

THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNET AND DIGITAL MEDIA ON THE READING CULTURE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Traditional reading habits of the young generation have changed and will continue to change with the digital revolution of today's world, which greatly impacts education and work. People, especially the young digital generation, called Netizens, more often than not, read contents in electronic mode causing a new revolution in the reading culture. Technological affordances make such change very easy and convenient. This study looks at the influence of internet and digital media on the reading culture of secondary school students in Nigeria. The paper provides a historical background of the concept of reading; it expounds the internet culture and the availability of overwhelming online content and tools for the youth. The impact of Internet content and digital media on changing reading culture is exhaustively discussed. The paper concluded by recommending a balance between the digital race and the traditional print reading culture.

Keywords: Digital resources, Reading habits, print media, digitization.

1. Introduction

Reading is very vital for the overall improvement of a human being. According to Bana (2020), reading affords experience through which an individual may enlarge his horizons of knowledge, identify, spread and increase his awareness and advances a deeper understanding of himself, of other people and of the world. In the context of education, a large amount of reading is essential because all learning activities involve reading skills and the success of students' study also depends on the greater part in their ability to read. Palani (2012) stated that reading is interconnected with the total educational development and educational achievement needs successful reading. People with good reading habits tend to score better on all kinds of tests (Krashen, 2011) add quality to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage (Igwe, 2011).

Erlina, (2019) posited that reading is one of the most important activities of life through which we enter into the life and experiences of others and extend our knowledge, scope of experience and enjoyment. It has critical role to play in the overall development of an individual and the nation at large. It is principally through reading that people obtain knowledge. People who can neither read nor write are described as illiterates and such people are often limited to the knowledge gained from oral communication channels. Many activities of ordinary life require the ability to read. Moreover, reading enriches one's understanding of how language is used, thereby improving one's spoken and written language (Lucky & Saidu, 2020). Additionally,

in-depth reading helps to develop the mind and personality of a person, enriches intellectual abilities, provides insights into human problems and influences attitudes and behavior. Reading is a vital factor affecting intellectual and emotional growth and individuals who read well widen their mental horizons and significantly increases their opportunities of success. Sir Richard Steele has logically stated that "Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body (Suhana & Haryudin, 2017).

However, the emergence of the Internet has created an extra-ordinary change in the reading habits of students. Presently, reading is no longer confined to the print reading. The scope of reading sources has changed drastically in the Internet revolution to include websites, web pages, e-mail, discussion boards, chartrooms, instant messaging, blogs, wikis and other multimedia documents (Umeh, 2016). Now the potential reader can access and browse the online information from the whole web while using his/her terminal at home. The hypertext and hypermedia technologies allow the e-readers to go from one page to another by selecting links in various directions popularly known as surfing (Kazazoğlu, 2020). The Internet surfing enables students to navigate a world full of inter-connected information, discover new site read up-to-date information and download things of interest. In the past, students relied heavily on print materials such as newspaper for information because, to a great extent, they assist in creating and improving reading habits, knowledge and awareness (Bala & Verma, 2018).

Also, in this era of information age, Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2016) identify globalization as one of the major challenges to effective reading. She argues that technology has revolutionized communication resulting in many social networks, Internet, micro-chips and others. Moreover, the effect of technology on reading is a preponderance of technological devices that make reading books a difficult and expensive task (Bolen, 2020). Studies show that electronic media, particularly the television, mobile phones, computers and even the radio are gradually taking over the relevance of books in the society (Shimray et al., 2015). DiLullo (2011) concluded that student's constant exposure to the Internet and other digital media influences how they receive information and learn.

Therefore, the rapid development of the Internet is one of the most fascinating phenomena characterizing the information age affecting the cultural, social and economic life of the modern world. Internet enlarges our access to information; it enables new forms of communication, and serves as an arena for many on-line services in the spheres of commerce, culture, entertainment and education (Hine, 2020). Today the Internet is still in a process of rapid change. The technology itself, its content, and usage patterns are in a continuous increase in demand by circle of users with specific needs. Many of those who participated in the creation of the Internet culture are young people especially secondary school students and undergraduates, who are growing up in the digital-technological society of the twenty-first century (Kraus *et al.*, 2018). Recent studies claimed that for the first time, youths are more comfortable, knowledgeable, and literate than their parents about an innovation central to society. The Net-Generation, as he called them, will use digital media to develop and superimpose its culture on the rest of the society (Shohel *et al.*, 2021). However, computers and the Internet not only give students powerful intellectual tools, but they also shape their thinking about their own self eg; identity, relationship, sexuality, or evolution (Mirra &

Garcia, 2021). The purpose of this study is to enhance our understanding of how internet usage will impact on the reading culture of secondary school students.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The ubiquity of information and communication technology in Nigeria is a very welcome development, while its use for educational purposes is also of immense benefit, especially in the area of being globally relevant and current (Amkpa & Abba, 2009). Studies conducted by different research organizations in different countries have shown that the greater percentages of Internet users are mostly secondary school students and undergraduate students (Jagboro, 2018; Singh & Nagar, 2019). They are well versed in this new technology and are commonly referred to as *net generation* students (Prensky, 2001; Kabir, 2016). This preponderance of the use of the Internet is supposed to greatly influence their reading habits and reading comprehension (Umeh, 2016). Despite the increasing interest of researchers in Internet usage by secondary students, studies regarding Internet use and its influence on secondary school students' reading habits and reading comprehension are still limited.

Internet usage has the potential to improve the quality of education. This is supported by Sian *et al.* (2019) who postulated that computer-based learning can increase understanding of theoretical and critical concepts. Mahanty and Mishra (2016) believe that the popularity of the internet as a teaching-learning tool increased with the introduction of the web browser, which uses a hypertext concept. With text and graphical images and later video, audio, and animated objects, it becomes easily distributed over the internet. The value of the internet for educational purpose was further supported by (Anderson, 2017) who stated that the internet brought about positive changes to teachers and instructors, who taught students to learn, work, communicate and play.

However, despite the numerous benefits discussed on internet usage in respect of making our lives worthwhile, reading habits are alarmingly declining. This is supported by Igbokwe, *et al.*, (2020) who argued that while technology is steady in individual lives, reading culture is fast vanishing into thin air. Similarly, Nkanu and Okon (2010) observed that information and communication technology especially Internet technology is having an adverse effect on the reading culture of Nigerians. This is due to the fact that, many students today prefer to spend most of their time in cafes, browsing, playing games, chatting with friends than reading.

Internet is a veritable tool in learning, teaching and research if effectively used. However, it has been observed that owing to this technological innovation, reading culture is being threatened, especially, among teens and secondary school students (Monu *et al.*, 2020). In Nigerian society today, while technology is slowly taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading culture among secondary school students is fast disappearing (Akidi *et al.*, 2021). The declining interest in reading among our children (especially those in secondary schools) compared to the increase in hours spent on the Internet has become a cause for alarm and a challenge to all (Kolajo & Agbetuyi, 2021).

On the contrary, Onovughe (2012), in her study on Internet use and reading habits of higher institution students asserted that the Internet is of immense benefit especially in the area of being globally relevant and current. However, the author added that when it becomes a substitute for good reading competence among young people, it should give cause for

concern. This implies that the existence of mixed findings on the relationship between internet usage and reading habit. In the same vein, Hooper and Herath (2014) pointed out that the Internet might have detrimental effects on cognition that diminish the capacity for concentration and contemplation. They added that students face difficulties with concentrating while reading books and long articles on the Internet. They further explained that, unlike speech, which is an innate ability hardwired into the human brain, the ability to read has to be taught in order for the brain to rearrange its original parts for the task of interpreting symbols into words. Therefore, Gálík and Galikova Tolnaiova (2015) purport that the neural circuitry shaped by regular Internet usage can also be expected to be different from that shaped by the reading of books and other page-based written material.

Despite these advantages, students in developing countries are still accustomed to the traditional face-to-face reading, lack confidence in electronic processes, and are scared of the risks involved (Céline *et al.* 2020). Others believe that due to privacy and security issues and the complexity of the system, Internet users avoid accessing and reading online (Usman & Kumar, 2020). This means that the success and continued growth of online reading culture depends to a large extent on trust, simplicity and perceived benefits. This situation highlights the importance of researching the main factors that will influence students in developing countries to embrace the internet in order to improve their reading culture. Literature research (Ganguly *et al.*, 2010; Ofori & Appiah-Nimo, 2019) shows empirically that the features and design of the internet and online websites can be used to enhance students' intention to use the internet for reading.

In the current academic climate globally, the use of digital texts is inescapable (Pardede, 2019) and it has significantly impacted students' attitudes and reading habits. According to Bana (2020), the Internet has become an important part of students' lives, not only for their studies and daily routine but as a tool for getting to know other people and the rest of the world. Several studies have been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of digital reading versus printed reading. Some studies (Bana, 2021; Kazazoglu, 2020) have been also carried out to investigate the changes caused by digital texts to students' reading habits. However, studies investigating the effect on the 899//8 reading habits of Nigerian students are scarce. This paper attempts to fill in the gap, by finding out students' perception of using the Internet in respect of ease, usefulness and whether this perception influences their reading habits.

Historical Background

Reading has undergone remarkable changes over the years; it started from ordinary basic script to profound learning experience. For instance, in the standard history of reading entitled *Orality and Literacy*, (RobbGrieco, 2014) points out that the earliest basic script dates from only about 6000 years ago. RobbGrieco (2014) added that the first alphabet was developed by a semantic people living in or near Egypt. Cuneiform is a system of writing first developed by the ancient Sumerians of Mesopotamia c. 3500-3000 BCE. It is considered the most significant among the many cultural contributions of the Sumerians and the greatest among those of the Sumerian city of Uruk which advanced the writing of cuneiform c. 3200 BCE. All of the great Mesopotamian civilizations used cuneiform until it was abandoned in favour of the alphabetic script at some point after 100 BCE.

At the middle of the fifteenth century, the German entrepreneur Johan Gutenberg produced his first versions of the Bible using his fantastic invention of movable type. RobbGrieco (2014) further expresses that for half century of its existence, the printed book continued to be an imitation of the manuscript book. Increasingly standardized in its design, cheaper in its price, and widespread in its distribution, the new book led the world. It did not simply supply more information. It provided a mode of understanding, a basic metaphor of making sense of life.

Furthermore, in the eighteenth-century Gutenberg's invention became commercialized and sized. Sociologist Bell and Ashwood (2015) pointed out that during the height of the industrial revolution finally became a widespread leisure activity in Europe and North America and as the post-information society developed, reading became necessary for many occupations in the skilled force. Griswold (1965) also argued that the past two centuries have been the golden age for leisure and that readers in most societies have usually been minority readers. This was because reading was meant for the educated class.

Reading has over the years proved to be a worthwhile intellectual exercise. Reading has not only developed the individual's mental capacity but has also fostered the socio-economic and political advancement of societies in the world. Technological and scientific feats are undoubtedly the result of enduring intellectual efforts which include reading.

Concept of Reading

Reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning (reading comprehension). It is a means of language acquisition, of communication, and of sharing information and ideas. The reading process requires continuous practice, development, and refinement (Sukmawati, 2010). In addition, reading requires creativity and critical analysis because it is such a complex process that cannot be controlled or restricted to one or two interpretations. Readers use a variety of reading strategies to assist with decoding (to translate symbols into sound or visual representation of speech) and comprehension (Pazmiño Tachón, 2019). Readers may use context clues to identify the meaning of unknown words. They integrate the words they have into their existing framework of knowledge or schema. Currently most reading is either of the printed word from ink or toner on paper, such as a book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or notebook, or of electronic displays, such as computer displays, television, mobile phones or e-readers. Handwritten text may also be produced using a graphic pencil or a pen (Luisa Sailema, 2018).

Reading has been variously defined by different scholars, from their respective perspectives. The definitions have changed over the years, sometimes as a result of research findings and gaining of new edge. Ukpebor (2017) describes reading as reasoning that involves the meaningful interpretation of words, phrases and sentences requiring all types of thinking such as critical, analytical, creative, imaginative, evaluative, judgmental and problem solving. He regarded reading as a complex process that requires mental capacity, perception and experience of the individual which is conditioned by distinct environment. Reading can be described as the hallmark of academic achievement, and fundamental to human development. An individual functionality is achieved when a person willingly engages effectively in activities that require knowledge and skills in responding to his environment (Labra, 2019). The ultimate goal of reading is to be able to understand written material, evaluate it apply it to meeting one's needs.

Unlike the expressive skills of speaking and listening in one's first language, reading is learnt not acquired naturally. Literacy extends competence in communication skills and enables individual to function appropriately and contribute to the progress of the society. Therefore, reading is an essential ingredient in national development, and grows with modern trends. Thus, literacy is now being described in its different forms, such as computer, mathematical and graphic literacy (Mose & Mose, 2021). Reading makes a man because it transpires as a consistent activity in 15 fields of knowledge. In spite of the important position of reading in the total make-up of a person, the reading level of many Nigerians is still very low.

Madani (2019) reports that the problem among students is that majority of them focus on academic reading at the expense of other forms of reading. This explains for the increased number of aliterates in today's society. Aliterates are those who can read but refuse to read and if they read, they do so reluctantly. She focused on "The Rising Population of Aliterates in Nigerian Secondary Schools". The result from her study reveals that aliterates in the society have outnumbered the illiterates. She also discovered that most secondary school students are not easily given to reading due to other activities calling for their attention.

The rising population of reluctant readers in this age of information explosion is alarming. Nigeria as a society is composed of the partially-literate, aliterate, and the literate avid readers. The partially-literates can neither read nor write but have acquired informal education. The literate avid readers are highly motivated individuals who delight in reading. They read with passion and for pleasure. Aliterates however, can read but refuse to read and if they read, they do so reluctantly. They lack enthusiasm for reading and always have reasons why they would not read. A famous quote by Mark Twain, an American author states that "the man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read". This means that those who can read but choose not to miss as much as those who cannot read at all.

Furthermore, Clin (2015) describes reading as one of the fundamental building blocks of learning. Becoming a skilled and adoptable reader enhances the chances of success. Reading is not just for school, it is for life. Reading in all its variety is vital to being better informed, having a better understanding of oneself and as well as others (Langton & Boy, 2017). It makes one to be a thoughtful and constructive contributor to a democratic and cohesive society.

In order to develop reading skill as a tool for learning, it must be noted that one ingredient that is important is-interest. Where there is interest, there will be speed, accuracy and improvement in reading efficiency. The frequent absorption of a reader in exciting stories trains him to read fluently and accurately and all the time he is not only becoming more and more at home with the foreign language but also gains some knowledge and acquires skills which can be used in content area (Murphy et al., 2016). It must be borne in mind that learning new words need intensive effort, drill and constant usage. Reading can be argued to be the backbone of modern communication because it influences the efficiency of other communication skills. Ukpebor (2017) supports this argument by saying that we learn to write by reading what others have written and imitating their correct use of language. This informs the idea that the students will definitely imitate the use of language of the kind of materials they are exposed to. The implication is that what we read, to a great extent determines how we write and what we say.

The Internet and other Digital Media

The integration of reading and technology on the internet is causing educators to take a new look at what it means to be literate in today's society. New forms of literacy call upon students to know how to read and write not only in the print world but also in the digital world (Schmar-Dobler, 2003). Today's definition of literacy is being broadened to include "Literacy skills necessary for individuals, groups, and societies to access the best information in the shortest time to identify and solve the most important problems and then communicate this information (Rhodes & Robnolt, 2009). The internet has provided the world of work with global competition and an informational economy. Knowing how to access, evaluate, and apply information is necessary for success in the workplace and at school.

McVicker (2018) argued that, being able to successfully use the internet places special demand on the reader. First, the Internet reader must be able to handle the sheer volume of text, which can be described as massive. The potential for gathering information is virtually unlimited. Through links, or internet connections, a reader can access innumerable sites related to the original idea or topic of a search. Second, much Internet content has blinking graphics, vivid color, and lots of eye-catching phrases that can guide or distract from the reading. A reader must be able to evaluate all the features of a webpage and quickly decide which one will likely be the most helpful in accessing information. Third, most of the text on the Internet is expository. Being able to read such text requires familiarity with its concepts, vocabulary, and organizational format.

By selecting links in various orders, a reader creates his or her own path when reading on the internet, continually being updated, removed, or remodeled. Text on the internet is not static whereas the text of a book remains the same each time the book is opened. The internet is an interactive model of continuously updating information which requires a rethinking of what it means to be a reader or even a literate person (Hofmann & Beaumont, 2005). Because of technology, our definition of reading has changed to include website, e-books, e-mail, discussion boards, chat rooms, instant messaging etc. Technology is transforming the nature of literacy as students search for information or answer questions with the internet (McVicker, 2018). How can educators help students use their reading strategies to understand the economic world? Many literacy educators are currently watching the convergence of literacy and technology, and they are seeking answers to this very question.

Nigerian Secondary School Students and Their Reading Culture

According to Oyewole (2017) secondary school education should be regarded as a strategy for efficient social transformation at all fronts in independent African states. It must be understood that formal secondary education is primarily the most significant of all national investments. It is a knowledge production center, a skills production system, a complex multi-layered system for social, political, cultural and economic development system. Further to this, the secondary school system is a formal institution vested with the responsibility of imparting and developing knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for individuals to fit into society and be able to contribute productively to its development.

Fabunmi and Folorunso (2010) describe reading culture as the process of building up positive reading attitude among students and children over a period of time. They added that when an individual habitually and regularly reads books and other information materials that are

not necessarily required for in his profession or career, he is said to have a reading culture. Thus, reading culture implies an individual forms a habit of reading everyday which later forms his behavior. It is an activity that ensures continuous and dedicated reading of information resources by pupils, children, students and adults for knowledge acquisition which will be applied practically for development. Reading as a cultural exercise no doubt pays off well. Reading is not limited to increase in knowledge but it also builds maturity of character, sharpens thinking, and widens awareness in social, economic, political and environmental issues. Reading is not a process that is inculcated overnight; it takes effort and hard work. Inculcating a reading habit pays off handsomely in our lives either directly or indirectly.

Reading is an essential tool for lifelong learning, it is important for everyone to develop the rudiments and the culture of reading always so as to survive in life. Orji and Erubami (2020) elucidate that reading adds quality to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage that emancipates citizens and brings people together. John (2017) reaffirms that the art of reading is a priceless instrument for everyone. It is one of the most important activities of life through which we enter into the life and experiences of others and extend our knowledge, scope of experience and enjoyment. It has a critical role to play in the overall development of an individual and the nation at large.

Problems of Traditional Print Reading and Positive Effects of Internet and Digital Media

As beautiful as the enterprise of reading is, it has in recent times suffered great constraints. Researchers have noted some of the limitations affecting the cultivation of reading culture and also the positive effects of reading using the new digital media.

1. Underfunding of libraries and their services. Sotiloye and Bodunde (2018) reports that that the under-funding of libraries in recent times is the result of the poor level of reading proficiency in the country. The libraries of many primary and post-primary schools are so poor that they impede rather than promote knowledge acquisition. There are cases of lack of dedicated library space, inappropriate use of libraries, poorly stocked and unattractive libraries e.t.c.
2. Ukpebor (2020) situates that poor reading skills which have been identified as the problem of Nigerian students were as a result of the following: slow comprehension rate, slow reading rate, difficulty in distinguishing main ideas from irrelevant details, inadequate vocabulary or word power, inadequate interests and habits,
3. Ukpebor (2020) also stated that distractions from television and film viewing and lack of interest and relevant reading materials are some other problems. Students are rarely interested in reading for pleasure and enjoyment.
4. Also, reading is not taught or included in the school curriculum. Reading is rather subsumed in every other subject and is regarded as a tool facilitating many other types of learning. In recent times, some parents pay little or no attention to their children's reading ability, and parents themselves lack the skill and the culture of reading such that some do not read to their children. Students are rarely interested in reading for pleasure and enjoyment instead they read only to pass the examination.
5. According to Anyira and Udem (2020), other factors that negatively affect reading habits of students include: Change in Nigeria's value system:-The quest for material wealth which has eroded the interest for the search of knowledge:-Most parents only manage to pay their wards school fees and forget about buying books for them:-

6. Astronomical high prices of books and other information materials which have made them out of the reach of the masses;- poor availability of indigenous books owing to the facts that local authors are not encouraged to write books; cost of publishing books being very high and hence, indigenous writers are not motivated as they may not be able to finance the high cost of book publishing.
7. On the other hand, the use ICTs and digital media provide increases access to information sources and bridges the traditional gaps between user and information and allow students to gain deeper understanding of complex topics and concepts and are more likely to recall information and use it to solve problems outside the classroom (Ololube et al., 2007). In addition, through ICT, students extend and deepen their knowledge, investigations and inquiries according to their needs and interests.
8. The emergence of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigeria and its impact on the education sector has changed the teacher-centered education being practiced in Nigeria to learner-centered approach. Adeosun (2010) stated that the term “knowledge-driven” world means that education reform practices focus on access and quality of education, highlighting the importance of change in education that equips new generation of learners with enhanced skills to operate in the 21st century.
9. Internet and other digital media are expected to massively cut down the workload of teachers-students by making planning and resources available on the internet. Information and learning exchange could then be made easier through electronic form. The advantage of this is that the long time on the exchange of information manually would thin down hence increasing the effectiveness of teaching and improving pupils learning.
10. Another advantage of digitization lies in its search function, as it is convenient, easy to carry out and to read, and books and magazines are still the reader’s first selection
11. Internet and Digital Media increase contacts and allow easy communication with worldwide readers via Web 2.0 services (like Facebook, MySpace) and ning network services on the Internet. The Web 2.0 tools like blogs and wikis also increases the participative reading.

Negative Effects of the Internet and other Digital Media on Student’s Reading habits

1. Lack of computer retrieving skills and knowledge: Older readers are used to reading characters and many of them are not familiar with computers and networks. Those that have computer skills may not have adequate knowledge of internet searching skills.
2. Young people, termed “The Digital generation” spend more time these days watching movies or surfing the internet, which has become an addiction, with the result that many children consider reading an ordeal. Children can only benefit optimally from electronic technology when firmly established as readers.
3. Internet decreases dependence on and contact with print sources. The Internet provides access to a wide range of online sources available in any part of globe related to various branches of knowledge and hence decreases dependence on print sources.
4. The Internet decreases reading of books. The possible reasons are lack of awareness about online book collection; difficult to read a book in a single attempt; unsuitable

reading screen; and physical discomforts. There is need to take certain steps to increase book reading during Internet surfing like: to create awareness about book repositories, online libraries and book projects;

5. Young people can easily be lured into Pornographic sites and imbibe other criminal tendencies. There are parental controls however but most parents do not know how to enforce such controls.
6. There are cyber security issues that may cause threat to users of the Internet; Issues of abuse of data privacy, hacking, unauthorized access to some networks or resources, or malicious attack through viruses and malwares, on digital libraries or other Internet resources.

Conclusion

The pattern of reading, as is known traditionally, is sooner than later paving way for a new reading culture because of new technological advances. The digital revolution happening in the world today, has resulted in literacy becoming more technological oriented. The definition of literacy is no more being able to read and write the Arabic, Latin, Greek or Hindu scripts, alone, it includes digital literacy. This means being able to operate a computer, smart phone or other technological devices that can access the internet to connect today's "connected world". Information and Communications technology and indeed the Internet has now affected the core of the traditional reading habits of the readers. These new technologies not only influence digital students' learning behaviours in the classroom, but also affect their reading patterns at home.

The questions to ask now are: How will educators, teachers, and administrators address this changed reading culture of our digital generation in order to improve their reading habits, with such information overload that is available online? In addition, researchers would want to know to what extent can educators, publishers, and instructors, help in developing quality online educational content, that are attractive (due to multi media) and also fun to read. Grabe and Sigler (2012), having evaluated students' use of an online study environment, stated that educational publishers would eventually integrate instructional content and online study activities. Since easy access to reading materials plays critical role in improving students' reading habits. Indeed more research needs to be done in this critical area. As a starting point however, this author proposes a balanced use of the traditional book print, for now, and the enhanced online environment where quality learning content is afforded to our digizens or Net generation, which will maintain their interest and dissuade them from wasting valuable time on only socializing and other non-value activities that will just waste their time and impact negatively on their studies.

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