

Religious Values of Youth within the Framework of the Sociology of Culture

Andrey V. Artukhov^{1,*}, Lidia V. Rebysheva² and Yulia P. Savickaya²

¹*Tyumen Region Duma, Tyumen, Russian Federation*

²*Department of Marketing and Public Administration, Industrial University of Tyumen, Tyumen, Russian Federation*

Abstract: In a situation of paradigm pluralism of modern sociology, the selection of certain provisions for the formation of a theoretical framework always causes certain difficulties and problems. On the one hand, there is a clear division of sociological knowledge along the line of the classical – non-classical, and on the other hand, in the present conditions this division looks somewhat artificial and, according to many analysts, should be replaced by the integration of approaches, theories, and concepts, the creation of an integrative paradigm. Therefore, considering the sociological heritage and new developments, it is necessary to select those groups of theoretical propositions that will help reveal the diversity of values in empirical research. The novelty of the research is determined by the existence of a certain hierarchy in the value system. As part of any value system, one can distinguish, first of all, dominant values. The authors show that the system of values determines the criteria recognised by society, based on which control over the activities of people is carried out and their behaviour is regulated, that is, it is the system of values that ensures civil order. It acts as a theoretical framework for social activity. Authors determine that the value system regulates the behaviour of people in society and directs it in the proper, correct direction. It acts as a guideline when choosing a method of action, forms goals and leads to their achievement. The practical significance of the research is determined by the fact that each culture creates its individual system of value guidelines, which serve as a kind of model, determine the direction of the actions of a person or the entire society, that is, values of a certain kind of motivators of actions.

Keywords: Culture, development, structure, dynamics, sociology.

INTRODUCTION

The main source of the sociology of culture is the structuralist perspective, or rather the compendium of the provisions of structural-functional analysis (Coburn 2011). Its first starting point is the requirement to consider society as a system of interrelated structures that make it up and form a single whole (Yeh, Borrero, Shea 2011). Within the framework of our study of the spiritual values of modern students, this position should be considered in two dimensions: understanding of modern society as a holistic education, one of the components of the structure of which is a specific social group of students; consideration of the phenomenon of values as a complex structured system that opens the way to understanding the human nature, its actions and deeds in the socio-cultural environment. Each society has its own specific structure of values, its “basic” values that determine its further development, place in global social and political systems. On this basis, values are defined as a complex structured system, one of the components of which is the system of spiritual values that guide people in their daily practices in a situation of rapid social change.

Considering the individualist-collectivist aspirations that take place in society, there are 3 value systems

that have formed or are being formed in the contemporary world: individual-functional, group-cooperative, egalitarian-structural (Karvonen *et al.* 2012), which coexist in the political dimension, however, are inherently opposing and often conflicting (Adams and Loofft 1977). In this context, conflicts are quite real and even inevitable, as they are often associated with the destruction of traditional values due to global changes (Ponce 1985).

From a global perspective, crossbreeding (mixing) and interpenetration of value systems, which corresponds to the spirit of globalisation. In processes, especially in cultural globalisation, it is possible to form new value systems, hybrids of values of sorts (Lee, Beckert, and Goodrich 2010). Global challenges have an extremely large impact on the value system, which is expressed not only at the beginning of the formation of a complex of global (universal) values, but also in a significant modification and renewal of value systems within individual nation states (Theron *et al.* 2011). In this process, a lot of weight is given to ideology based on the belief in shared values (value systems) (Martinez and Polo 2018). As an example, the process of creating the European Union embodies a value consensus (Stein and Polo 2014). In the process of value diffusion, great importance is attached to the following factors: equality, fairness, and respect for cultural differences (Davis, Carlo, and Knight 2015).

*Address correspondence to this author at the Tyumen Region Duma, Russian Federation; Tel: +7 345 245-50-81; E-mail: a_artukhov2@tanu.pro

The next procedure for structural and functional analysis is to identify phenomena of various kinds based on their typology and classification. More than thirty types of social values are distinguished. Conventionally, they can be grouped into several blocks according to the individual's areas of activity: religious; cognitive; artistic (creative); moral; sensual; legal. Each of these blocks can be attributed to several types of values, the concepts of which are used to describe social processes. Representatives of macrostructuralism in sociology identified 4 main types of values:

- 1) particularistic values, which constitute a means of integration and support of solidarity (values of this type can unite members of groups or particular individuals around a certain idea) (Gorlova *et al.* 2012);
- 2) universalistic values, which represent certain stereotypes, based on which the comparative value of various entities that can be presented for exchange is determined (these values enable society to determine the value of each individual contribution to a common cause and provide an appropriate reward for the individual, including improvement of their social status) (Richmond, Braughton, and Borden 2018);
- 3) "values of legitimate authority" (this is a system of values that gives particular individuals more powers and rights than other members of a given society);
- 4) "opposition values" or "revolutionary", which cause a feeling of the need for changes in society and legitimise the opposition (Scales 2011).

At the social level, processes significantly differ from the ones that occur at the level of individual being (Lee *et al.* 2017). The world of values has different meanings in everyday life. The transition from the individual to the social level involves the complicated mechanisms of value regulation in structured and hierarchical social systems that function in the coordinates of social change (Savicki 1999). Values are divided into two main types: materialistic values (orientation towards material well-being), and post-materialistic values (orientation towards prestige, self-fulfilment, mutual understanding, etc.) (McCuish *et al.* 2018). Thus, 4 value types of people are distinguished: a carrier of a "pure" materialistic orientation, a carrier of

a "pure" post-materialist orientation; the rest are intermediate "mixed" types.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The theoretical framework of the study was based on a structural-functional approach, which opens the way to a typology and classification of spiritual values, the possibility of considering them based on multilevel sociological knowledge, as well as an understanding of the openness of social systems of social changes and transformations. In this paper and upon the implementation of the original sociological research, the authors used the hierarchisation procedure as one of the components of the structural and functional analysis. Cultural changes are analysed in religious beliefs, motivations at work, in attitudes towards children and family, in political conflicts, etc. Value changes comes down to replacing "old" values with "new" ones associated with socio-economic progress. This creates the framework for the further development of human society towards the establishment of gender equality, democratic freedoms, new moral norms and values (Ho *et al.* 2007).

The theory of modernisation and post-modernisation, or the theory of two shifts, occupies a significant place in the understanding of modern value and worldview processes. Modernisation, first and foremost, constitutes an increase in the economic and political possibilities of society: economic – through industrialisation; political – through bureaucratisation. Modernisation has great appeal because it allows society to move away from poverty towards wealth. The theory is based on the differences between three generations of people who grew up in traditional, transitional, and industrial societies. Those who grew up where the access to basic goods (such as food, shelter, security) was problematic, became people with survival values. With that, if they live in conditions of industrialisation, the development of which promises them the availability of these benefits, they become people with secular-rational values, that is, they highly value authority, rationality, order, and security. Unlike the generation of their parents who grew up in a traditional society, where the receipt of good was associated with the preservation of the existing and with supernatural forces, these people demonstrate a shift towards secular and rational values (Milas *et al.* 2019). This is called the modernisation (first) shift. The generation of children of such people, raised in an environment in which food, life, and other basic goods are taken for granted, become people with a broader

horizon than concern for survival. Among them, the ideas of tolerance, civic participation, nature protection, and self-knowledge are gaining popularity. Such values are called the values of self-expression, and their difference from the secular-rational values of the previous generation constitutes a post-modernisation shift, which naturally leads to the emergence or improvement of the quality of democracy in the country.

Values in sociological science are largely considered as norms or regulators of the activity of both an individual and a particular social group. The authors are in solidarity with the expression that in the life of modern society, values play the role of a kind of “control centres” of human behaviour, because they determine the meaning, strategy of purposeful activity, and thereby regulate social interactions, internally encouraging activities in the surrounding social environment (Rivas-Drake and Stein 2017). Speaking of the functions of values, attention is paid to such functions as integrating, identification, the function of standards of behaviour, forming, and normalising functions, the function of constructing the meaning of life and orientational functions. For example, spiritual values, which constitute the object of authors’ sociological analysis, perform the main integrative (consolidating) function that ensures the stability of society. On the other hand, spiritual values are also called upon to perform communicative, aesthetic, moral, ethical, and symbolic functions (Manchester and Pett 2015).

Authors pay attention to social regulators of human behaviour at various levels of social reality. In particular, at the micro level, they operate with the postulates of success, incentive, derivation – satiety, aggression – approval, rationality. The postulate of value is distinguished separately (positive and negative values are distinguished), which lies in that the more value holds the result of person's action, the higher the likelihood that the person will commit that action. At the macro level, the connecting mechanism constitutes norms and values (“value consensus”), which allow indirect social exchange and govern the processes of social integration and differentiation in complex social structures. Unfortunately, the meso-level of value analysis that we use in relation to students as a social group has not been highlighted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study of social change is central to sociology. Social change is seen as the transformation of society

from an earlier to a later stage. One advance is to look at social change proceeding from the concept of trauma. In this case, trauma is understood as a process that dynamically unfolds and goes through several stages: from the structural and cultural prerequisites that contribute to the occurrence of trauma, to the stage of overcoming it. Any social change can be viewed as carrying a traumatic, destructive, dysfunctional consequence both for the individual, social group, and for society at large. One of the reasons for social changes is seen in the psychology of a human, its inner desire for change and innovation. The agents of social change can be prominent individuals and social movements. During periods of social change, two features of social consciousness emerge:

- 1) “agent syndrome” (people realise that a lot depends on specific human actions, they see themselves as potentially significant actors, agents; this is where the questions arise: who causes changes, who is responsible for the processes that take place, what social groups stimulate them, and how a particular person can contribute to these changes);
- 2) “historical syndrome” (people look at their time only as a segment of a broader stream of history, they look back in search of roots, traditions, genealogy of modern society, look ahead with the intention of imagining the future course of events).

Social trauma, which is important for this paper, is caused, first and foremost, by a break in the value foundations of the usual symbols, signs, and meanings of social reality. The trauma of radical social transformations arises from their suddenness for most people and from their totality, since they decisively affect all spheres of social life, radically changing the nature of everyday life. It is due to the latter circumstance that such transformations decisively affect all members of society and devalue the usual rules of social action accumulated by previous life experience, make the individual a kind of bankrupt. Any of its forced structural and functional changes are accompanied by losses – the emergence of “unnecessary” social units and “redundant” people. Such losses are the flip side of any transformation process.

Trauma occurs when there is a split, displacement, disorganisation in an ordered, self-explanatory world.

Trauma is a collective phenomenon, a state that a group, a community experiences as a result of events that are interpreted as culturally traumatic. Trauma can occur at the demographic level of collectivity (biological degradation of the population, epidemics, mental disabilities, a decrease in the birth rate and an increase in mortality, hunger, etc.); trauma affects the social structure, where it can destroy the existing channels of social relations, social systems, hierarchy (political anarchy, disruption of economic exchange, panic, and desertion of the active army, disruption and disintegration of the family, etc.). The most important is cultural trauma, because it has the strongest inertia, continues to exist longer than other types of trauma, sometimes retaining in collective memory for generations, and with that, from time to time, under favourable circumstances, it can remind of itself (ethnic, national traumas that are rooted in violent, traumatic events of the past).

The influence of the same potentially traumatic events or situations can be qualitatively different for different groups (for some it is useful and desirable, for others it is destructive and harmful, and others are ignored). Methodologically important for this paper is attention to the inevitability of social changes that currently take place in society and have a tremendous impact on the values of ordinary citizens, especially youth. It is youth, including students, who are primarily exposed to cultural trauma, the essence of which, in an era of gigantic social transformations, lies in the destruction of the old, key system of values (traditional values of local culture), the absence of new positive development values acceptable to society, the spread of pseudo-values, asocial lifestyles. At the present stage of development of our society, with its characteristic pluralism of opinions, it is necessary to pay attention to the formation of the spirituality of the younger generation, the value comprehension of the surrounding world. The spiritual values of student youth are precisely the object of scientific research, the study of which, in authors' opinion, is worth pursuing with the use of sociological tools.

Upon studying the issues of spirituality and spiritual values of students, the authors conducted a sociological survey among experts on this issue at the end of 2019. The survey allowed to discover that 66.7% of experts believe that the study of spiritual values of modern student youth is a very important task of higher education (29.9% of experts chose the option "important"). The option "not remotely important" was chosen by only one person from the education sector

(1.1%), and three people from this area (3.3% of the total number of respondents) remained neutral. Among the representatives of the religious sphere there were no persons who consider the issues of studying the spiritual values of modern student youth unimportant.

To understand the need to study this problem, the authors asked the experts to substantiate the relevance of research and study of the spiritual values of modern student youth. It should be said that experts consider students to be an important and active force in modern sociocultural transformations. The future of society will largely depend on what values students put in to social and political changes, what culture they support. Analysis and study of the spiritual values of student youth are relevant and are considered by experts as a priority area in the educational process. The priority of this area is made dependent by experts on the level of development of spiritual values of modern students. Thus, in the opinion of the majority of experts (57.8%), the level of development of the spiritual values of the students is mediocre; about a third (31.1%) consider it low, and only 5.6% of the respondents consider it high. This indicates the need to increase the level of development of the spiritual values of students, because spiritual values describe the essence of the life of a young person, determine how young people will build their future; they influence the behaviour of students today and determine the state of economic and political development of society tomorrow.

In the process of forming spiritual values, the important question is "at what age is a person ready to understand and adequately perceive spiritual values?". According to a third of the surveyed experts (33.3%), the most optimal period is from birth to 5 years of age. 10.0% of surveyed experts noted that at the age of 6 to 10, children are most ready to understand spiritual values, and 23.3% of respondents say that this is the age from 11 to 15 years. Furthermore, about a third of the experts (26.7%) noted that university age is favourable for a person's perception of spiritual values, and for 5.6% of experts – adult age that goes beyond the university age. Thus, there was no consensus among the experts regarding the optimal period when a person is most ready to understand and adequately perceive spiritual values. An important task of this study was to identify which factors influence the development of students' spiritual values the most (see Figure 1).

As is evident from Figure 1, representatives of the education sector believe that the family has the

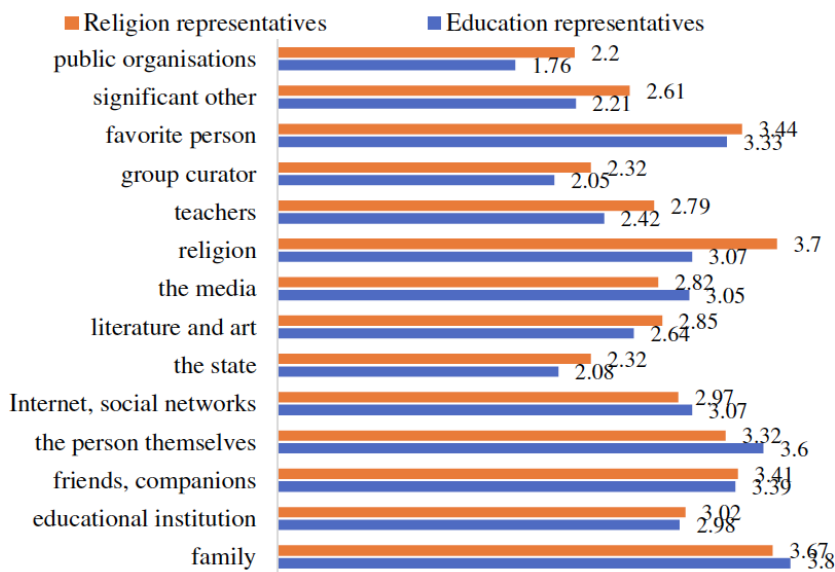


Figure 1: Factors that Influence the Modern Development of Spiritual Values of Student Youth (n = 90, 2019), Average Value/Rank, by Areas of Activity of Experts.

greatest influence on the modern development of the spiritual values of student youth (in first place in terms of the importance of influence). Other factors include the person themselves and their environment (friends, companions, significant other). As for the representatives of the religious sphere, for them the most significant influence on the development of students' spiritual values is carried out by religion; followed by factors such as family, significant other, friends, companions and the person themselves. Intermediate positions according to the sphere of influence were taken by such factors as the Internet, social networks, educational institution, the media, literature and art. Among the least important factors influencing the development of the spiritual values of modern students, experts named the state, the curator of the group, famous personalities and public organisations. In a summary, generalised form, the system of factors that has an impact on the formation of spiritual values of students, according to experts, looks as follows (in decreasing order of importance): family (3.73), the person themselves (3.46), friends, companions (3.40), significant other (3.38), religion (3.38), Internet and social networks (3.02), educational institution (3.0), the media (2.93), literature and art (2.74), teachers (2.60), prominent individuals (2.41) the state (2.20), curator (mentor) of the group (2.18), public organisations (1.98).

An important place in the system of forming spiritual values is occupied by the sphere of culture, human involvement in participation in cultural events and activities. Among the cultural events that contribute to

the spiritual development of a student's personality, experts, first and foremost, named visits to churches, holy places, spiritual enlightenment (94.4%). Next in importance is visits to theatres, museums, exhibitions (74.4%). Excursions to historical sites (58.9%), reading classical literature and visiting libraries (57.8%) took an intermediate place. Next, according to the rating estimates, are the following events: popular science programmes, creative evenings, workshops (48.9%), national traditions (47.8%), and visiting lectures of famous scientists (41.1%). Spiritual values play the role of a kind of axiological ground, influencing all spheres of human existence. The important role of spiritual values in determining life goals, in solving the most important tasks for a person, which are implemented throughout that person's life.

As is evident from Figure 2, representatives of the religious sphere, as well as representatives of the educational sphere who took part in authors' survey, are convinced that spiritual values, first and foremost, help an individual to become a decent and honest person (average value for representatives of the educational sphere is 3.75 and for religious sphere – 3.91). In the second rank position – spiritual values contribute to the creation of a strong family and good upbringing of children (with an average value of 3.64 and 3.88, respectively), in third place – to be useful to society and other people (3.48 and 3.73). Furthermore, representatives of the religious sphere put such a property as a successful marriage in the fourth place, while teachers rank fourth the development of resilience in the face of life's difficulties and respect for

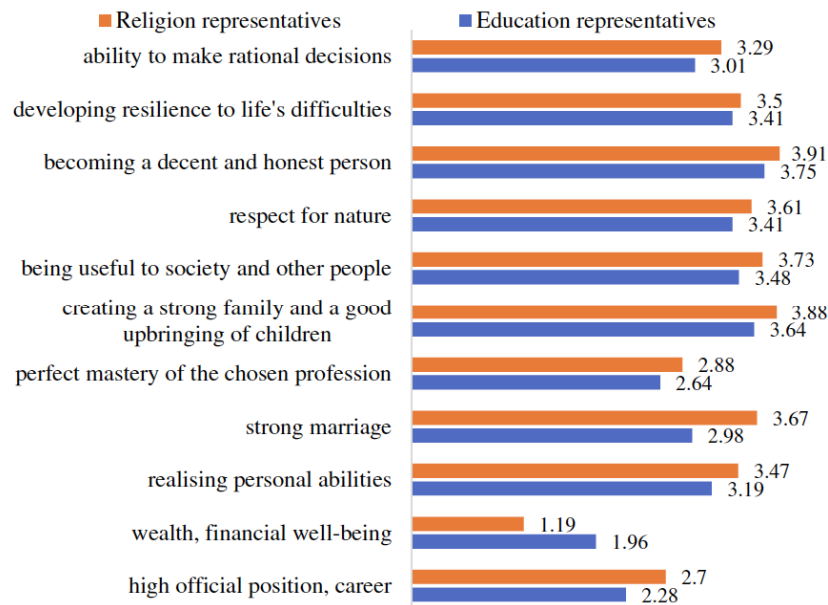


Figure 2: The Measure of the Influence of Spiritual Values on a Person’s Achievement of Personal Life Goals, (n = 90, 2019), Average Value/Rank, by Areas of Activity of Experts.

nature. According to the results of the study, experts almost unequivocally agreed on the insignificant influence of spiritual values on the achievement of financial success and well-being; career growth and achievement of success in perfect mastery of their profession. The educational process is no less significant for the formation of students' spiritual values. According to experts, such academic disciplines as ethics (56.7%), religious studies (44.4%), philosophy (40.0%), cultural studies (37.8%), psychology (30.0%), history (28.9%), pedagogy (21.1%), sociology (17.8%) and aesthetics (13.3%) have a huge influence on the formation of the spiritual component of a student's personality. Furthermore, almost all experts agreed with

the statement that the content of the professional disciplines of the university should be supplemented with information reflecting the spiritual heritage of humankind (51.1% of the respondents quite agree, 41.1% rather agree than disagree, 4.4% disagree with this statement).

A separate problem is the degree of effectiveness of some methods of transferring knowledge about spirituality and spiritual values. As is evident from Figure 3, among the effective ways of transferring knowledge about spirituality and spiritual values for students youth, experts named the transfer and assimilation of knowledge through direct communication with leading specialists (“masters”) in

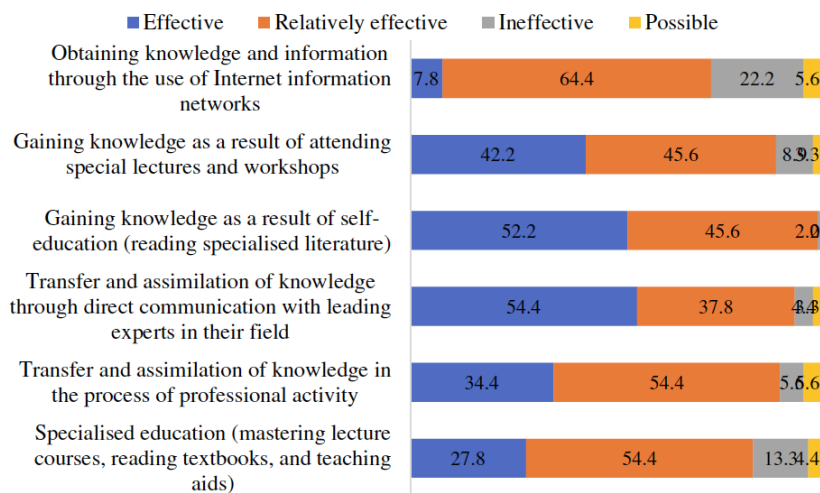


Figure 3: Distribution of Answers to the Question: “On the Effectiveness of Different Ways of Transferring Knowledge for the Formation of Spiritual Values of Student Youth”, (n = 90, 2019), in %.

their field (54.4%), and gaining knowledge as a result of self-education (reading specialised literature) (52.2%). Relatively effective ways of transferring knowledge, according to experts, are specialised education (mastering lecture courses, reading textbooks and teaching aids) (54.4%), transferring and mastering knowledge in the process of professional activity (54.4%), gaining knowledge as a result of attending special lectures and workshops (45.6%), and obtaining knowledge and information through the use of Internet information networks (64.4%).

Investigating the issue of spiritual values of student youth, it was important for authors to find out the opinion of experts on the necessity for the formation of the concept of the formation and development of spiritual values of youth at the state level. It turned out that the overwhelming majority of the interviewed experts, which accounts for 72.2%, quite agree with this statement, 10.0% disagree, and 17.8% chose the answer "difficult to answer". If the work experience of experts is considered, then among those who answered affirmatively to this question, there are 22.2% of persons with work experience of less than 5 years, 21.1% with work experience of 5-10 years, 15.6% with work experience of 11-20 years, and 13.3% with work experience of over 20 years.

CONCLUSION

The issue of studying the spiritual values of student youth is a very important and urgent problem, because students are an active force for political and social changes. University age is very favourable for understanding and adequate perception of spiritual values by a person, because this is the central period of the formation and stabilisation of character, the most active development of moral and aesthetic feelings. The greatest influence on the development of the spiritual values of student youth, according to experts from the field of education, are such factors as the family, the person themselves and their environment (friends, companions, significant other). As for the representatives of the religious sphere, for them the most significant influence on the development of students' spiritual values is played by religion; followed by factors such as family, significant other, friends, companions, and the person themselves. Among the least important factors, experts named the state, the curator (mentor) of the group, famous personalities and public organisations.

The spiritual development of the student's personality, in the opinion of teachers and clergy, is

promoted, first of all, by visiting churches, holy places, spiritual enlightenment, visiting theatres, museums, exhibitions, excursions to historical places, as well as reading classical literature, and visiting libraries. Experts in both the religious sphere and the educational sphere argue that spiritual values have a positive effect on all spheres of a person's life, in particular, they help a person become a decent and honest person, contribute to the creation of a good family and proper upbringing of children, and develop resilience in the face of life's difficulties. Experts named the transfer and assimilation of knowledge through direct communication with leading specialists ("masters") of their craft and gaining knowledge as a result of self-education (reading specialised literature) among the most effective ways of transferring knowledge about spirituality and spiritual values to students.

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