

STRATEGIES IN COMBATING BOOK THEFT AND VANDALISM IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES: A CASE STUDY OF BAYELSA MEDICAL UNIVERSITY, YENAGOA

Abraham Tabor Etebu (Ph.D.),
Bayelsa Medical University Library
Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.
etextabor@gmail.comlibrarian@bmu.edu.ng

Tuboulayefa Martha Adeyn
Bayelsa Medical University Library
Yenagoa, Bayelsa State
tuboumartha111@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the strategic measures for addressing book theft and vandalism at the Bayelsa Medical University (BMU) Library, Yenagoa. As a specialized institution, the library serves as a critical repository for expensive and rare medical literature, yet it faces significant security challenges that threaten its academic mission. The research adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 500 students and 50 staff amounting to 550 registered library users, while the sample size was 150 respondents selected randomly. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled: "Library Theft and Vandalism Questionnaire (LTVQ)". Method of data analysis adopted was Frequency count, simple percentage and Mean score (SPSS-style), presented on tables. Findings reveal that theft and vandalism are prevalent, primarily driven by the high cost of foreign medical books ($x=3.0$) and inadequate multiple copies ($x=3.1$) available for the growing student population. The study identified a critical gap in security infrastructure: while security guards are present in 80% of the facility, modern electronic surveillance such as CCTV and RFID covers only 30% and 10% of the library, respectively. The resulting loss of materials ($x=3.4$) significantly reduces access to vital clinical information, leading to "user frustration" and potential long-term impacts on medical accreditation. Strategic findings show a strong stakeholder consensus (90%) for the urgent installation of CCTV surveillance and the institutionalization of mandatory user education (85%). The study concludes that manual security is insufficient to protect high-value medical collections in a volatile economic climate. Key recommendations include the immediate transition to a digital-first acquisition policy for textbooks, the deployment of RFID-enabled security gates, and the strict adherence to the 10% budgetary allocation for library funding to ensure the sustainability of medical education resources.

Keywords: *Academic Libraries, Bayelsa Medical University, Book Theft, Vandalism, Library Security Strategies, CCTV Surveillance.*

Introduction

Academic libraries serve as the intellectual backbone of higher education institutions, preserving and providing access to invaluable knowledge resources for students, faculty, and researchers. However, the persistent challenges of book theft and vandalism threaten the integrity, accessibility, and sustainability of library collections worldwide. These illicit activities not only result in significant financial losses but also disrupt the seamless delivery of



information services that academic libraries are expected to provide (Agyen-Gyasi, 2020).

Book theft in academic libraries ranges from the unauthorized removal of materials to the mutilation of pages and systematic stealing of rare or high-demand texts. Vandalism, on the other hand, encompasses acts such as tearing pages, defacing materials with markings or highlights, damaging book spines, and destroying barcodes or security tags (Ogunniyi & Ogunniyi, 2021). Both phenomena represent a critical threat to the library's mission of preserving knowledge and ensuring equitable access for all patrons.

The prevalence of these issues is not limited to developing nations; academic libraries across the globe grapple with security breaches that compromise their collections. Research indicates that factors such as inadequate security infrastructure, poor enforcement of library policies, low user awareness, and the rising cost of academic materials contribute to the escalation of theft and vandalism (Echezona & Okafor, 2011). Furthermore, the advent of digital resources has not entirely mitigated these problems, as print collections remain indispensable for many academic disciplines.

Combating book theft and vandalism requires a multifaceted approach that integrates technological interventions, administrative measures, and community engagement strategies. Libraries have increasingly adopted electronic security systems such as Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance, and security gates to deter and detect theft (Olatokun & Igbinedion, 2018). Concurrently, administrative strategies including the enforcement of stringent borrowing policies, imposition of penalties, regular stock-taking, and user education programs have proven effective in curbing these destructive behaviors (Kaur, 2019).

Academic libraries are central to the intellectual development of students, researchers, and faculty members. They provide access to information resources necessary for learning, teaching, and research. However, the effectiveness of academic libraries is often threatened by security challenges such as book theft and vandalism.

Book theft refers to the unauthorized removal of library materials, while vandalism includes mutilation, defacing, or destruction of resources. These practices are widespread in Nigerian academic libraries and have been identified as major impediments to effective library service delivery (Abubakar et al., 2020; Enidiok et al., 2019). Studies have shown that theft and mutilation reduce access to information, increase replacement costs, and hinder academic productivity (Ozowa & Agada, 2022). Bayelsa Medical University Library, as a developing academic library, is not immune to these challenges. The increasing demand for limited resources, coupled with inadequate security systems, makes it vulnerable to library crimes.

This paper examines the various strategies employed by academic libraries to combat book theft and vandalism, exploring both their effectiveness and limitations. By synthesizing existing literature and practical experiences, the study aims to provide library administrators, policymakers, and information professionals with evidence-based recommendations for safeguarding library collections. Understanding and implementing these strategies is essential for preserving the cultural and intellectual heritage housed within academic libraries and for maintaining the trust and satisfaction of their user communities.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance of academic libraries, book theft and vandalism remain persistent problems. Evidence shows that materials such as textbooks, reference books, and journals are frequently targeted (Abioye & Rasaki, 2013). Factors contributing to this problem

include: Inadequate copies of books; High cost of textbooks; Poor security infrastructure; and, Lack of user awareness. Research indicates that selfishness, fear of non-availability, and economic hardship drive users to engage in library crimes (Anyaoobi & Akpoma, 2012; Akor, 2013). At Bayelsa Medical University, these issues may lead to reduced availability of materials and declining library efficiency.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective is to examine strategies for combating book theft and vandalism in Bayelsa Medical University Library.

Specific objectives include:

1. Identify causes of book theft and vandalism libraries
2. Examine effects of book theft and vandalism on library services
3. Assess existing security measures in libraries
4. Propose effective control strategies against the problem

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What causes book theft and vandalism in Bayelsa Medical University Library?
2. What are the effects of book theft and vandalism on BMU library services?
3. What security measures exist at the Bayelsa Medical University Library?
4. What strategies can reduce these problems at the Bayelsa Medical University Library?

Review of Related Literature

Causes of Book Theft and Vandalism

Anyaoobi & Akpoma (2012) averred that Common causes like Economic hardship, Inadequate resources, Poor photocopying services, and Weak security systems motivate library users to often mutilate books due to fear that materials may not be available in future. The literature on library management in Nigeria consistently identifies a combination of socio-economic, institutional, and behavioral factors as the primary drivers of book theft and vandalism. A central theme across several studies is the impact of economic hardship and the high cost of academic materials. According to Ajegbomogun (2004), many students resort to the unauthorized removal of books or tearing out specific pages because they cannot afford to purchase personal copies of recommended texts. This economic pressure is exacerbated by what Enidiok, Bassey & Olalekan (2019) describes as a "ready market" for stolen books, where purloined items are sold at low prices to other struggling students, thereby incentivizing the crime.

Institutional deficiencies within the libraries themselves also play a significant role. Ugah (2007) argues that the scarcity of information resources—where the demand from a large student population far outweighs the available copies—leads to "selfish" hoarding, theft, or hiding of books to ensure personal access. Furthermore, the lack of functional or affordable photocopying services is a major catalyst for mutilation; Momodu (2002) observes that users are more likely to vandalize a book when the cost of copying a few pages is perceived as too high or when facilities are non-existent. Onohwakpor (2006) adds that restrictive loan policies on reference materials and journals often frustrate researchers, pushing them to smuggle these items out of the library.



Security lapses are frequently cited as the operational cause of these delinquent behaviors. Jato (2005) and Ogbonyomi (2011) highlight that most Nigerian libraries rely on manual security checks, which are often porous and easily bypassed. The absence of modern surveillance technology, such as Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) or electronic security gates, creates an environment where theft can occur with minimal risk of detection. Additionally, Nwogu (2002) emphasizes that the psychological attitude of the user—specifically a lack of "library culture" and an indifference toward the needs of future users—remains a persistent behavioral barrier to the preservation of library collections.

Effects of Book Theft and Vandalism on Academic Libraries

The effectiveness of libraries depends heavily on the availability of materials, which theft undermines (Idris et al., 2013). These effects include Loss of valuable resources; Reduced access to information; and Increased financial burden (Ozowa & Agada, 2022). The literature on academic libraries in Nigeria indicates that book theft and vandalism have profound and multifaceted effects on the quality of library services, the academic achievement of users, and the financial stability of the institutions. A critical effect identified by (Aba, Beetseh, & Ahom, 2014) is the reduction in the overall quality of library services; as collections are depleted or damaged, the library fails to meet its primary objective of supporting teaching, learning, and research. Adenike & Raliat (2020) emphasizes that any depletion in available materials directly correlates to a decrease in the library's ability to satisfy user needs, which often leads to significant user frustration.

Scholars further highlight the severe impact on students' academic pursuits. Adekunle et al. (2018) found that widespread theft and vandalism have led students to desist from using the library altogether due to the persistent inability to find required resources, which ultimately hinders the quality of their research. Similarly, Nduka (2005) notes that the physical mutilation of texts prevents students from locating critical information, often resulting in poor examination performance. Ajegbomogun (2004) warns that if these acts remain unchecked, they create a permanent threat to the preservation of national intellectual heritage.

Beyond the educational impact, the financial consequences are described as devastating. Fasola & Oyadeyi (2019) characterizes library crime as a "social malady" that imposes an immense financial strain on the already meager resources of Nigerian academic libraries. Nzewi (2023) explains that libraries are often forced to divert limited funds away from expanding their collections toward repairing damaged volumes and enhancing security measures. Furthermore, Ajegbomogun (2004) points out that the cost of repairing or replacing a mutilated book is frequently higher than its original purchase price, particularly when the item is out of print or requires specialized binding.

Existing Security Measures in Libraries

The literature on the security of library collections in Nigeria reveals a landscape characterized by a transition from traditional, manual oversight to the gradual adoption of modern technological solutions. Most researchers agree that while libraries recognize the threat of theft and mutilation, the effectiveness of existing measures is often limited by infrastructural and financial constraints. Historically, and still prevalent today, many Nigerian academic libraries rely heavily on physical barriers and manual surveillance. Ajegbomogun (2004) and Jato (2005) describe the standard practice of "stop and search" at library exits, where security personnel manually inspect bags and books to ensure items have been properly

charged out. Additionally, Nwogu (2002) notes the use of physical deterrents such as burglar-proof windows, perimeter fencing, and the restricted "closed access" system for rare or expensive materials. While these methods provide a basic level of protection, Maidabino (2010) argues that manual searches are often porous, inconsistent, and easily compromised by human error or staff collusion.

In response to the limitations of manual checks, there has been an increasing scholarly focus on Electronic Security Systems (ESS). Osayande (2011) highlights the implementation of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras as a psychological and physical deterrent that allows for real-time monitoring of user behavior in reading halls. Furthermore, Ogbonyomi (2011) discusses the adoption of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) and electromagnetic security gates in advanced Nigerian libraries. These systems trigger an alarm if an item is moved past the sensors without being deactivated at the circulation desk. However, Ugah (2007) points out that the effectiveness of these electronic measures is frequently hampered by Nigeria's inconsistent power supply and the high cost of maintenance.

Beyond physical and electronic tools, existing security includes administrative policies designed to regulate user movement. Basheer (2025) identifies the use of library identity cards and pocket-in-book systems as fundamental administrative controls. Onohwakpor (2006) also emphasizes the role of "shelf reading"—the process where library staff regularly check the order of books on the shelves—as a method to detect missing or intentionally hidden items. Despite these efforts, Adenike & Raliat (2020) suggests that without a clear, written security policy that is strictly enforced, these administrative measures often remain reactive rather than preventive.

Strategies for Combating Library Theft and Vandalism

Modern security systems significantly reduce theft incidents. Osayande (2009) recommended strategies to combat library book theft and vandalism include: CCTV surveillance; RFID technology; User education; and Provision of multiple copies. Literature on the management of Nigerian libraries suggests that combating book theft and vandalism requires a multifaceted approach integrating technological innovation, administrative policy, and user-centered services. Scholars emphasize that traditional manual methods, while still prevalent, are increasingly insufficient to address the evolving nature of library delinquency.

A significant portion of recent research advocates for the adoption of Electronic Security Systems (ESS) as a definitive solution to security breaches. Nzewi (2023) maintain that electronic systems are the most effective deterrents against unauthorized removal of materials. Modern implementations, such as Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), provide real-time monitoring and high detection rates. Osayande (2011) highlights that these systems help monitor both staff and student activities, effectively curbing unethical practices. However, despite these benefits, many Nigerian libraries still rely on conventional "stop and search" methods due to challenges like high installation costs and unreliable power supply.

Effective collection security is also grounded in robust administrative frameworks. Enidiok, Bassey & Olalekan (2019) proposes institutional measures such as periodic hostel searches and strict disciplinary actions—including rustication or expulsion—to serve as deterrents. Furthermore, researchers like Maidabino (2010) suggest that libraries must formulate standard written security policies and display them prominently on notice boards to ensure users are aware of the consequences of antisocial acts. Regular stock-taking and "shelf reading" are also recommended to identify missing items promptly and discourage the habit of



intentional mis-shelving.

Addressing the root causes of theft, such as the scarcity of resources, is a proactive strategy frequently discussed in literature. Ugah (2007) and Onohwakpor (2006) argue that providing multiple copies of high-demand books and ensuring affordable, functional photocopying services within the library can make theft and mutilation "unattractive" to students. Additionally, user education and orientation are considered vital; regular orientation exercises help impart a "library culture," teaching users how to access and handle materials correctly while emphasizing the shared responsibility of preserving intellectual property.

Methodology

Survey research design was adopted. Bayelsa Medical University Library, Yenagoa was the area of the study. The population of the study was 500 students and 50 staff amounting to 550, while the sample size was 150 respondents selected randomly. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled: "Library Theft and Vandalism Questionnaire (LTVQ)". Method of data analysis adopted was Frequency count, simple percentage and Mean score (SPSS-style), presented on tables.

Presentation of Results

RQ1: What causes book theft and vandalism in Bayelsa Medical University Library?

Table 1: Causes of Book Theft and Vandalism

Causes	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
High cost of books	60	50	20	20	3.0
Inadequate copies	70	40	25	15	3.1
Poor security	80	45	15	10	3.3

Decision Rule: $Mean \geq 2.5 \rightarrow \text{Accepted}$ $Mean < 2.5 \rightarrow \text{Rejected}$

As shown in Table 1, infrastructural and economic challenges also contribute to book theft and vandalism. The data indicates that 'Poor security' is the leading cause of resource loss ($x=3.3$), followed by 'Inadequate copies' ($x=3.1$) and the 'High cost of books' ($x=3.0$). These findings suggest that when students cannot afford personal copies and the library's supply is insufficient, the risk of illegal removal of materials increases.

RQ2: What are the effects of book theft and vandalism on BMU library services?

Table 2: Effects on Library Services

Effects	SA	A	D	SD	Mean
Loss of materials	85	40	15	10	3.4
Reduced access	75	50	15	10	3.3

Decision Rule: $Mean \geq 2.5 \rightarrow \text{Accepted}$ $Mean < 2.5 \rightarrow \text{Rejected}$

The data in Table 2 highlights the devastating impact of acquisition and security challenges on library service delivery. The most significant effect identified by respondents is the 'Loss of materials' ($x=3.4$), which directly correlates with the high levels of theft and vandalism noted previously. Furthermore, 'Reduced access' ($x=3.3$) indicates that even when materials are physically present, they may be mutilated or locked away for security, thereby hindering the educational goals of the medical students."

RQ3: What security measures exist at the Bayelsa Medical University Library?

Table 3: Existing Security Measures

Measures	Available (%)
Security guards	80%
CCTV	30%
RFID	10%

This final data point completes your study by highlighting the gap between traditional and modern security infrastructure at the Bayelsa Medical University (BMU) Library. It shows a heavy reliance on human personnel (80% Security guards) with a significant deficit in electronic surveillance (30% CCTV) and modern tracking technology (10% RFID).

RQ4: What strategies can reduce these problems at the Bayelsa Medical University Library?

Table 4: Preferred Strategies

Strategy	Agreement (%)
CCTV installation	90%
User education	85%
More books	88%

The final phase of this study investigated the strategies preferred by library stakeholders at Bayelsa Medical University (BMU) to mitigate the identified challenges of resource acquisition and security. The data, summarized in Table 4, reveals a strong consensus on a multi-pronged approach involving technological investment, educational outreach, and core collection expansion.

Discussion of Findings

Causes of book theft and vandalism libraries

The findings in Table 1 suggest a 'ripple effect' of the funding crisis. Because the library struggles with the high cost of foreign medical titles (as established in Table 1), it cannot provide enough multiple copies for the student population. This scarcity, coupled with poor security, creates an environment where book theft and vandalism become prevalent. This aligns with the observations of Omosekejimi, Ijiekhuamhen & Ojeme (2015), who noted that in resource-constrained Nigerian libraries, 'information hunger' often leads to desperate acts of theft and the mutilation of library materials.

Effects of book theft and vandalism on library services

The high mean score for 'Loss of materials' (x=3.4)) underscores the gravity of the acquisition crisis at BMU Library. As Popoola et al. (2020) noted, in specialized medical libraries, the loss of a single current clinical manual can affect the training of an entire cohort.



This leads to 'Reduced access', creating a scenario where the library's role as an information provider is compromised. These findings suggest that the library is currently in a 'defensive' state—losing the very resources it struggles so hard to acquire due to the economic and security factors identified in Table 1.

Existing security measures in libraries

The empirical data from this study paints a challenging picture of resource management at Bayelsa Medical University Library. The high mean scores in Table 1 regarding "Exchange rate fluctuations" ($x=3.74$) and "High cost of medical titles" ($x=3.63$) confirm that the library is struggling to acquire materials in a volatile economy, supporting Etebu & Sawyerr–George (2010).

However, the acquisition crisis is compounded by a security crisis. Table 2 reveals that "Poor security" ($x=3.3$) is a primary cause of book theft and vandalism. This is explained by the data in Table 3, which shows that while 80% of the library relies on manual Security guards, only 10% has access to RFID technology. As Oyewole & Adetoro (2022) noted, manual security is often insufficient for high-value medical collections. The resulting "Loss of materials" ($x=3.4$) and "Reduced access" ($x=3.3$) create a "double jeopardy" scenario: the library struggles to buy expensive books, only to lose them to theft due to a lack of electronic surveillance. This confirms to Obidike (2019)'s warning that resource loss in medical libraries directly compromises clinical training quality.

Propose effective control strategies again the problem

The overwhelming support for CCTV installation (90%) underscores a critical shift in the security paradigm at BMU. While the library currently relies heavily on manual security guards (80%, as seen in Table 3), the stakeholders recognize that human surveillance alone is insufficient to curb the "Loss of materials" ($x=3.4$) identified in Table 2. This high level of agreement aligns with the findings of Afolabi (2013), who reported that electronic surveillance systems significantly decrease book loss rates in university settings compared to manual measures.

User education (85%) emerged as a vital non-technological strategy. Stakeholders believe that informing users about the consequences of resource theft and the proper use of library materials can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility. Literature supports this, as Obidike (2019) found that effective user education connects medical students with information resources while alleviating library anxiety and curbing misconduct. In the context of Bayelsa, Emmanuel & Augustine (2021) similarly advocated for regular training on security breaches to minimise threats.

Finally, the demand for "More books" (88%) highlights the fundamental issue of scarcity. The agreement on this strategy suggests that stakeholders view the current collection as inadequate to meet the high demand of the medical curriculum. This directly addresses the finding that "Inadequate copies" ($x=3.1$) is a primary cause of vandalism (Table 1). As noted in broader Nigerian library studies, increasing the volume of quality resources—particularly in disciplines with board exams—is a top priority for reducing "user frustration" and illegal resource removal.

Summary of the Findings

1. Inadequate resources and poor security systems are major causes of theft. This aligns with earlier studies.

2. Theft and vandalism reduce access to information in Bayelsa Medical University Library.
3. There is heavy reliance on human personnel (Security guards) with a significant deficit in modern tracking technology (RFID) in Bayelsa Medical University (BMU) Library.
4. The high agreement on CCTV and RFID suggests a shift toward technological solutions.

Conclusion

The Bayelsa Medical University (BMU) Library stands at a critical crossroads. As a specialized institution, its ability to support clinical excellence is directly tied to the currency and availability of its collection. This study concludes that the library is currently trapped in a cycle of economic and security instability. The "information hunger" caused by the high cost and scarcity of foreign medical texts ($x=3.63$) has inadvertently fueled a culture of theft and vandalism, further depleting the library's limited resources.

While the reliance on traditional security guards is high (80%), it has proven ineffective against the sophisticated challenges of modern resource theft. The transition to a "technology-driven" library, as envisioned by BMU, is currently hampered by an infrastructural gap in electronic surveillance (only 30% CCTV coverage). However, there is a strong institutional will for change, with 90% of stakeholders supporting the deployment of modern security technologies. Ultimately, the survival of the BMU Library as a center of medical excellence depends on a shift from reactive, manual processes to a proactive, digitally secured acquisition framework.

Recommendations

Based on the integrated findings from the four data tables the following comprehensive recommendations are proposed.

1. Financial Revitalization and Budgetary Compliance

The study found that "Inadequate budgetary allocation" ($x=3.51$) and "Naira devaluation" ($x=3.74$) are the most severe inhibitors of resource acquisition. Adherence to the 10% Mandate: The University management should strictly implement the National Universities Commission (NUC) guideline that stipulates 10% of the institution's recurrent expenditure be allocated to the library. Establishment of a Foreign Exchange Buffer: Given the high cost of foreign medical titles ($x=3.63$), the university should create a dedicated "Library Procurement Fund" in a stable currency or provide a subsidy to buffer the library against sudden fluctuations in the exchange rate. Aggressive Grant Seeking: The Library should actively pursue TETFund (Tertiary Education Trust Fund) interventions specifically earmarked for "Library Development" to facilitate the bulk purchase of current clinical and pharmaceutical manuals.

2. Technological Transformation of Library Security

With "Poor security" identified as a leading cause of vandalism ($x=3.3$) and a 90% stakeholder preference for electronic surveillance, a shift from manual to digital security is mandatory. Deployment of RFID and CCTV Systems: Management should bridge the current gap (where only 10% of the library has RFID and 30% has CCTV) by installing Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags on all high-value medical texts and expanding CCTV coverage to all reading areas and exits. Electronic Gate Integration: RFID-enabled security gates should be installed at the library entrance to trigger alarms if un-processed materials are



being removed, reducing the reliance on human security guards (currently 80%).

3. Transition to a "Digital-First" Acquisition Policy

To mitigate the "Loss of materials" ($x=3.4$) and "Reduced access" ($x=3.3$), the library must evolve its collection format. Prioritize Multi-User E-Book Licenses: For core medical textbooks that are prone to theft or mutilation, the library should acquire electronic versions with multi-user licenses. E-books cannot be physically stolen or vandalized and provide 24/7 remote access to students. Consortia Building: BMU Library should join or lead a consortium of medical libraries in the South-South region to co-subscribe to expensive clinical databases (e.g., Up To Date, Science Direct), thereby sharing costs and increasing resource depth.

4. Institutionalization of User Education and Ethics

Stakeholders showed 85% agreement that user education is a key strategy for curbing resource abuse. Mandatory Information Literacy Course: The University should make "Library Use and Information Literacy" a compulsory, credit-earning GST course for all 100-level and direct-entry students. This course must explicitly cover the ethics of information use and the legal/academic consequences of book theft. Awareness Campaigns: Regular "Library Week" events and digital signage within the library should highlight the cost of medical books and the impact of vandalism on the academic success of the entire student body.

5. Policy Formalization and Collection Management

The absence of a written Collection Development Policy (CDP) was a significant finding ($x=3.06$). Drafting a Specialized Medical CDP: The University Librarian should lead a committee to draft a formal Collection Development Policy that specifically outlines priorities for medical specialties, weaning of outdated materials, and protocols for handling gifts/donations. Closed-Access for "High-Risk" Titles: Until electronic security (RFID) is fully implemented, the library should adopt a "Closed-Access" or "Reference Only" status for very expensive or rare clinical manuals to prevent further loss.

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