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Website as a gateway for the provision of public archives and records management guidance: a Botswana – South Africa comparison

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Abstract

National archival agencies are mandated to manage public sector archives and records. They provide guidance by issuing, among others, guidelines, policies, and procedures. With advances in technology, and in the spirit of e-government, it is expected that national archival agencies should have websites through which key documents that provide guidance on the management of archives and records are made accessible online. The purpose of this study was to compare the websites of Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) and the National Archives and Records Services of South Africa (NARSSA) with specific reference to key documents providing guidance on the proper management of public archives and records. This study is qualitative and obtained data from a content analysis of the websites of the two organisations. These were supplemented by interviews from selected key officers responsible for public archives and records management programmes. It is notable that BNARS has a website that can be accessed through Botswana's Department of Information Technology. On the website, the only downloadable guidance document is an archives search room inquiry form. Comparatively, NARSSA has a more comprehensive website with downloadable guidance documents such as file plans, templates records management policies, records retention and disposable schedules, and functional specifications for electronic records management systems, to mention just a few. It is recommended that BNARS should have a comprehensive website with guidance documents posted on it to provide guidance for proper public archives and records management practices.

Key words: archives, Botswana National Archives and Records Services, National Archives and Records Services of South Africa, records

Introduction and background

Archival agencies are normally established by legislation to provide archives and records management guidance to public bodies. In Commonwealth countries, archival legislation provides national archives with the statutory mandate to manage and preserve government

records (Goh 2016). It serves as a framework for organised archives and records management because, without it, a deficit of information access is created (Okello-Obura, 2011). Therefore, as authoritative bodies in the field and profession of archives and records management in the public sector, archival agencies are expected to be visible and use various methods available to make information about their services available to consumers of their services. In the case of Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS), the department uses social media platforms to reach out to users and potential users online (Mosweu, 2019). That way, potential users of archival services such as researchers, students, the public and even government officials would be informed about services provided by the national archives. According to Saurombe and Ngulube (2016), creating awareness by archivists, about the services provided by the archives is called public programming. Through public programming, users of archives are made aware of the archival service and encouraged to use it. It is necessary to undertake public programming, as very few people use the information services provided by public archives ((Kamatula, Mnkeni-Saurombe & Mosweu, 2013). In the words of Gregor (2001:1), public programming enables archivists to “promote the use of archives and educate their sponsors and users in how to use them”. Thus, public programming turns into an educational service that guides potential users of archives to use the information service provided.

A part of national archives’ services includes providing guidance to public agencies on proper archives and records management services. For example, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) of the US provides guidance to help public agencies understand and comply with applicable regulations, executive orders, and the law, to support records management, access, and information security goals (NARA 2021). The Federal Agency also provides guidance to help the public understand the ways in which federal information may be accessed, how to request for service and how to comment on policies. Among others, NARA has posted guidance documents on its website, including:

- Classified national security information guidance
- Controlled unclassified information guidance
- Records management guidance
- Freedom of Information Act Ombudsman guidance

Elsewhere, other national archival agencies use their websites to guide public agencies by posting key guidance documents such as policies and procedures. Table 1 presents examples of key guidance documents posted on the websites of selected national archives.

Table 1: Websites of selected national archives

Archival agency	Website address	Key guidance documents posted
National Archives of Zimbabwe	http://www.archives.gov.zw/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. National Archives of Zimbabwe Act of 1986 b. Printed Publications Act of 1975 c. Digital Records Management Framework of 2018 d. Management of Records during Administrative Change e. Common Classes Retention and Disposal Schedule of 2014 <p>(Documents downloadable)</p>
Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service	http://www.archives.go.ke/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. National Records Management Policy b. Microfilming Guides c. Records Disposal Act of 1962 (All not downloadable)
Public Records and Archives Administration of Ghana	https://praad.gov.gh/	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Records Office Procedures Manual b. Procedures Manual for Unstructured records Office c. Records Office Restructuring Guide d. National Records Centre Procedures Manual e. Records Disposition Guide f. Omnibus Schedule for the retention and disposition of Public Records g. Records Office In-service Training Guide h. Desk instructions for action officers <p>Listed but no documents uploaded</p>

Botswana National Archives and Records Services

The BNARS was established by an Act of Parliament, the National Archives and Records Services Act of 1978 (as amended in 2007). Notably, the department predated the legislation, which was formally established as it began operations in 1967. Initially, BNARS was mandated to manage public archives, excluding public records. Mbakile (2004) notes that following the 1995 recommendations of an Organisation and Methods Review, the Permanent Secretary to the President (PSP) Circular No. 4 of 1992 established the BNARS as a department and extended its mandate to also manage current records in government. This meant the management of all government records, from the point of creation to the non-current stage using the life cycle approach. The extended mandate to manage both public records and archives (Government of Botswana, 2007) led to the department being renamed the Botswana National Archives and Records Services, from the Botswana National Archives (Mbakile, 2004). As part of its mandate, BNARS provides guidance to government departments on proper records management practices.

National Archives and Records Services of South Africa

The National Archives and Records Services of South Africa (NARSSA) derives its mandate from the National Archives and Records Services of South Africa Act (Government of South Africa, 1996). The department is thus responsible for taking proper management and care of

the records of governmental bodies, and for the preservation and use of national archival heritage. This mandate includes ensuring that governmental bodies manage electronic records using well-structured record keeping systems, as governed by appropriate policies and procedures in compliance with the requirements of the Act. For example, in terms of section 13(2) (b) of this Act, the National Archivist shall “determine the conditions subject to which electronic records systems should be managed” (Government of South Africa, 1996). Therefore, NARSSA requires all governmental bodies to implement strategies necessary to support effective management of electronic records.

Using websites for information sharing

There are several platforms for information dissemination, which include print media, electronic media like radio or television and the World Wide Web (Bhattacharya, 2010). This was made possible by the rapid rise of the internet and its advantages as a medium for information dissemination (Duffy, 2000). Websites are now commonly used for information dissemination, and they have become one of the most important vehicles for information dissemination (Bhattacharya, 2010). According to United Nations (2001:1), “web technologies have evolved during the last years into one of the most important information channels and constitute one of the backbones in the development of what is called the information society.” Organisations, both public and private, have embraced the use of websites for various reasons, ranging from commerce, marketing, recruitment of staff and archival public programming. Shonhe (2017) opines that the use of ICTs allows multiple access to information resources. As an example, Table 1 presents selected organisations with their websites, as used for different purposes.

Table 1: Selected examples of organisations and their websites

Organisation	Use of website	Website address
Absa Bank Botswana Limited	Online Banking Services	https://www.absa.co.bw/personal/
Botswana Agricultural Marketing Board	Marketing of agricultural produce	https://www.bamb.co.bw/
Attorney General Chambers’ Botswana	Communication of services provided	https://www.gov.bw/ministries/attorney-generals-chambers
Civil Aviation Authority of Botswana	Marketing of civil aviation services	https://www.caab.co.bw/

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach using content analysis. According to Bengtsson (2016:8), “no matter what chosen method, the process of analysis reduces the volume of text collected, identifies and groups categories together and seeks some understanding of it”. Content analysis can be utilised in studying documents, artefacts, films, audios, and other forms of communication text. Meaning is derived from complex, lengthy messages and conclusions are drawn from meaning extracted from text (Parveen & Showkat, 2017). The meaning extracted from text followed its categorisation as coded in alignment with the objectives of the study. Data were collected from a content analysis of the websites of

BNARS and NARSSA. In addition, a review of available literature was done to supplement content analysis of the websites. A review of literature was used to supplement content analysis in line with Ngoepe, Masego and Tsabedze (2020) who used it to assess the preservation of, and access to, archives at the eSwatini National Archives.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The main purpose of the study was to answer a research question on what BNARS can learn from NARSSA in terms of the website as a gateway for the provision of public archives and records management guidance. Specific objectives were designed to provide answers for the research question. Research objectives provide boundaries of a research study. They provide specific research topics or issues intended to be investigated (Thomas & Hodges, 2010). The objectives of this study were as follows:

- To determine provisions for the dissemination of information for guidance purposes in the national archival legislation of Botswana and South Africa.
- To find out whether the national agencies of both Botswana and South Africa have websites to disseminate information on public archives and records management.
- To identify key documents published on the website for purposes of providing archives and records management guidance to public agencies.

Findings of the study

The findings of the study are presented in the next section. They have been organised in accordance with the objectives of the study.

Archival legislation provisions for the dissemination of information for guidance purposes

Governments must utilise legislation to ensure the preservation of records and archives over time. This makes archives legislation a critical component in the broader regulatory framework for an accountable and effective government (Hamooya, Mulaudzi & Njobvu, 2011). According to Mosweu and Simon (2018), archival legislation is the basis for records and archives management in any country. Goh (2016) also points out that pieces of legislation in Commonwealth countries provide the national archives with the statutory mandate to manage and preserve government records. The next section presents the findings on Botswana and South Africa's archival legislation provisions on information dissemination.

Botswana

The first objective of the study sought to investigate provisions for the dissemination of information for guidance purposes in the national archival legislation of Botswana and South Africa. Mosweu and Simon (2018) observe that the National Archives and Records Services Act of Botswana mandates BNARS to make accessible the nation's documentary heritage to the public. Specifically, section 5(i) and 5(L) requires the director to publicise National Archives holdings. Section 5(i) stipulates that the director "may compile, make available and

publish indices and guides to public archives in the National Archives”, while section 5(1) requires the director to “prepare publications concerning the activities of, and the facilities provided by, the National Archives or any place of deposit”. Mosweu and Simon (2018) argue that the cited provision prescribes for BNARS to publicise holdings in its repository, including making available any publications on records and archives produced to promote access to records. BNARS markets itself through exhibitions, workshops, advertising and tailor-made presentations as well as the use of social media in recognition of today’s online world (Mosweu & Simon, 2018). The findings of this study for Botswana thus indicated that its national legislation for archives and records management has provisions for the dissemination of information for its services.

South Africa

NARSSA has several provisions which, in totality, can be regarded as providing for the dissemination of information about services offered by the department. These are as follows:

- Section 3(h): “Promote an awareness of archives and records management and encourage archival and records management activities.”
- Section 5(b): “Provide information, consultation, research and other services related to records.”
- Section 5(c): “With special emphasis on activities designed to reach out to less privileged sectors of society, make known information concerning records by means such as publications, exhibitions and the lending of records.”

With reference to the provisions of section 3(h) about awareness creation for archives services, Kamatula et al. (2013) note that although public archives offer information services to the public and other interested parties, their facilities are used by few people. In fact, Ngoepe and Ngulube (2011:3) observe that, “only a small percentage of the population is aware that archives are open to the public.” Saurombe and Ngulube (2016) affirm that, as a memory institution, the national archives is an important part of South African society and so it should exercise its mandate and make societal engagement with the archives a reality through the efforts of archivists. To this end, NARSSA (2016) has a public programme whose purpose is to open the national archives to the public and lure in or create new users. The programme serves as an interface between public archives and society.

- Section 5(b): “Provide information, consultation, research and other services related to records.”
- Section 5(c): “With special emphasis on activities designed to reach out to less privileged sectors of society, make known information concerning records by means such as publications, exhibitions and the lending of records.”

With reference to provision of section 5(b) and 5(c), it is notable that NARSSA provides information to assist governmental bodies to comply with the spirit of the national archival legislation. For example, NARSSA developed a prototype file plan to guide governmental bodies on the classification of records based on business functions (NARSSA, 1998). Despite this legal prescription, Makhura and Ngoepe (2006) note that government departments still manage records without approved classification systems. This is clearly a contravention of archives law, which gives NARSSA and the national archivist the powers to evaluate and

approve the records classification systems used by governmental bodies (Mojapelo & Ngoepe, 2017).

Availability of websites for information dissemination on archives and records management

NARSSA

The second objective of the study sought to find out whether the two national archival agencies had websites for the dissemination of information about archives and records management services. For NARSSA, the findings showed that the department had a website located at: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.za/>. Figure 1 in the next page shows the interface of the NARSSA website.

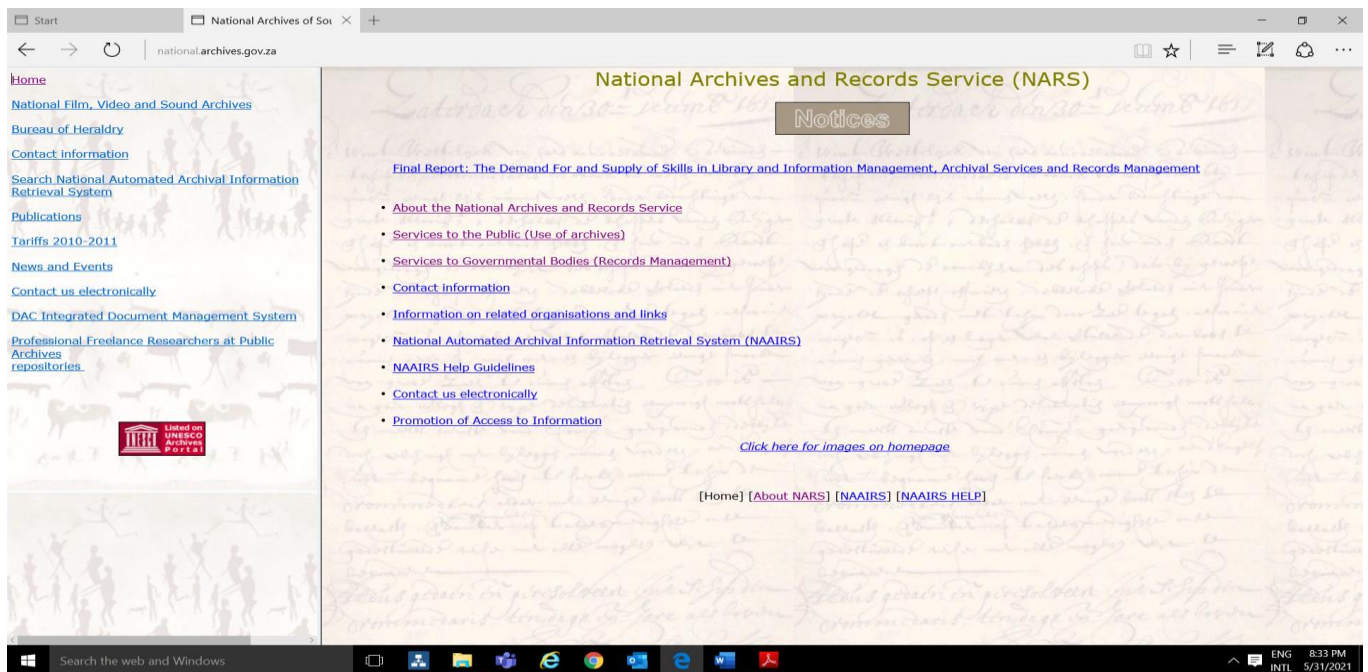


Figure 1: NARSSA website homepage

Source: NARSSA website (2021)

Posted on the NARSSA website is selected information about its services and these relate to:

- National Film, Video and Sound Archives
- Publications
- National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System

NARSSA provides detailed information about the services it renders to the public and governmental bodies. These are too numerous to cite. It is, therefore, enough to just give an example by citing guidance documents shared under publications, and these are placed under the following:

1. General archives and records management policy and procedures
2. Management of electronic records
3. Records Classification Systems
4. Disposal of records

It is very clear that NARSSA provides much detailed guidance on several aspects of archives and records management, ranging from filing systems, records management policy and procedures, disposal of records and functional specifications for electronic records management systems.

BNARS

This study has shown that BNARS does not have a website. In a study that investigated the use of social media platforms for increased access and visibility by BNARS, it also emerged that the department does not have a website of its own, a situation which requires consumers of archival services to physically visit the archival repository to obtain a service (Mosweu, 2019). Notably, an earlier study by Ngoepe and Keakopa (2011) had stated that BNARS had a web page within its parent ministry's website (Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sport, and Culture Development). The website was supposed to post publications and other informational materials, but it has been dysfunctional for some time.

All is not gloom and doom through. There is a website that appears under the Culture, Sports, and Tourism home page. Figure 2 provides an overview of the said website, which indicates that BNARS receives and responds to general enquiries pertaining to collection (archival materials) such as books, files, audiotapes, videos, and microfilms from anyone who intends to do research. It should be noted that this is a narrow view of the mandate of the department, as this is not all it does.

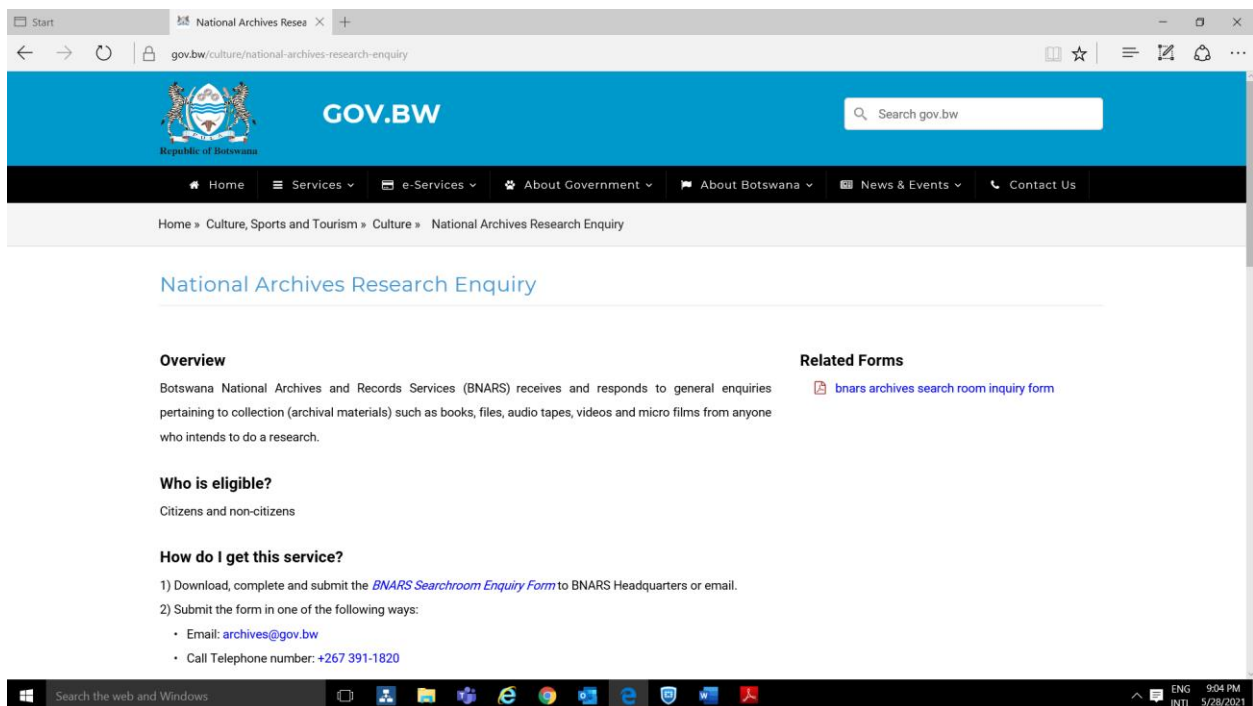


Figure 2: GOV.BW website

It is a contradictory to the ideals of Botswana's e-government programme that BNARS does not have a website of its own where it disseminates information about the services it renders to the public. The National ICT Policy, known as Maitlamo Policy (Government of Botswana, 2007:2),

Provides Botswana with a clear and compelling roadmap that will drive social, economic, cultural and political transformation in the years ahead through the effective use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). The Policy complements and builds upon Vision 2016 and provides many of the key strategies essential for achieving Botswana's national development targets.

Maitlamo Policy has eight objectives, two of which are to provide "government services available electronically" and to provide "access to relevant, localised and understandable information for all citizens" (Government of Botswana, 2007). These are good and practical objectives, which, in the context of BNARS, are yet to be achieved fully. The Botswana Government's e-Government Strategy, which started in 2011, leveraged on the Maitlamo Policy as a foundation to further transform the public service through the realisation that ICTs can "dramatically increase access to, and availability of, life enriching information and services" (Government of Botswana, 2012).

Key documents providing archives and records management guidance to public agencies

The third objective of the study was to identify archives and records management guidance documents shared on the website of the national archival agencies of Botswana and South Africa. In the context of this study, archives and records management guidance refers to those key documents shared online for purposes of providing authoritative guidance to public organisations to enable them to develop their own customised documents. Such developed guidance documents would, therefore, comply at the minimum, with set standards and policies, as well as best practices. The next section presents the types of archives and records management guidance shared by BNARS and NARSSA on their websites.

BNARS

It has already been established in this study that BNARS does has a website. Rather, its mandate is briefly outlined on the website of Botswana Government (<https://www.gov.bw/>) under the heading "Culture, Sports and Tourism". Shared on the website is a BNARS Educational Tour Form which should be completed two weeks before a proposed visit to tour BNARS. It is to be emailed to archives@gov.bw or faxed. Figure 3 shows the form in question.


Botswana National Archives and Records Services
 Educational Tour Booking Form

Name of the Organisation/Institution: _____
 Name of the Contact person: _____
 Address: _____
 Number of participants: _____
 Date: ____/____/____ Actual Date of the tour: ____/____/____
 Country: _____
 Telephone: _____ Mobile: _____ Fax: _____
 Email: _____
 Nature of the visit: _____

 NB:

Figure 3: BNARS Educational Tour Form

Although only the educational tour form is on the website, BNARS does have key documents that are used to provide guidance on archives and records management. These were provided upon request and are:

- Generic Functional File Classification Scheme – It provides guidance on the classification of records common across government departments and ministries
- Records Management Procedures Manual – It aims to provide guidance to the public sector for the undertaking of records management activities and programmes, in accordance with the requirements of the National Archives and Records Services (NARS) Act and International Records Management Standards like ISO 15489 and business requirements of record Institutions (BNARS 2020)
- Records Management Policy Guide
- Records Transfer Manual

The fact that these key guidance documents are available but not shared online is a disadvantage for the provision of archives and records management services by BNARS. It may suggest that the department does not provide the much-needed archives and records management services to public organisations, while, in fact, it does by using other ways to share them, such as BNARS hand delivers or posts guidance documents to government ministries and departments, including state-owned enterprises.

NARSSA

A perusal of NARSSA's website showed that it provides comprehensive guidance on archives and records management through the provision of key documents covering a broad spectrum of the mandate of the department. The guidance documents shared online cover the following thematic areas in archives and records management:

1. General: *Prototype Registry Manual, Records Management Policy Manual and Guidelines for the compilation of a Records Management Policy.*
2. Records managers; *Performance criteria for records managers in governmental bodies* and *Advisory Pamphlet No.3 on Records Managers and the law: what governmental bodies need to know?*
3. Management of electronic records: *Managing electronic records in governmental bodies: policy, principles and requirements*, and *Managing electronic records in governmental bodies: Metadata requirements.*
4. Filing systems: *Background and compilation of a filing plan, Applications and maintenance of filing systems, Prototype classification of main series for support functions of all government bodies etc.*
5. Disposal: *Application for disposal authority: terminated correspondence files, Example of a description of an electronic records system for inclusion in the schedule for electronic records systems*, and *General Disposal Authority on personal files and personnel service cards at state departments etc.*

Conclusion and recommendations

The main purpose of the study was to answer a research question on what Botswana National Archives and Records Services can learn from the National Archives and Records Services of South Africa in terms of the website as a gateway for the provision of public archives and records management guidance. Proper guidance provided by the national archives is essential if public agencies are to develop and implement records management programmes. As shown by NARSSA, the online environment website is a good platform to share guidance documents. NARSSA is doing very well in this instance, as it provides extensive guidance to governmental bodies regarding various aspects of archives and records management, including electronic records management. BNARS is still lagging in terms of sharing guidance documents online to provide information that informs government ministries and departments about proper archives and records management practices. Clearly, BNARS has much to learn from NARSSA about providing guidance and helping public agencies in Botswana to institute proper records management practices.

In view of the findings of this study, it is recommended that BNARS:

- develop and run a website of its own to host guidance documents for public sector records management
- publish archives and records management guidance online to guide public sector bodies
- benchmark with NARSSA on the development of the same since NARSSA has covered much ground regarding the development of archives and records management guidance documents.

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