

Olha Antonova

*PhD in Social Communication, Associate Professor of the Department of Marketing,
National University of Food Technologies,*

Kyiv, Ukraine

orcid.org/0000-0003-3213-8699

**COMBINING OF MOODLE PLATFORM ELEMENTS WITH EXTRA-
PLATFORM RESOURCES IN DISTANT TEACHING OF CREATIVE AND
PRACTICAL SUBJECTS (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE COURSE ADAPTATION
FOR "JOURNALISTIC SPECIALITY (PHOTO JOURNALISM)")**

***Abstract.** The article is dedicated to the demarcation of the transformation specificity of creative and practical subjects into distant teaching in higher educational establishment. The particularities of the course didactic elements usage on the Moodle platform and on extra-platform resources were studied on example of the course "Journalistic Speciality (Photo Journalism)" which was located on the website of distant learning of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University. Academic subjects of such type aim to form students' practical skills and, thus, are based on imitation as a method of teaching which is hard to realize during distant teaching of an academic subject. The formation of necessity of creative seeing and self-realization within the academic subject is also important. Taking into consideration specific situation caused by the events in Luhansk region it was particularly important to create psychological comfort and minimize stress situations connected to the absence of direct contact with a teacher and groupmates during the studying process. The aim of this research is to trace out the specificity of usage of the Moodle platform and extra-platform resources in distant teaching of creative and practical academic subjects to the students of humanities; to lighten gained experience in search of optimal for distant learning forms and methods of teaching for provision of high educational result and psychological comfort of students. The author uses such methods of research as analysis of educational and methodological literature, programmes, manuals and methodological recommendation, available programme means and a platform for distant learning; approbation of chosen methodology in the conditions of distant learning in evacuated university; questionnaires and interviews with the students who took part in studying of the academic subject, working out and statistical analysis of the results; progress monitoring of students' educational activity, observation and evaluation of their extra-learning creative activity. The search of didactical forms and methods was made while taking into consideration the aim and the subject matter of the academic course and technical facilities for communication during teaching of creative and practical academic course "Journalistic Speciality (Photo Journalism)" for the students of 4 academic groups of specialities "Journalism" and for master students of speciality "Media communications" in 2014 – 2016 years. Monitoring of students' educational activity and analysis of questionnaire results have shown that many students consider the Moodle platform elements more suitable for studying of theoretical materials, while creative tasks they prefer to fulfil on extra-platform specialized resources, for example, in open theme social nets. The usage of both basic methodological forms of work and interactive and playing technologies (web-quests, glogs, and comics) realized due to combination of the Moodle elements and outside internet resources assisted to better mastering of learning material and helped to those students who faced distant learning for the first time to adapt quicker to the particularities of the distant learning platform Moodle and to lighten their integration into student community. The choice of platform and extra-platform educational resources allowed to meet psychological, educational, professional needs of the students and encouraged them to creative self-realization in open information space.*

Introduction.

Technological evolution and global internetization of the world caused significant changes in society, which, logically, influenced the necessity of renewal of professional training standards. Nowadays every individual functions in quickly updating, globalized and digitalized informational space, has access to the whole data array generated during the previous years, and as a result the ability of constant autonomous self-perfection is spotlighted in professional development because it allows to synchronize personal skills with epoch demands. At the same time development of informational communicative systems defines modern person's psychological particularities of world perception, typical features of his or her learning activity – “yearning for energy saving, comfort and quick access to resources, wish to get information or service «here and now»” [18, p. 14]. That is why it is natural that system of higher education in order to meet social demands in highly qualified, capable of self-development professionals is forced to bump into search and formation of new, more effective teaching forms and methods. One of these forms is distant learning which “gives the opportunity to create systems of mass constant learning and self-education” [9, p. 147].

Democratic nature and accessibility of educational resources regardless of geographical and social particularities made distant learning able “to react in a flexible way to needs and demands of the society and to provide the realization of constitutional right for education” [9, p. 147]. In Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University implementation of distant forms of teaching started in 2002. With this purpose at first the laboratory of distant learning was created, which later was re-organized into a sector of distant learning of the department of management of educational process quality planning. At first, distant courses played a role as an additional element in general process of education for students of different specialities. This was appropriate on the this stage of implementation and development of distant learning in Ukraine because, in opinion of M. A. Umryk, “taking into consideration financial, organizational and psychological moments... in the nearest future we can talk mostly about organically mixed traditional and distant learning in which all advantages of the first and of the second are harmoniously joined” [19, p. 4].

But in 2014 the necessity to re-orient the most of the academic courses into distant form of teaching appeared. Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University was forcibly evacuated from Luhansk to Starobil's'k that is why distant learning became the only possible form of organization of teaching for many specialities. Pedagogical staff had to adapt quickly all the existing methodological groundwork in teaching to the specificity of computerized learning process in distant form, because “an observational study was conducted to analyze whether effective instructional strategies found in the face-to-face environment could be used in the distance learning environment” with some adaptations [7, p. 181].

During this re-organization deep transformations took place in distant format in case of creative and practical courses. Because of that fact that in them the possibility of direct communication between students and teachers is extremely important, the search of optimal forms of communication per internet was entrusted to “a mentor-consultant who should coordinate the process of cognition” [6, p. 3]. Teaching of creative and practical academic subjects often requires direct contact between a teacher and a student. Thus, it is traced out that in the process of learning of such academic courses as “Photo Journalism” or “Journalistic Speciality” it is necessary to use such method of teaching as imitation because a student has to orient on demonstrated teacher's skills and to form his own skills while repeating pedagogue's actions. In addition to ensuring the actual studying of the material through distant learning, it was also urgent to create a psychologically comfortable environment for the students' educational and, most importantly, creative activity. So, we aimed at facilitating and consolidating learning groups by means of distant learning, at increasing learning motivation of the students who suddenly found themselves under quite stressful conditions due to the general situation in the region.

According to our hypothesis, it was possible to solve these tasks with the help of usage of non-platform means of learning (social networks, web-quests and interactive poster-glogs) in conjunction with the basic resources of the Moodle platform.

The aim of this research is to study the specificity of usage of the Moodle platform and extra-platform resources in distant teaching of creative and practical academic subjects to the students of humanities (on the example of the course “Journalistic Speciality (Photo Journalism)” for students of specialities “Journalism” and for master students of speciality “Media communications”) and to highlight our gained experience in the search of forms and methods which would suit the distant teaching system and would provide high educational results and psychological comfort of students.

The object of the research is academic course “Journalistic Speciality (Photo Journalism)” which was located on the website of distant learning of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University. **The subject** is the particularities of distant teaching of photo journalism for the students of specialities “Journalism” and “Media communications”.

Analysis of recent researches and publications. Specificity of methodological organisation of distant professional education was a subject of studies done by several domestic and foreign researchers. In particular, V. Bykov [3], P. Stefanenko [16], P. Yutsiavichene [21] paid attention to the conceptual basics of distant education, its main particularities such as flexibility, modularity, parallelism, profitability, asynchrony and the special status of a teacher and a student, to the principles of constructing a modular learning. While working out our educational subject we take into consideration specificity of distant course projecting and requirements to it which were defined by V. Bykov [3], V. Kukharenko, O. Rybalko & N. Syrotenko [8] in particular, development in the aspect of work and emphasis on skills formation, integration of technical and non-technical skills, individual practice, etc.

We also rely on the basic model of distant education proposed by P. Stefanenko, its place in general didactic system and main forms of educational process organisation and on developed by the scholar ways of improvement through the individualization of educational process [16]. Ye. Polat in her studies warned against the attempts of “just mechanically transfer developed traditional academic subjects into electronic version and sending them per email to the users” [15]. This proved the topicality of our methodological search in the process of adaptation of full-time academic course to distant teaching. We also based our research results of the principles of teaching traced out by Ye. Polat, M. Moiseieva & A. Petrov, e. g., co-working and project method and necessity of entrance test in order to identify students' level of grounding [14]. Yu. Borysovska, O. Kozlova & O. Lysenko, paying attention to the particularities of distant teaching of academic subjects in natural sciences, proposed different forms of work with information and of students' knowledge evaluation, defined functionality of used software elements in the studying process. In our pedagogical experiment we based on their idea that “the material which one cannot master on one's own should be ... supplemented with multimedia elements that must take into consideration the experience of the teacher teaching this subject” [2, p. 22].

Sh. Amonashvili [1], S. Lysenkova, V. Shatalov & Volkov I. [10] were analyzing principles of cooperation pedagogy and the problem of support of the learners in the process of mastering of educational material through co-working; we this this is especially suitable for creative and practical academic subjects. But distant teaching of creative and practical academic subjects in a higher educational establishments and search for optimal educational methodological strategies of forming students' creative competence through the means of specialized educational platforms and extra-platform internet resources still should be researched deeply. In the process of learning of creative and practical academic subjects in the foreground one can see the necessity to find optimal ways of transmitting of practical experience from a teacher to students through the means of distant learning and formation of students' motivation for creativity; but certain methodological examples of successful solution for such tasks are still missing.

Methods of research. While looking for some optimal strategy for distant teaching of creative and practical academic course “Journalistic Speciality (Photo Journalism)” for the students of specialities “Journalism” and for master students of speciality “Media communications” we used such methods and modes as analysis of educational methodological literature, programmes, tutorials and methodological recommendations, available programming means and platforms for distant learning; observation of educational process in higher educational establishment; testing of chosen methodology under the conditions of distant learning in evacuated university; surveys and questionnaires of the students who studied the material distantly, processing and statistical analysis of the results; monitoring of the successfulness of students' educational activity, observation and evaluation of their creative extraeducational activity.

The teaching of the academic subject took place in 2014 – 2016. 4 academic groups were involved (the students of specialities “Journalism” and master students of speciality “Media communications”), in general number of 36 students. The monitoring of chosen educational means included the set of actions.

Firstly, we conducted the entrance control of students' knowledge and skills through the oral test and analysis of their own photos created taken before the academic course, and also through estimation of their general interest in photography as creative activity.

Secondly, in order to track the effectiveness and comfort of the selected methodical techniques and to adjust the strategy of training, short questionnaires were conducted after the development of the topics. Simultaneously there was a qualitative and a quantitative assessment of the success of the homework connected to learning of theory and development of creative skills.

Thirdly, at the end of the course, evaluation of both the mastering of the theoretical material (by testing) and of the photo-portfolio of each student took place, their further creative self-realization was tracked.

1. Standard Moodle platform educational elements in the teaching of creative and practical subjects

Distant learning aiming to provide optimal results of educational activity means usage of specialized distant learning platform that is “software intended for organization of distant internet-education which allows automatizing of the process of creation and getting of knowledge un the system of distant learning” [12, p. 9]. It gives access to educational resources, has to guarantee “possessing of equal rights in presence in the net for all the participants of educational process (for a teacher, for a student, for an educational establishment)” [17, p. 39], allows locate specialized electronic educational and methodological complexes with possibility of quick editing and checking of the materials.

The choice of the optimal platform for distance learning is extremely important because “to make studying at distance more complete, various computer tools may be used : tools for browsing and searching the web, but also tools for communication (email, forums, distribution lists), planning activities, note-taking, modeling of concepts, etc. For distant students, who may have varied expertise with computers, the learning curve might be too steep. Also since most of them study asynchronously, they find themselves quite isolated not only to use the environment, but more importantly to organize their activity in this new world” [5, p. 364].

Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University uses the platform with open code – Moodle, which is now leading in Ukraine according to number of usage in educational establishments, as mentioned Taranenko [18, p. 15]. Its advantage is “open source, is built on a sound educational philosophy, and has a huge community that supports and develops it. It can compete with the big commercial systems in terms of feature sets and is easy to extend” [4, p. 4].

Though, in the process of teaching of creative and practical academic course where the necessity not only to transfer theoretical knowledge to students but, on the first place, to form practical skills for creation of quality creative materials is of great importance, usage of the Moodle platform gained some specific features. In particular, in the process of transformation into distant form of the course “Photo Journalism”, in which students have to gain practical experience of creation of photos in different genres, to master different photo equipment, to learn methods and principles of photography with natural and artificial light and under different conditions, we were looking for optimal ways of transmitting of practical experience from a teacher to students through the means of distant learning. Such creative and practical academic subject required direct communication of a teacher with academic group in order to demonstrate main settings of a camera and also usage of specific equipment, but it was obvious that didactical means of the Moodle platform were not able to provide full and synchronous contact. Especially it was important for conducting practical sessions which were based on development of particular skills in mastering photo equipment.

The general conditions of studies, in which students and teachers of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University found themselves, also influenced particularities of this platform usage. It was also necessary to take into account the general conditions of studying, in which students and teachers evacuated from the Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University found themselves that imposed specific requirements for the usage of educational elements including purely technical ones. Difficulties were represented by the technical limitations of some students who were unable to use high-quality photographic equipment and stable internet connection. We also note that in a certain period, it was generally dangerous to engage in street photography in uncontrolled Ukrainian cities, and this should have been taken into account when creating the course tasks. The necessity to take into account this fact also influenced the choice of the best didactic forms of learning offered by Moodle.

In teaching of creative and practical academic course “Journalistic Speciality (Photo Journalism)” according to the recommendations of the department of management of educational process quality planning we used such standard course elements as “Lecture”, “Task”, “Forum”, “Test”. The element “Lecture” appeared to be the best for presenting theoretical information about the historical development of photojournalism, shooting conditions, structure of a camera, laws of frame compositional organization, and modern genres of photojournalism, which are the main content parts of the academic course.

While writing the text of the lectures, we tried to maintain a balance between text and illustrative parts in order to make them as comprehensible and understandable as possible, as well as to ensure their technical accessibility. Thus, some lectures, which because of the particularities of the academic subject and of the topics contained big number of illustrations, were accompanied with a file in format of .ppt (presentation) or .pdf (lecture text with illustrations).

Because not all the students had stable internet connection it was easier for them to download illustrative material as a separate file and not depend on stability of internet connection during processing of the material on the website of distant learning. Because of these reasons we were using as an illustrative element only single glogs (in a form of interactive posters) and comics images because they are more dependent on students' technical resources. The "Task" element allowed organizing and control of the practical activity of students during the mastering of the course "Journalistic Speciality (Photo Journalism)". This part of the course, in particular, allowed easy mastering of such "problematic" for the learning (distant in space and time), but very important topics as studying of the settings for the camera for natural light and composition laws.

Because the teacher and the students were separated in space, this made it impossible to quickly assess the light conditions of photography and adjust the exposure settings. Thus, it was problematic to repeat the frame with the corrected settings while preserving the original shooting conditions. It was also necessary to take into account the requirements of the safety of several students in the non-controlled territory of Ukraine. So, taking into consideration all above mentioned particularities, the "Task" element of the distant learning course on the Moodle platform was the most optimal because it allowed each student to send shot footage and subsequently receive a teacher's answer to analyse the disadvantages and advantages of a photo. The students had to make their own conclusions about what camera settings should be used during shooting. The Moodle platform element "Forum" allowed the usage of synchronous teaching methods and arranging of a workshop on photography with artificial lighting (due to its more stable nature and ease of reproduction of light conditions). Thus, every student at the forum, located within the curriculum on the website of distant education, described created light conditions, indicated selected settings of the available photographic equipment and showed photos. Having received a feedback from the teacher and other students, he or she was able to argue the appropriateness of the decision taken or re-capture the photo. The "Test" element was useful in carrying out modular final evaluation. These elements of the Moodle platform became the first and the basic ones for the development of the course "Journalistic Speciality (Photo Journalism)" for students and master students.

2. Combined educational elements and their role in shaping of students' motivation and consolidation

However, the surveys conducted by us (in the form of questionnaires with closed and open questions) and the analysis of students' educational activities (qualitative and quantitative indicators of their performance in different tasks) showed that there is an urgent need to pay more attention to the educational motivation of students and to the comfort of such educational process.

Several factors should have been taken into consideration. In particular, the fact that some students studying “Journalistic Speciality” did not have the experience of distant learning (and in general, studying at the university because this academic course was studied during the first year in the first year of evacuation of the higher educational establishment), which affected their motivation sphere, as well as the ability to work with the distant platform and to distribute time for tasks fulfilment. So, in the survey for students, which was conducted after the first 3 – 4 topics, a part of the respondents mentioned that “it is difficult to study the discipline distantly” (almost 40% of the respondents), “it is difficult to distribute time for study” (22% of the respondents), “it is difficult to understand how to apply the gained knowledge in practice” (almost 30% of the respondents, mostly junior students).

It was also important that a significant part of the students, who were mastering the course, were territorially distant not only from the teacher but also from each other; this condition made their common creative and educational activities more complicated. 28% of junior students mentioned that it was “difficult for them to build mutual understanding with the groupmates”, the students complained about the psychological discomfort of the quick change in the format of education, the lack of habitual daily direct communication with groupmates and teachers. Such discomfort was also reinforced by the general anxiety of the situation. Monitoring of students' educational activity at this stage showed that about 10% did not handle the tasks at all, and almost 40% performed them at a low level.

Therefore, it was decided to use additional non-standard forms of work on the Moodle platform (besides with used basic ones), as well as to search for some extra-platform resources. Thus, In order to create supportive psychological atmosphere during course learning, to raise interest in academic course and to activate students' creative and investigative activity the teacher offered web-quest in one or the studied topics on the basis of element of distant learning called “Wiki”. The task for the quest was placed with open access on the created website, and there we also placed links for internet resources with the information necessary for passing the quest in the theory of compositional frame construction. The accomplished task students had to put together in the element “Wiki”.

In the opinion of the researchers, “communication with a computer, which is less emotional than communication with a teacher in a classroom, becomes a cause of emotional psychic discomfort, of psychological stress” [6, p. 62], that is why we decided in order to resist to this to conduct the quest in a form of game according to the motifs of one popular literature work. This also allowed younger students to get acquainted with each other distantly, to integrate them into a student community (some tasks were fulfilled by young students and master students together). The book series about Harry Potter was selected as a plot for the educational quest. This step contributed to the psychological relief of the students, revealed their common interests, and, in addition to the discussion about proposed educational tasks, initiated a literature discussion.

As scholars note, “social constructionism is based on the idea that people learn best when they are engaged in a social process of constructing knowledge through the act of constructing an artifact for others... The process of negotiating meaning and utilizing shared artifacts is a process of constructing knowledge. We are not blank slates when we enter the learning process” [4, p. 4-5]. Element of distant academic course “Wiki” appeared to be optimal for team work on the tasks of web-quest because of its interactive nature, allowed to orient the students not to reproduction of gained during the course knowledge but to impel them search autonomously, to analyze and generalize aggregated information. Emotional involvement into process of studying was also strengthened by constant interaction with classmates during the fulfillment of the task, by information exchange with players from other teams and change of roles, and transition from passive perception of information to active creator position.

The effectiveness of this chosen form of teaching was proved with the fact that only 9% of all students completed the tasks at a low level. In addition, in the final test, students gave correct answers to 96% of the questions which were processed during the quest (while in topics presented on the Moodle platform through the element “Lecture” this figure was only 72%). It should be mentioned that that in full-time teaching of the academic course such form of work as web-quest was not used, so transformation of the academic subject into format of distant learning allowed broadening arsenal of methods and techniques.

On the Moodle platform in order to give some illustrative examples we also placed several glogs and comics images created with the help of third-party internet resources. In particular, we were using StoryboardThat.com resource to create a comic book that clearly explains to the students the basic requirements for working with the course, as well as Glogster.com for creating interactive posters that would structure the theoretical information for its better mastering. During the survey, 72% of the students mentioned that they were more comfortable with interactive posters than usual presentations. However, we have deliberately used only a few glogs, because they are dependent on the technical resources available to the students.

3. Usage of extra-platform resources in the process of distant education

We must also admit that for teaching of creative and practical academic subject “Journalistic Speciality (Photo Journalism)” we decided not only limit ourselves with educational methodological and communicative resources of Moodle platform. As additional space we have chosen social nets, in particular specialized in topics and types of content (Flickr, Instagram) because all students had accounts in social nets and communicate there so they knew nets' functional set well.

According to H. Mozhayeva & A. Fashchenko, “intelligibility of ideology and interface of social nets of the majority of internet audience allows to save time, skipping the stage pupils' adaptation to the new communicative space which allows to build informal communication between a teacher and students” [11].

Such particularities of communication in social nets as well as higher ease, simple organization and control of synchronous communication, wide possibilities and convenient instrumental set for grouping of educational process participants into dialogues and communities, and also habitualness of such communication for students allowed forming more comfortable conditions for group work and active discussion about creative works.

In the survey which we conducted, the majority of the students (84%) answered that fulfilment of the tasks based on collective discussion and consulting with the teacher is more convenient in social networks, and communication through the element “Forum” and private messages on the Moodle platform 75% of the respondents considered more formal, that is why the involvement in commenting on the creative work of the colleagues was lower. This confirmed our observations. Only 60% of students and master student participated in commenting on photo works through the “Forum” element, while in specialized social networks more than 85% took part, with the discussion there being more active, indeed less formal.

Thus, learning of academic subject “Journalistic Speciality (Photo Journalism)” stipulated course task – creation by the students of their own photo project. Each day they had to make pictures, chose the most interesting ones and publish them online on their account on Flickr, and also they had to comment pictures of their classmates and other net users. Necessity to make pictures every day and publish them in open access for others became a incentive for development of each student, allowed to skip “reticence” in a close round of classmates and “to share the achievements with the whole world” [13, p. 153] that is an important factor of development. The students also followed some profile communities in photo journalism (“Ukrainian Flickr”, “Street photo”, etc.).

Realization of this project on the basis of Flickr net allowed deepening the students into modern photo journalistic process, and gave the, a possibility to gain and analyze multiplicity of their photo works evaluations. On the basis of discussions with the colleagues the students had a possibility to form their own technical, aesthetical and ethical norms of photo journalism, gained guidelines for creative work. There was an exchange of knowledge and skills not only between a teacher and students, a student and other students but also between a student and strange users- amateur in photo, in the frame of one communicative space which corresponds to current connectionistic approach to the organization of educational process in the conditions of mosaic informational paradigm [20] as Vlasenko said. Because for works of photo journalism (as well as for any other mass media materials) it is extremely important to get a reception and feedback from an audience, withdrawal of students' creative educational activity out of locked Moodle platform seemed to appropriate. Realized in Flickr net possibility to get comments and «likes» from other registered participants became one more (besides teacher's critical remarks) measure mean for the quality of educational task fulfillment because students could trace which photo gathered more positive comments, analyze the reasons for popularity or failure.

We monitored the qualitative and quantitative performance of students in social networks. In particular, the creative work in student's own blog-portfolio was assessed, the activity of commenting on groupmates' work and third-party photographers and the argumentation in the discussions were evaluated, which would be a proof of the students' deep understanding of the technical and aesthetic principles of creating a photo.

In the final survey, more than 80% of the students mentioned that they would like to work in the field of photography in the future. It should be mentioned that besides improving the quality of photos in creative blogs in comparison with the data provided during the entrance test, the indicator of efficiency and suitability of usage of third-party resources in distant learning is shown by the fact that about 40% of students placed in their photo blogs in social media works which they created outside of the course, and 65% of students continued to post in their creative blogs after finishing the study of discipline.

Another indicator of the growth of students' motivation is that in the final questionnaire, more than 85% of students mentioned their interest in photography for future activity, while only about 25% were interested in photojournalism during the entrance test. Also, at the moment of the entrance test only 11% created some photos for journalistic purposes.

Conclusions.

To sum up, in the distant teaching of creative and practical academic courses, in particular photojournalism, the usage of the resources of the Moodle distant learning platform and specialized social networks gave an opportunity to increase motivation for students' creativity, to create a more comfortable learning environment, to remove or reduce psychological discomfort from the lack of permanent direct contact with a teacher and groupmates. The usage of interactive and game technologies (in particular, web-quests, glogs, comics), along with the basic methodological forms, helped those students who faced distant learning for the first time to adapt more quickly to the features of the Moodle distant learning platform and to intensify their learning and extra-curricular communication with teammates, to integrate into the student community.

Exiting the closed educational environment and application of the opportunities of specialized social networks has led to students' deeper understanding of the technical grounds and the ethical and aesthetic principles of photojournalism; this allowed them to receive and analyse the unbiased reaction from the audience to their works.

Thus, the combination of platform and extra-platform educational resources has yielded positive results, optimally satisfying the psychological, educational, professional needs of students, pushed them to creative self-realization in an open informational environment, formed professional competencies and interest in photojournalism as creative activity. Usage of social nets (specialized as well as general) in distant learning of creative and practical academic subjects aiming to adapt synchronous forms of teaching, extremely important for gaining practical skills, is worth further research.

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