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# Transformation of Women's Religious Authority in Digital Da'wah: an Analysis of Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi

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#### Abstract

This study examines how female preachers in Indonesia cultivate and sustain religious authority in the digital sphere, particularly within a patriarchal context where their visibility and legitimacy remain contested. While online da'wah and personal branding have been widely studied, little research addresses the intersection of gender, charisma, and mediatized communication, especially across multiple platforms. Focusing on Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi a prominent preacher active on YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Threads, and Facebook. This research explores how Weber's concept of charismatic authority is embodied and reconfigured online, and how Hjarvard's mediatization of religion explains these processes. Using qualitative content analysis of 30 purposively selected posts over three months, complemented by nonparticipatory netnographic observation, the study captures thematic depth and multimodal performance, integrating narrative and visual analysis with media theory. Findings show that Oki's digital charisma is built through emotional storytelling, consistent aesthetic branding, and active audience engagement. This enables her to bypass certain institutional constraints while remaining shaped by platform logics. These results affirm Weber's view of charisma as relational and mediatization theory's emphasis on the media's active role. Limitations include the single case design, the absence of audience interviews, and the restricted timeframe. The study urges religious institutions to engage female preachers, enhance digital literacy, and explore comparative or longitudinal research on women's digital religious authority.

Keywords

Digital Da'wah, Women's Religious Authority, Charisma, Mediatization of Religion, Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital media has fundamentally reshaped how religious knowledge is produced, disseminated, and consumed. In Indonesia, where religious authority has historically been rooted in patriarchal and institutional structures, the rise of social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Threads, and Facebook has opened new spaces for alternative actors, particularly women, to assert religious leadership (Busro, 2022). As Campbell notes, digital technology has shifted and expanded religious practices, dissolving time, distance, and place boundaries. This transformation enables da'wah to bypass traditional gatekeepers and circulate through highly accessible, participatory, and visually driven media channels..(Herdinan and Gumgum Gumelar, 2000) While



earlier discussions on religion and the internet often framed online religious practices as potential threats to conventional, face-to-face rituals (Rachmadani, 2022). Today's dominant trend shows digital media as an extension and amplifying religious communication. In this new media ecology, legitimacy is shaped by institutional endorsement and personal charisma, media visibility, and interactive engagement. Female preachers (muballighah) increasingly use affective storytelling, modest aesthetics, and consistent online interaction to establish religious authority in the public sphere—an authority once dominated by male clerics.

While old media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television will gradually decrease in demand, although there are still users. John Naisbitt calls the current era the slow death of newspaper culture, all of these mass media are gradually being replaced in some way or some part by new media that have been introduced towards the end of the last decade of the 20th century in most parts of the world.(Mutohharun, 2012) However, the influence and reach of new media have been expanding faster than old media achieved over a longer period. Unlike conventional media such as newspapers or magazines, new media is real-time so that it can present *up-to-date* information. New media is also considered more democratic and independent regarding creating, publishing, distributing, and consuming available content. The presence of new internet-based media (digital media) changes existing relationships and brings new adjustments in various aspects of life.

Digital media, along with the large-scale use of internet-based technologies, is transforming Indonesia's "religious market" by creating new players. After da'wah was long disseminated through television, radio, and newspapers, the internet has become an equally prominent medium.(Efa, 2018) Social media users dominated by millennials and Generation Z now consume religious content at higher intensities and often learn religion independently. This shift has redefined how religious figures build credibility and reach audiences, especially younger generations shaped by digital culture. One of the most significant changes brought by this transformation is the renegotiation of religious authority: traditionally held by male scholars, legitimacy is now also shaped by personal charisma, media visibility, and digital interactivity.

In this evolving media ecology, female preachers (muballighah) are gaining prominence by using affective storytelling, modest visual aesthetics, and consistent online engagement to assert authority in the public religious sphere. Nurcholish Madjid emphasized that the internet supports da'wah and provides well-maintained, accessible information for daily activities.(Arum, 2023) Among these figures, Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi, an actress, writer, and preacher often called a "contemporary ustadzah," has built a massive audience: 21.2 million Instagram followers, 2.5 million on TikTok, 663 thousand on Threads, 3.3 million on Facebook, and 3.23 million YouTube subscribers.

Despite this important trend, scholarly attention to women's roles in digital da'wah remains limited, particularly in the Indonesian context where religious authority is historically patriarchal. This study addresses this gap by examining Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi, a public figure who has transitioned from an actress to a widely followed Islamic preacher. With millions of followers across social media platforms, her case provides an ideal lens to explore how women's religious authority is performed, mediated, and legitimized digitally. Currently, mad'u identically likes da'wah that listens to an innovative story, advice, so that it can be listened to well; heavy da'wah elements are often not in demand by today's audiences because they make someone bored in listening to it. However, if a motivational word and story accompany the delivery of da'wah content, then someone can digest the content of the da'wah well.

Among the very important changes in religious aspects is the shift in religious authority and

patterns of relationships between followers and religious figures who are role models in everyday life. Someone who needs an answer to a problem does not have to ask the ulama directly. Because conventional scholars no longer own religious fatwas, everyone can easily find answers and make decisions based on information available in the media (Alfan Taufiqi, 2022). Scholarship on Indonesian digital da'wah has addressed influencer branding (Ilyas Supena dan Muhammad Sulthon, 2024) and modest fashion in religious narratives (Hindi, 2020). Specific studies on women preachers remain limited, with Mieke and Eka exploring female leadership in pesantren media (Mieke T. A. Lopes Cardozo dan Eka Srimulyanib, 2021) and Bukola and Anne analyzing gendered audience reception (Bukola and Anne Blankedship, 2024). However, few works examine how female preachers construct and sustain digital charisma across multiple platforms, or how such charisma is negotiated through both religious and media logics.

Theoretically, this research is grounded in Max Weber's typology of authority, particularly the shift from traditional and legal-rational models toward charismatic authority, which is validated through followers' perception of personal authenticity and emotional resonance. In digital contexts, this form of authority is inseparable from what Stig Hjarvard terms the mediatization of religion, wherein media not only transmit religious content but also reconfigure its form, logic, and meaning. As Campbell and Busro argue, digital technologies have not merely supplemented traditional religious practices, they have expanded, contested, and in some cases supplanted them. While the broad impact of new media on religious life has been widely acknowledged, scholarly engagement with how women negotiate and construct authority in these digital spaces remains limited. This study addresses that gap by examining Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi's transition from actress to widely followed Islamic preacher, focusing on her da'wah style that combines bil qashash (religious storytelling), motivational framing, and curated visual branding.

Theoretically, it draws on Max Weber's concept of charismatic authority validated through followers' perceptions of authenticity and emotional resonance and Stig Hjarvard's mediatization of religion, which posits that media not only transmit content but also reconfigure its logic and meaning. This research interrogates how platform dynamics such as virality, visual culture, and audience interaction mediate the construction of religious credibility. By analyzing 30 purposively selected posts and audience engagements, it situates Oki's digital persona within broader debates on gendered religious communication and the decentralization of Islamic authority, contributing to both mediatized religion scholarship and critical discussions on Muslim women's agency in renegotiating public piety in contemporary Indonesia. How does Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi embody and sustain charismatic religious authority in Indonesia's digital da'wah sphere, and how does media logics shape this authority? In doing so, it contributes not only to the literature on mediatized religion but also to critical discourses on Muslim women's agency in renegotiating public piety in contemporary Indonesia.

## 2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using content analysis as the primary method, complemented by non-participatory netnographic observation of public social media content (Sarosa, 2021). The object of analysis was Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi's da'wah content on four major platforms: YouTube, Instagram, Facebook Threads, and TikTok. Data was collected over three months (August–November 2024) using purposive sampling to select 30 posts. Selection criteria included: (1) explicit presence of religious narratives or Islamic storytelling (bil qashash); (2) thematic relevance to

gender, charisma, and spirituality; and (3) high audience engagement, measured through metrics such as views, likes, shares, and comments. This approach ensured the inclusion of thematically rich posts and widely circulated among audiences.

The coding process followed three stages. First, open coding identified recurring elements such as emotional storytelling, modest fashion aesthetics, and interactive audience engagement. Second, axial coding organized these elements into broader analytical categories aligned with Weber's concept of charismatic authority and Hjarvard's mediatization of religion e.g., "charisma performance," "media logic adaptation," and "audience co-construction." Third, selective coding integrated these categories to interpret how mediated charisma was constructed across platforms. Content analysis was chosen over other qualitative methods because it allowed systematic examination of multimodal content while enabling cross-platform comparison.

All analyzed materials were publicly accessible, and no private or restricted content was included. Ethical considerations involved respecting platform terms of service, avoiding direct audience interaction, and anonymizing user identities when quoting comments. Triangulation was applied by cross-referencing da'wah content, secondary materials (e.g., public interviews, biographies), and audience responses to enhance analytical validity. While the study's scope was limited to 30 posts, this sample was selected to balance thematic diversity with manageable analytical depth future research could expand the dataset or incorporate audience interviews for a more comprehensive understanding.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

## A. Constructing Charismatic Religious Authority: Profile of Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi

Dr. Hj. Oki Setiana Dewi, S.Hum., M.Pd., born on 13 January 1989 in Batam, is the eldest of three siblings. She spent her childhood in Batam until age sixteen, attending SD Kartini I Sekupang, SMP Negeri 3 Batam, and SMA Negeri 1 Batam. She consistently ranked first in her class and represented her school in biology Olympiads, public speaking contests, and English debates. Her extracurricular involvement ranged from the Intra-School Student Organization and the Indonesian Scout Movement to theatre and the English Club, shaping her communication and leadership skills from an early age. (Restudia, 2020)

In 2007, Oki pursued Dutch Literature at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia (FIB UI). During her undergraduate years, she was active in the Salam UI Campus Da'wah Institute, the Student Executive Body (BEM), and theatre. Her passion for acting earned her the Best Female Actress award at the UI Creative Petang Festival, and she was recognized as an outstanding student in the arts at FIB UI. Graduating with a Humanities degree in 2012, she joined Rumah Qur'an Darut Tarbiyah in Depok to memorize the Qur'an. As an auditing student, she later attended the language institute at Ummul Qura University in Mecca for one month. She completed a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education at Jakarta State University in 2012, and 2016, she began her doctoral studies at both the Postgraduate School of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta concentration in da'wah and communication and PTIQ Jakarta Qur'anic Sciences and Tafsir, concentration in Qur'an-Based Education.(Eka Laili, 2020)

Oki rose to national prominence after starring in Habiburrahman El Shirazy's widely acclaimed film *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (*When Love Bertasbih*, 2009). Her career spans films, television series, web series, books, religious music singles, and public speaking engagements. 2016 she founded the Maskanul Huffadz Foundation, providing scholarships and housing for orphans and

underprivileged Qur'an memorizers. She has also served as a presenter, preacher, jury member, and producer in various television programs and films. She has received awards such as *Best Newcomer Actress* at the Indonesian Movie Actors Award 2010.

Her emergence as a prominent digital preacher represents a paradigmatic shift from institutional to charismatic religious authority, consistent with Max Weber's typology. This charisma is not merely a by-product of her departure from traditional structures or her large follower base; it is deliberately constructed through strategic da'wah performance. Key to this are her use of bil qashash (Islamic storytelling), a soft spoken delivery style, and a visually modest appearance all of which cultivate perceptions of sincerity, emotional resonance, and spiritual authenticity. For instance, videos combining personal reflections with Qur'anic verses or historical anecdotes often receive thousands of empathetic comments such as "Kak Oki touched my heart, I cried" or "I feel closer to Allah after watching this", exemplifying the spiritual effect central to Weber's concept of charisma.

Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi's emergence as a prominent digital preacher signals a paradigmatic shift from institutional to charismatic religious authority, aligning with Max Weber's typology. However, rather than merely observing her departure from traditional endorsement structures or citing follower metrics as indicative of influence, a deeper interrogation of how charisma is constructed within digital platforms is necessary. Her da'wah content, particularly the use of bil qashash (Islamic storytelling), soft-spoken delivery, and visually modest appearance, functions as stylistic features and deliberate performative strategies that cultivate perceptions of sincerity, emotional resonance, and spiritual authenticity.

For instance, videos where she narrates personal reflections intertwined with Qur'anic verses or historical anecdotes often draw thousands of empathetic comments, such as "Kak Oki menyentuh hati saya, saya menangis" (*Kak Oki touched my heart, I cried*) or "Saya merasa lebih dekat dengan Allah setelah menonton ini", (*I feel closer to Allah after watching this*) indicating a spiritual effect that Weber identifies as central to charismatic authority. This affective connection is further amplified by her consistent visual branding, muted colors, gentle facial expressions, and nurturing tone, which aligns with Stig Hjarvard's concept of media logic, where religious authority is mediated through culturally resonant, platform-optimized forms of presentation. Moreover, the parasocial bond developed between Oki and her audience, evident in the personalized language she uses in captions and the frequency of her comment responses, should not be viewed merely as evidence of popularity, but rather as mechanisms through which digital charisma is maintained and reinforced.

These bonds reflect the mediatized intimacy that increasingly replaces institutional proximity in constructing religious legitimacy, particularly among digitally native audiences. However, the discussion should acknowledge that this legitimacy is not uncontested; critiques around commodification, visual aesthetics, or theological depth (e.g., in comment sections or independent reviews) also serve as important indicators of the tension inherent in charismatic digital authority. Thus, her authority operates at the intersection of Weber's charismatic ideal-type and Hjarvard's mediatization framework: both embodied in affective performance and legitimized through algorithmic visibility and audience feedback loops. By grounding these claims in concrete examples and theoretical constructs, the analysis moves beyond biographical celebration toward a more critical understanding of how religious legitimacy is actively constructed, negotiated, and gendered in contemporary digital da'wah.

## B. Conventional Authority Changes to New Media

The transformation of religious authority in Indonesia reflects a broader shift from institutional legitimacy traditionally held by ulama, kiai, and formal organizations like Muhammadiyah, NU, and MUI toward more individualized, media-driven forms of authority. Historically, institutions such as the Majelis Tarjih of Muhammadiyah and Bahtsul Masail of NU shaped Islamic discourse through structured scholarly processes.(Haryadi, 2020). However, the proliferation of mass media since the 1990s enabled figures like Zainuddin MZ and Aa Gym to extend their reach beyond institutional settings via television and radio, foreshadowing a shift toward charismatic religious figures.(Zainuddin, 1997) In the digital era, new da'i such as Felix Siauw, Hanan Attaki, and Handy Bonny gained popularity through social media by leveraging youth culture, informal aesthetics, and personal storytelling. While their styles differ from Felix's ideological narratives to Hanan's inclusive tone—their authority is mediated through affective performance and audience interactivity, hallmarks of what Hjarvard describes as the mediatization of religion.

Their legitimacy relies not on institutional ijazah but on perceived sincerity, relatability, and viral appeal criteria shaped by platform logics rather than religious orthodoxy. (Kiptiyah, 2017) Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi represents a distinctive variation within this shift. Unlike her male counterparts, her digital persona is built upon maternal charisma, calm delivery, and visual piety elements that resonate strongly with women and family-oriented audiences. Her consistent use of bil qashash (narrative preaching), modest fashion, and emotionally charged storytelling exemplifies how authority is now performed and branded. However, unlike male da'i who often adopt subcultural identities (e.g., streetwear or hijrah movement aesthetics), Oki's authority is grounded in a gendered moral exemplar that aligns with traditional values, thereby negotiating institutional patriarchy rather than overtly rejecting it. (Martias, 2023) Despite the growing prominence of digital da'wah, this transformation is not without tension—the reliance on platform metrics and algorithmic visibility risks reducing religious authority to popularity performance.

The need to remain "relevant" may incentivize aestheticization over theological depth, as seen in promotional posts that blend da'wah with lifestyle branding. Although this can expand reach, it raises questions about commodification and audience-driven shaping of content issues often underexplored in existing scholarship. (Romario, 2022) Furthermore, while informative, general narratives about media usage trends in Indonesia should not eclipse the core analytical focus on how Oki constructs religious legitimacy through digital mediation. For instance, rather than broadly noting the decline of print media or the rise of millennial religiosity, it is more analytically productive to assess how these trends specifically shape the reception and performance of Oki's authority. (Mutohharun, 2013) Comparative references to other preachers should highlight what is distinctive about her model: its affective, maternal tone; its alignment with female Islamic values; and its mediation through curated digital aesthetics (Santoso, 2022).

To improve coherence and depth, this section should be structured around clear subthemessuch as the historical shift in authority, media strategies of contemporary da'i, and gendered dynamics of digital charisma each anchored in theoretical perspectives from Weber (charismatic authority) and Hjarvard (mediatization). Redundant descriptions should be trimmed, and claims about institutional decline or audience behavior should be supported by citations and empirical evidence. Doing so will ground the argument in scholarly discourse and enhance its analytical rigor.(Dwi Syafitri, 2023)

## C. Ustadzah Oki's Religious Authority Through Social Media Accounts

Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi strategically employs multiple social media platforms, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Threads, and Facebook, to disseminate Islamic messages and cultivate a form of personalized religious authority. While follower metrics (e.g., 21.2 million on Instagram, 3.24 million on YouTube) illustrate her reach, authority is not solely a function of scale but of how media logic shapes perception and engagement. Drawing from Stig Hjarvard's mediatization theory, Oki's da'wah reflects key mechanisms such as aestheticization, personalization, and platform optimization. Her YouTube videos often merge religious narratives with travel documentary formats. At the same time, Instagram and TikTok emphasize curated spiritual aesthetics, fashionable hijab styles, short Qur'anic reflections, and family-centered posts designed for emotional appeal and virality. However, this religious branding invites both admiration and critique. For instance, promotional posts involving modest fashion brands occasionally elicit follower concerns over the commodification of da'wah. However, Oki often counters this tension by incorporating spiritual reflections in captions and interacting empathetically with her audience through digital counseling in comment sections or live Q&A sessions.

These interactions foster religious intimacy and exemplify how media enable parasocial bonds that simulate traditional da'wah relationships. Nevertheless, challenges persist. The pressure to remain algorithmically visible may dilute theological substance in favor of affective performance. There is also a lack of critical discourse around how audience feedback or public critique shapes her message. Does virality alter her content's doctrinal depth? To what extent does her feminine persona limit or empower her authority in patriarchal digital contexts?. To deepen the analysis, future research should compare platform content strategies, explore audience segmentation, and examine tensions between visibility and authenticity. Ultimately, Oki's case exemplifies how digital media reshape not only da'wah techniques but also the gendered dynamics of religious authority in Indonesia's contemporary Islamic public sphere.

## D. The Tensions and Risks of Digital Authority

While digital platforms provide new avenues for religious communication, they also introduce structural pressures that complicate the authenticity and credibility of religious authority. One significant tension lies in the commodification of da'wah. The demand to remain visible and relevant often incentivizes preachers to adopt branding strategies that may blur the line between spiritual sincerity and commercial persona. In the case of Ustadzah Oki, while her content generally maintains a spiritual tone, the incorporation of curated aesthetics such as coordinated fashion styles, high-production-value visuals, and endorsements occasionally triggers mixed responses from audiences. For example, in several Instagram posts promoting modest fashion collaborations, comment sections reveal ambivalence, with some followers expressing admiration. In contrast, others critique the commercialization of religious messages (e.g., "semoga dakwahnya tidak jadi ajang endorse ya, Ustadzah").

This phenomenon aligns with Hjarvard's notion of media logic, in which content optimized for visibility emotionally resonant, visually appealing, or shareable tends to be privileged by algorithmic systems over content that is theologically dense or challenging. As a result, there is a risk that religious depth may be subordinated to digital performance, privileging affective engagement over doctrinal clarity. While effective in reaching mass audiences, the virality of brief, motivational clips on platforms like TikTok raises concerns about fragmenting religious teachings into

decontextualized soundbites. Another consequence is the marginalization of offline religious engagement. While Ustadzah Oki maintains her presence through safari da'wah and public events, the digital sphere often lacks the dialogical, ritualistic, and community-embedded elements of traditional religious life. The rise of parasocial interactions may substitute genuine communal ties with one-sided digital intimacy. Thus, while digital da'wah democratizes access, it also reconfigures religious authority into a spectacle shaped by metrics, audience analytics, and platform design, challenging traditional transmission models' coherence.

# E. Implications for Gender and Institutional Religion

The rise of Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi as a female religious authority in the digital age marks a significant reconfiguration of gender dynamics in Islamic leadership. Her trajectory gaining legitimacy not through institutional affiliation but through mediated charisma and narrative affect illustrates how women can increasingly cultivate religious capital outside of pesantren, fatwa councils, or mosque pulpits. This reflects a symbolic breakthrough and a strategic reorientation, where digital media becomes a vehicle for marginalized voices to assert interpretive agency. However, while her success challenges the male-dominated religious hierarchy, it also operates within gendered frameworks that warrant critical reflection. Her affective authority is largely built on attributes such as maternal care, emotional intelligence, and modesty qualities traditionally associated with feminine ideals. This raises a paradox: while she subverts patriarchal gatekeeping by bypassing formal institutions, her public persona may simultaneously reinforce conventional gender roles. Her acceptance as a preacher appears less threatening to conservative audiences precisely because it conforms to established norms of feminine piety, rather than radically contesting them. Institutional reactions to figures like Ustadzah Oki remain mixed.

Some religious bodies have acknowledged the digital sphere as a complementary space for da'wah, but there is little evidence of structural inclusion of female voices in formal authority structures. Rather than normatively suggesting that "institutions must adapt," a more empirical framing reveals that few pesantren or Islamic organizations actively support female preachers' digital training or theological elevation. Institutional resistance is often expressed in subtle forms such as the lack of formal recognition, exclusion from panels, or limited invitations to speak in institutional events. Thus, while Oki's case demonstrates the potential for mediated female leadership in Islam, it also exposes the limitations of symbolic visibility in the absence of institutional transformation. The challenge moving forward lies in amplifying women's voices online and ensuring these voices are structurally integrated into the evolving religious public sphere.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study has examined how Ustadzah Oki Setiana Dewi embodies Weber's charismatic authority in a digitally mediated environment, showing how narrative intimacy, affective engagement, and platform-specific aesthetics converge to construct religious legitimacy beyond institutional structures. Linking the empirical findings to mediatization theory demonstrates that her authority is not merely transferred from offline to online contexts but actively reconfigured through media logics and audience interaction. These findings directly address the initial research gap, the lack of in-depth analysis on how female preachers in Indonesia cultivate and sustain digital charisma across multiple platforms. The case of Oki Setiana Dewi illustrates that mediated religious authority for women can be built through affective, media-optimized communication strategies, bypassing

some traditional institutional barriers while simultaneously introducing new challenges tied to algorithmic visibility and audience expectations.

The study is limited in several respects. It focuses solely on a single figure, without incorporating audience interviews or ethnographic engagement, which restricts the understanding of reception and impact. The dataset is confined to publicly available posts within a fixed time frame, excluding potentially relevant content outside that scope. The implications of these findings are threefold. First, religious institutions should recognize the strategic role of female preachers in digital spaces and create formal avenues for their participation in religious discourse. Second, female da'i can draw from the case of Oki Setiana Dewi to develop intentional content strategies that balance authenticity, religious depth, and media literacy. Third, digital literacy programs within and beyond religious institutions should be tailored to equip preachers with the skills to navigate platform algorithms, audience analytics, and ethical considerations in content production.

Future research could expand this work through comparative analyses across multiple female preachers from different theological orientations, enabling cross-case insights into varied models of digital charisma. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in a preacher's digital authority over time would also be valuable, particularly in understanding how audience dynamics, platform policies, and socio-religious contexts influence the evolution of female religious leadership online.

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