialogues regarding goods and its sustainability.

Moreover, Many superstores in urban and suburban areas are decorated by glass and sophisticated furniture. Commodities are kept in order and with price tag. 'Push' and/or 'pull' words are attached on the entrance door. Prices are identified by using computers during paying. Agora, PQS, Meena Bazar, etc. are the renowned superstores in the Dhaka city of Bangladesh. In general, the people of economically rich and middle class go to these superstores for shopping. In contrast, house workers of those rich and middle class who economically poor feel uncomfortable to go to those superstores because of very sophisticated structure of superstores. There is no scope for maintain personal or subjective relations, such as to bargain, to buy in condition to pay later, to share some gossips, and etc. These places are only objective structure: to push or pull the door to enter into the store, take the goods, pay to the person who operate the computer and again to 'push or pull' the door to exit. Thus, the reciprocal relations between sellers and buyers are framed in economic exchange, but anthropological insights want to create a platform on which buyers and sellers can exchange their views, ideas, and dialogues on commodities. Anthropology emphasizes that economic reciprocal relations are not limited in money against the commodities and vice versa.

In this case, anthropologists can reduce the customers' uncomfortableness in shopping malls. Anthropologists can observe the behaviors of buyers and sellers; take the in-depth interview and conduct the ethnographic interview of both the customers and shopkeepers. To the shopkeepers as well as sellers, the tentative queries are:

- How many types of customers have you seen?
- Is the structure of stores are friendly? If yes, why? If not, why?
- What are the situations you feel embarrassed?
- Are the conversations between buyers and sellers convenience?

Does the superstore know as well as ensure the consumer rights?

By revealing such types of queries, anthropologist completes ethnography (detail description) of the superstore, or shop, or shopping mall. Such category of ethnography gives the natures of customers and their expectations to sellers, to products, to environments of shopping mall, to infrastructures of shopping mall and above all the importance of the goods in their socio-cultural life. More precisely, anthropologists can use their anthropological insights to capture the self-perception of the consumers and the mode of consumption.

Symbolic Value of Brand and Place

People consumed the goods for fulfilling their demands; it is, however, the primary concern of consuming goods. Moreover, consumers have general tendency to show themselves in known or unknown persons by revealing the brand they consume. For example, for mobile handsets, Nokia is considered the main brand to mobile users of Bangladesh, in general. Samsung, LG mobile handsets are also used. It is the salient picture of mobile users in Bangladesh that many young and adult persons are using Chinese mobile handset because of the comparatively cheap rate. Using, however, the Chinese mobile handsets are not considered as prestigious for well-off consumers. The 'high brand' (Nokia, Samsung, LG) refers to the well-off position of consumer and the 'low brand' (made in China, such as Symphony) designates dearth of affluence. In this case, anthropological insights can postmortem the different types of brands and consumers reactions to the brand. By illuminating the brand and public reaction to it, anthropologists can show that people's social status and economic status are deeply related with the mode of consumption and consuming brand. Thus, anthropologists would become corporate engineer who will have reduced the tensions between companies and goods by engineering. Mainly, the anthropologists address the existing practice of social and economic status by both the *emic* and *etic* perspective.

To buy from footpath, unpopular, unknown places lessens the prestige of buyers. In contrast, to buy from superstores or centrally air conditioned shopping mall increases the elegance and prestige of consumers. Let me show an example, a cap or mat from Saudi Arabia, which are accessories for performing *salat* for the Muslims, refers to sacred goods and dignity of those accessories. Bangladeshi Muslims go to Saudi Arabia in order to perform *hazır* and buy cap, mat, and other accessories that would be gifted to their relatives and known persons. In such case, goods have religious values. In the background of capitalism and market economy, goods have economic as well as social (prestige, elegance, status) value. Anthropologists have scope to grasp such realities through participant observation in the shopping mall and observe the consumer's behavior towards materials they buy and use.

Products Enter into the Culture

After manufacturing the products, the ultimate purpose of the manufacturer is to make available the products to the consumers. According to anthropological knowledge, the products enter into the cultures of human being. Here, the argument is between the concept of 'consumers' and 'cultures'. A product has a uniformity feature; but is it possible to show a uniform culture? It is quite impossible. Traditionally, in marketing, employees present the products and its advantages to the consumers. In contrast, anthropological marketing will be more qualitative and in-depth. CNN.com/Career¹ published a short article titled "Corporate Anthropology: Dirt-free Research". It revealed how anthropological knowledge can be applied in corporate sector in order to consider the cultural values and beliefs prior to marketing the products. Here is the magnetic part of the article:

"Marketing involves targeting an audience for a product and then selling it, while anthropologists are responsible for finding out how the product will be used -- if at all. Anthropologists shun marketing's questionnaires and focus groups in favor of studying behavior. By recording in excruciating detail how people live and how products fit into their lives, anthropologists learn much more than what consumers usually tell marketers, since interviewees often lie on surveys or say what they think they should". (CNN.com/Career, 2003)

Thus, corporate anthropology has scopes in marketing the products:

- To identify who are the would-be consumers of the particular products;
- To identify the cultural pattern of the consumers in order to take cautions if the products hurt the cultural values or religious values of the particular cultural group, for instance, a logo or trademark would be fall in criticize if it imitates to any sacred sign or word;
- Before marketing, to identify whether consumers can afford the products or not;
- Before marketing, to identify the temperature of the consumer's place where they live in, because some products need particular temperature for its sustaining;
- To identify the capability of would-be consumers so that whether they use the products in future or not, for example, a consumer bought a refrigerator but s/he does not have economic capability to buy more foods at a time to storage it.

'Thick Description' of Consumers' Behaviors to Products

American Cultural Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) developed an approach: 'thick description'. According to Geertz, ethnographers should interpret all the meanings of signs shared in a culture. According to 'thin description', all the meanings are not captured or illustrated. For example, a boy winks of his any eye. The outsider cannot illustrate the meanings of his wink if he does not understand the social code or public code of the wink in that culture. According to thick description, one may make several meanings of the wink: conspiracy; do not talk; false statement; etc. In contrast, according to thick description, to understand the actual meanings that boy wanted to create by winking. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is the popular method to depict the people's perceptions on any issues. In marketing, group discussion is applied to give a picture of consumer's demands and purpose of consuming goods. A matter of fact, there are suspicions: are consumers telling the truth? Is s/he disclosing her/his tastes and purchasing power in front of a group? Thereupon, thick description has scope to represent

the desires and purchasing power of people; and to depict the contradiction between what they want and what they really do. For example², “.... ask people what channel they watch on TV and they will tell you PBS. But, in reality, 60% of the time they are watching World Wide Wrestling.” (www.cdf.org)

By applying the approach thick description anthropologists can provide the user's demands and services they want. By analyzing the activities of daily lives of consumer (people), it is possible to reveal that whether the services of products disturb the users and sophisticated instructions balk them to reject the products. For example³, At Sapient, a tech consultancy based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a team of 70 corporate anthropologists consulted on how to design user-friendly products; moreover, at DaimlerChrysler, renowned French anthropologist G. Clotaire Rapaille had a hand in designing the PT Cruiser, one of the most successful automobiles in recent years. In Bangladesh, recently, a lot of Chinese autorickshaws, that are tricycle and powered by chargeable batteries, have got popularity among the passengers. Most of them are appeared in suburban places. Besides cheap rent, a group (consisting of five or six persons) of people can ride on that type of autorickshaw. It has been become a part of recreation. On the occasion, a family can hire it to go outside home. More precisely, it is the place (on the autorickshaw) where a group of people ride at a time, take seat face to face and gossip with each other. In contrast, other vehicles have less chance to sit face to face and gossip comfortably. I would like to show that recent autorickshaw is the ride as well as the place where people flexibly take seat face to face as if they are in drawing room. Therefore, the products gain the popularity if it is users friendly.

Employer and Employees: A Reciprocal Relation

Who are the employers and employees? What are their identities? There are many replies for these questions. One thing is very banal that they are the members of society and shared cultures. In order to maximize the profit in terms of materials and credits in terms of immaterial, a corporate needs the flexible and balanced reciprocal relation between employer and employee. Not only employer, but also the good relation

is needed between high-rank officer and low-ranked employees. Every employee is an individual part of the institution. The sum of the all employee is the institution and the sum of the all employees' contribution is the material and immaterial benefits. British Social Anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (1922) developed the theory of structural-functionalism to analyze the Andaman Islander's social organizations and their function. He argued that social organizations (e.g. marriage, law, kinship, family, religion etc.) are functionally interrelated. In the case corporate business, every corporate institution is a structure; every employee and departments are parts of that structure. If the parts (employees, departments) function, the structure (institution) goes well.

The employer and every employee go through the common code: official and professional behavior. Low-rank holders are officially subject to high-rank holder. The uncomfortable situation comes when low-rank officers are forced to mentally subject to anyone, because there is no objective scale to judge the mental dispositions of employee. Besides the balanced salary, employer should ensure that every employee is not unprofessionally and illogically subjugated. To my mind, the frequent labor unrest of garments factory of Bangladesh should be analyzed through the anthropological knowledge. Some significant questions are to be answered through the anthropological research on the relation between cheap labor and garments factory:

- How is the garments worker's labor abased as 'cheap labor'?
- In what process the workers' poverty is prolonged whereas thousands of businessmen have become millionaire?⁴
- As professional accountability, are the businessmen really ensuring social and economic securities of the laborer?

The apparent practice is that, staffs' labor, times, skill, above all merit is evaluated by paying salary. It is only the return in quantitative form. Staffs need dignity, respect, and credit; however, they have emotional attachments with the institution and other colleagues. These are very much qualitative. Working in an institution for a long time makes some ways in which staffs make bondage with each other. It is hard to assess such types of relations by paying in quantitative forms.

Reclaiming the Rethinking on 'Gender' and 'Child Labor'

Most of the corporate companies recruit female staffs. Nowadays, the advertisements titled 'Job Opportunity' put footnote that 'female candidates are cordially encouraged to apply'. Whether it is positive or negative that is another debatable matter. Private Banks, mobile company, multinational company and other international organizations are the sectors where the women are working like men. Like men, women have to stay at office until the office time ends. Moreover, like men, women have to perform official works in given working days. But, unlike men, women conceive child. For her privacy and comforts, she needs the appropriate desk and working environment. More precisely, pregnant friendly working environment is required for her.

Basic anthropological strengths are translated into strengths of corporate-anthropology

Strengths of Basic Anthropology

Write the Native's views
Participant observation in community
Analyzing the social organization

Identifying the social discrimination
Illustrating the worldviews in order to create social or cultural theory

Strengths of Corporate Anthropology

Write Consumer's views
Participant observation in community (consumers)
Analyzing the social organizations with consume-culture
Identifying the problems of consumers to reduce
Fitting the values and beliefs reate consumer friendly products

Figure 2: Basic anthropological strengths are translated into strengths of corporate anthropology

Officially and formally, child labor is not recruited in Bangladesh. It is plain as the nose on your face that many children sales products of famous companies in Dhaka city. For example, the children are hawking to sale the renowned daily newspapers of Bangladesh. They do not know that the newspapers publish the article on stopping child labor. A matter of fact, though child labor is not appreciated but it is functioning to makes profit of that companies. Through the observation upon children's labor and his/her contribution on national economy, anthropologists make children friendly working environment. Since they are contributing on national economy, their labor should be evaluated as labor. I would like to propose a suggestion to companies that, since the child labor is not practically avoided in the context of Bangladesh, corporate institutions responsibly recruit child laborer (who is bound to labor during childhood) at educational institutions, such as school, so that child have chance to take education from school. In a word, learning and earning scope for child laborer.

Comparison between Products to Corporate and Products to Consumers

<i>Products to Corporate</i>	<i>Products to Consumer</i>
Sale the products	Consume the products
Make quantitative profits	Get satisfaction
Objective on making profits	Subjective on reaching highest point of satisfaction
Products go to market	Products entire into culture
Product is material object	Product has symbolic value

Figure 3: Products to Corporate and Products to Consumer

Cautiousness for Corporate Anthropologist

The anthropologists are called 'cultural brokers', because their activities are involved in transferring knowledge, skill or service between distinct

cultures (Chambers 1985). Chambers also pointed out the applied anthropologist's roles: the representative role, the facilitator role, the informant role, the analyst role and the mediator role. Anthropological training helps anthropologist or practitioners to enter into the people's society, cultural map, and mind setup as well. It is needless to say that an anthropologist as a researcher has scope to enter into the practicing power with local community. Similarly, through depicting the community's knowledge, assessments on particular products, corporate anthropologists have to be cautious so that people's information will not have been misused. In this case, ethical codes of researchers would be ensured. Prior to research the consumer's worldviews, corporate anthropologist must respect the respondent's dignity and privacy.

From ethical responsibility, besides giving importance on company's interest, corporate anthropologists will take care of people's voice and sensitive issues they share; will not be apolitical on company's policy that have chance to disturb the community's life and will be critical (political economy) on company's goals. Research on consumers will be shared to the community, formal organization of consumer society, research institutions and universities. More precisely, consumer's worldviews will be published by corporate anthropologist. Since the extensiveness of applying anthropology is acknowledged in many NGOs, business organization, research institution, development organization and administrative institutions, anthropologists are hired by these organizations only for validating the policies made by organizations. Pant and Alberti (1997) reveal that in the fashion of anthropological consultancy many organizations hire anthropologists as a showpiece; anthropologists recommend enriching the policy from holistic perspective, but organizations do not largely consider anthropologist's research findings and recommendations. Perhaps, the inner causes are: biasness to particular group of people, avoiding critical-anthropological analysis, passiveness to the political economy and uncritical to business policy and so on.

Notes

1. See http://articles.cnn.com/2001-05-23/business/corp.anthropologist.idg_1_corporate-anthropology-squires-cool-idea?s=PM:CAREER (last browsed: 27 January 2011)
2. See www.cdf.org/.../coming_of_age_of_corporate_anthropology.html (last browsed: 27 January 2011)
3. http://articles.cnn.com/2001-05-23/business/corp.anthropologist.idg_1_corporate-anthropology-squires-cool-idea?s=PM:CAREER (last browsed: 27 January 2011)
4. See <http://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/29/2862/labor-unrest-can-bangladesh-turn-the-tide1.asp> (last browsed: 27 January 2011).

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