

Fall 2020

Location: Online

Instructor: **Sulafa Zidani** (she/her)

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I. Course Description

This course covers the foundations for studying Internet culture and introduces different formats of Internet culture, including memes, GIFs, mashup videos, remixed music, and others. We will be discussing the networks and platforms where Internet content circulates, like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, and learn how to analyze the power dynamics of Internet culture. The course covers core concepts like culture, networked culture, participatory culture, user-generated content, among others which students will utilize in their analyses. It is divided into 11 units, each covering a theme of online content from humor and politics, to music, and memory. The course involves creative methods for student participation online, incorporating visual and aural technology, as well as occasional visits from guest speakers.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

Students will leave this course having practiced and learned several new skills, including:

- Developing a nuanced complex view of the Internet;
- Defining core concept related to Internet culture;
- Learning to differentiate and critically analyze different content formats;
- Conducting research and collecting information for writing a case study;
- Proposing ways to participate in Internet culture which promote their desired values;
- Listening, analyzing, and participating in collective learning;

Combined, these outcomes help develop the critical thinking skills foundational for understanding how power is involved in communication and culture.

III. Course Notes

This syllabus may be subject to change based on news events, guest speaker availability, or to adapt to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

IV. Assignments and Assessment

Attendance, Participation, Engagement (10%)

This class demands participation from all of us. Students are strongly encouraged to attend live sessions via Zoom. This is the best way to engage with the course and keep up to date with class activities and assignments. Your participation grade is based on: attending the class live or completing the make-up assignment, contribution and engagement in discussions and class activities, reading the required material, setting up one office-hour meeting with the instructor, checking emails regularly, not using your technology for distraction from the class. Moreover, being present and engaged means being just as willing to listen to others as you are to speak. We will discuss how

to give feedback and have generative discussions. Differences and disagreements are embraced in this classroom, but disrespect, hostility, and violence will not be tolerated.

Lecture Make-Up Response

If you miss a class or are unable to attend our meetings synchronously, in order to receive your full participation grade, you are asked to watch the recorded lecture and post a 3-2-1 Response on the Blackboard discussion board **no later than a week after the lecture**. The “3-2-1” asks you to state: (a) three things you have learned, (b) two interesting facts, (c) one question that came up. A template for the reading response will be made available on Blackboard. I encourage examples (memes, images, videos, links, etc.) that are relevant to your response.

Tuesday Reading Responses (25%)

250-400 words. Reading responses are **due every Tuesday** on the Blackboard discussion board. Each Tuesday reading response must engage with at least 2 readings: one from Monday’s required readings and one from Wednesday’s required readings. In these responses, you are expected to demonstrate critical engagement with the ideas, arguments, and questions that are presented in the readings. Do not simply regurgitate arguments or summarize readings. Use the reading response to make connections across the readings and to your own experiences with the subjects at-hand. You may advocate for, or push against the ideas presented in readings and elaborate on how/why you agree/disagree. You can also address how these readings have made you think differently about Internet culture and content. I encourage examples (memes, images, videos, links, etc.) that are relevant to your response.

Each reading response will be graded on a three-point scale: ✓- (75); ✓ (90); ✓+ (100)

Share an Example (10%)

A signup sheet will be distributed via email on the first day of class for each student to sign up for a day to bring an example from Internet culture. A successful example is one that matches the theme of the class for which you are signed up. It can be in any format (meme, video, GIF, tweet, etc). Be prepared to provide some context about your example to the class. Please note, **videos must not exceed 7 minutes**.

Midterm Assignment (20%)

500-700 words (2-3 pages, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12 pt font, Times New Roman)
For your midterm assignment, you will write a **small-scale case study**, which you can later develop into your final assignment. Analyze a case of Internet culture incident, trend, or controversy. For example, your case can be a trending hashtag, a group of memes, or derivative remixes of a song on tiktok. A successful paper demonstrates knowledge of the case and clearly explains how this case relates to the theories of Internet culture that we have covered in class thus far. You must cite at least two items from this syllabus and include **at least five citations** in total. **Due Friday Sep. 25, 2020.**

Presentation (10%)

4-5 minutes

Give an informative speech for **five-seven minutes**. If class is online, your speech can be a pre-recorded video presentation or an edited video. The topic of your presentation **can be based on one of the previous assignments** (the example you brought to class, your midterm case study, or an example you created). A successful presentation demonstrates knowledge in the subject matter as

well as skillful research and analysis around the case that is being presented. As you prepare for your presentation, please remember that a presentation is a performance, therefore you will also be expected not to rely exclusively on your notes and to connect with your audience as you present. You must **cite at least three sources** to support your information.

Final Paper (25%)

1500-2000 words (6-8 pages, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12 pt font, Times New Roman)
 Prepare a case study drawing on an Internet culture incident, trend, or controversy. Your topic can be based on a previous assignment (the example you brought to class, or your midterm case study). Provide a detailed account of the case and analyze it critically based on the theories and concepts of Internet culture and power covered in this class. A successful paper is one that has a clear argument or thesis and uses supporting material (including theories and case studies covered in this class) to bolster that argument. **Topics are due via email by session 23.** You must cite **no less than ten sources**, at least five of which must be from this syllabus. Final papers are **due November 15.**

Extra Credit (1%)

250-300 words (~1 page, double-spaced, 1-inch margins, 12 pt font, Times New Roman)

Students can earn extra credit in several ways:

- Attending an **online event** on a topic related to Internet culture and writing a short response paper. You can find online events through USC, Visions & Voices, and other events will be suggested throughout the semester
- Visit an **online museum** or gallery and write a short response paper on how it is related to Internet culture. Many museums and galleries have set up online ways of viewing their exhibitions.
- Write **peer feedback** on one of your peer's reading responses or presentations. You can engage with your peers' reading responses by writing a Blackboard discussion post that converses with what they wrote, or email them (cc the instructor) feedback to their presentation.
- Suggest your own idea. To earn extra credit, students can also write a post connecting the class material/readings to a movie, film, music video, Internet trend, etc. I am also open for other creative ideas so you're welcome to suggest your own!

Note: **no more than two** extra credit assignments allowed.

V. Grading Scale

a. Breakdown of Grade

Each assignment will be worth 100 points and will be converted to a percentage score, depending upon the weight assigned to it above. The percentage scores on the assignments will then be calculated as a percentage of 100 points and translated to a letter grade per the grading scale below.

b. Grading Scale

Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
Percentage	95-100	90-94	87-89	84-86	80-83	77-79	74-76	70-73	67-69	64-66	60-63	59-0

c. Grading Standard

A/A-	Outstanding, thoughtful, and enthusiastic work
B+/B	Above average work, demonstrating good insight into assignment
B-/C+	Needs improvement on ideas, argument, and follow-through
C and below	Shows little understanding of material, does not fulfill requirements

*** How to get an A in this class:** In short: show up! Showing up means doing the assigned work and being prepared to share your work, your thoughts, experience, and questions. If you miss a class, make sure to get updates and complete the make-up assignment to keep you on track. Showing up in these different ways is also how you get the best out of the class.

d. Grading Policy

All graded assignments will be returned to you individually via Blackboard in a timely manner (usually within 10 days of the assignment). You will receive thoughtful feedback on each assignment, please **read it thoroughly** and incorporate it into your next assignments.

If you have concerns regarding a grade on a specific assignment, you must appeal the grade in writing **within one (1) week** of receiving your graded assignment from me. Your appeal must state why/how you feel your grade is inaccurate, providing specific examples. No appeals will be accepted for assignments submitted late, or after the one-week appeal deadline.

VI. Assignment Rubrics

Your assignments will be evaluated differently based on each of their requirements. Broadly speaking, you will be evaluated on: following the prompt requirements, clarity of arguments, use of evidence to support the arguments, depth of analysis, and critical engagement with/consideration of the theories and concept covered in the class. This means that expectations will be higher the farther along we are in the semester. A separate rubric will be provided along with each assignment.

VII. Assignment Submission Policy

All assignments are due on the deadlines specified in the corresponding prompt (all will be discussed in class, and will also be posted on Blackboard under “Assignments”). Extensions on assignments must be approved by the instructor **in advance** of the assignment deadline. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, **late assignments** will receive a one-third (1/3) grade reduction for each day late (including weekends), and any missing assignments will automatically be given a grade of 0%.

Assignments must be submitted via Blackboard unless otherwise stated by the instructor. All written assignments must be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced, and have 1-inch margins. Please make sure to spell-check and proofread all papers for spelling and grammar. If you are using/citing someone else’s work, please include a “works cited” section and follow a consistent style guide (APA is recommended). Please save and submit all assignments in .doc or .docx format, so that I may return your graded papers to you with feedback and comments in “Track Changes.”

VIII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

* All the required reading material is listed in the schedule below and will be made available through the course's Blackboard page

Recommended (available at USC library):

- (available online) Burgess, J., Marwick, A., & Poell, T. (2018). *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media*. Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473984066>
- Navas, E., Gallagher, O., & burrough, x. (2018). *Keywords in remix studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- (available online) Peters, B. (2016). *Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society and Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400880553>
- Shifman, L. (2014). *Memes in Digital Culture*. MIT Press.

IX. Technology Policy

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please use your laptop when logging into class, unless there are special conditions that limit you from using it. Laptops will be used in this class for participation, notetaking, research, or other purposes related to class activities. This class requires students' participation and presence, therefore **please refrain from using technology as a distraction** during class time.

X. Add/Drop Dates for this class - TBD

August 21, 2020 Last day to register/add classes

September 4, 2020 Last say to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass

September 4, 2020 Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund

October 2, 2020 Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript for Session 001. [Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20 percent mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.]

October 2, 2020 Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade

November 6, 2020 Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001

November 13, 2020 Fall semester classes end

XI. Course Schedule

This course has 25 sessions which are divided into 11 units, an introduction, and conclusion.

Introduction

Session 1 8/17/2020 - An introduction and overview of the course

Required Reading:

- Miriam Sweeney "How to read for grad school"
<https://miriamsweeney.net/2012/06/20/readforgradschool/>
- hooks, b. (2010). Engaged Pedagogy. In *Teaching Critical Thinking* (pp. 19-23). Routledge.

Unit 1: Key Concepts

Session 2 8/19/2020 - Introducing: The Internet.

In-class activity: What is the Internet? Students draw what they think the Internet looks like. This is followed by a discussion on *what* the internet is, *who* the Internet is, and *how* it came to be this way.

Required Reading:

- Srinivasan, R., & Fish, A. (2017). Introduction. In *After the Internet*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Sample, I. (2018, Oct 22). What is the internet? 13 key questions answered. *The Guardian*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/oct/22/what-is-the-internet-13-key-questions-answered>
- Maddie Stone (Aug 14, 2020). Facebook Abandoned Drilling Equipment Beneath the Ocean Floor. *Vice*.
https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/4ay5mj/facebook-abandoned-drilling-equipment-beneath-the-ocean-floor

Session 3 8/24/2020 - Introducing the concept of culture.

Required Reading:

- Williams, R. (2001). Culture is Ordinary [1958]. In B. Highmore (ed.). *The Everyday Life Reader* (pp. 91-100). London: Routledge.
- Striphas, T. (2016). Culture. In B. Peters (ed.) *Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society and Culture* (pp. 70-80).
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400880553>

Session 4 8/26/2020 - Networked Culture & Participatory Culture.

Using a participation journal assignment to understand participatory culture.

Required Reading:

- Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2018). Introduction. In *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. NYU press.
- Castells, Manuel (2007). Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society. *International Journal of Communication*, 1(1): 238- 266.

Recommended Reading:

- The difference between spreadable and viral
<https://www.niemanlab.org/2010/11/why-spreadable-doesnt-equal-viral-a-conversation-with-henry-jenkins/>

Session 5 8/31/2020 - Introducing and defining user-generated content

Required Reading:

- Östman, J. (2012). Information, expression, participation: How involvement in user-generated content relates to democratic engagement among young people. *New Media & Society*, 14(6), 1004– 1021.
- Shifman, L. (2016). Cross-Cultural Comparisons of User-Generated Content: An Analytical Framework. *International Journal of Communication* (19328036), 10.

Unit 2: Memes, Humor, & Politics

Session 6 9/2/2020 –

The definition of memes and the relationship between humor and politics

Required Reading:

- Hristova, S. (2014). Visual memes as neutralizers of political dissent. *Communication, Capitalism & Critique*, 12(1), 265-276.
- Shifman, L. (2014). Introduction. In *Memes in Digital Culture*. MIT Press.

Suggested Reading:

- A Meme is a Terrible Thing to Waste: An Interview with Limor Shifman <http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2014/02/a-meme-is-a-terrible-thing-to-waste-an-interview-with-limor-shifman-part-one.html>

Session 7

9/9/2020 –

Power and user-generated content: government regulation and platform regulation

Required Reading:

- Nissenbaum, A., & Shifman, L. (2017). Internet memes as contested cultural capital: The case of 4chan's /b/ board. *New Media & Society*, 19(4), 483–501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815609313>
- Gillespie, T. (2010). The politics of platforms. *New Media & Society* 12(3): 347-364. <http://nms.sagepub.com/content/12/3/347>
- Roberts, S. T. (2019). Introduction. In *Behind the screen: Content moderation in the shadows of social media*. Yale University Press.

Suggested:

- **Listen:** In the Tall Grass: One man tries to unite America. One frog threatens to tear it apart. (a podcast episode about the history of Pepe the Frog). *Gimlet Media*. Available at: <https://gimletmedia.com/shows/reply-all/76h56o>

Unit 3: Hashtag Activism & Collective Action

Session 8

9/14/2020 – Activism versus slacktivism

Required Reading:

- Bonilla, Y., & Rosa, J. (2015). # Ferguson: Digital protest, hashtag ethnography, and the racial politics of social media in the United States. *American ethnologist*, 42(1), 4-17.
- Vie, S. (2014). In defense of “slacktivism”: The Human Rights Campaign Facebook logo as digital activism. *First Monday*, 19(4).

Session 9

9/16/2020 – The complexities of organizing action online

Required Reading:

- Shresthova, S. (2016). “Watch 30 Minute Video on Internet, Become Social Activist?” Kony 2012, Invisible Children, and the Paradoxes of Participatory Politics. In H. Jenkins, S. Shresthova, L. Gamber-Thompson, N. Klinger-Vilenchik, & A. M. Zimmerman (Eds.), *By any media necessary: The new youth activism* (pp. 61-101). New York: New York University Press. doi:<http://hdl.handle.net/2333.1/brv15j8p>
- Zuckerman, E. (2012, March 8). Unpacking Kony 2012 <http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2012/03/08/unpacking-kony-2012/>

Unit 4: Music, virality, and politics

Session 10 9/21/2020 – Remixes, mashups, and politics

Required Reading:

- Navas, E., Gallagher, O., & burrough, x. (2018). *Keywords in remix studies*. New York, NY: Routledge. (chapters on: **Remix, Mashup, & Sampling**)
- Punathambekar, A., & Mohan, S. (2017). A Sound Bridge: Listening for the Political in a Digital Age. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 20.
- Zidani, S. (2020). Not Arabi or Ajnabi: Arab Youth and Reorienting Humor. *International Journal of Communication*.

Watch/Listen:

- Why This Kolaveri Di [YouTube Video]
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YR12Z8f1Dh8>

Session 11 9/23/2020 –

User-generated content and the platformization of music (potential guest speaker)

Required Reading:

- Alexander, J. (2019, Apr 5). ‘Old Town Road’ proves TikTok can launch a hit song. *The Verge*. <https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/5/18296815/lil-nas-x-old-town-road-tiktok-artists-spotify-soundcloud-streams-revenue>
- Hesmondhalgh, D., Jones, E., & Rauh, A. (2019). SoundCloud and Bandcamp as Alternative Music Platforms. *Social Media+ Society*, 5(4), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119883429>
- Mühlbach, S., & Arora, P. (2020). Behind the music: How labor changed for musicians through the subscription economy. *First Monday*. <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/download/10382/9411>

Suggested:

- Watch: The New York Times (2019, May 9). *How Lil Nas X Took ‘Old Town Road’ From TikTok Meme to No. 1 | Diary of a Song* [YouTube Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptKqFafZgCk>

Assignment: Midterm due on Friday, Sep 25, 2020

Unit 5: The Borders & Boundaries of the Internet

Session 12 9/28/2020 – The language(s?) of the Internet

Required Reading:

- Danet, B., & Herring, S. C. (Eds.). (2007). Introduction. In *The multilingual Internet: Language, culture, and communication online* (pp. 3-40). Oxford University Press on Demand.
- Shirky, C. (2019, Aug 16). Emojis Are Language Too: A Linguist Says Internet-Speak Isn’t Such a Bad Thing. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/16/books/review/because-internet-gretchen-mcculloch.html>

Suggested:

- Try this language mapping tool (data from the U.S.)
https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/languages/language_map.html?#

Session 13 9/30/2020 – Migration, Diaspora, and the Internet

Required Reading:

- Kang, T. (2009). Homeland re-territorialized: Revisiting the role of geographical places in the formation of diasporic identity in the digital age. *Information, communication & society*, 12(3), 326-343.
- Mohan, S., & Punathambekar, A. (2019). Localizing YouTube: Language, cultural regions, and digital platforms. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 22(3), 317–333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877918794681>

Unit 6: Work from Bali, Work from Home

Session 14 10/5/2020 – Crowdsourcing and remote work

Required Reading:

- Irani, L. (2015). The cultural work of microwork. *New Media & Society*, 17(5), 720-739.
- Thompson, B. (2019). The Digital Nomad Lifestyle: (Remote) Work/Leisure Balance, Privilege, and Constructed Community. *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, 2(1), 27–42.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41978-018-00030-y>

Session 15 10/7/2020 – Influencers and vloggers (potential guest speaker)

Required Reading:

- Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2015). “Having it All” on Social Media: Entrepreneurial Femininity and Self-Branding Among Fashion Bloggers. *Social Media + Society*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115604337>
- Keller, Jessalynn. 2015. “Girl Power’s Last Change? Tavi Gevinson, Feminism, and Popular Media Culture.” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*. 29 (2): 274-285.

Unit 7: User-Generated Knowledge

Session 16 10/12/2020 – Wikipedia and open source

Required Reading:

- Raval, N. (2014). The Encyclopedia Must Fail! - Notes on Queering Wikipedia. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media and Technology*, no. 5 (July).
<http://adanewmedia.org/2014/07/issue5-raval/>
- John, N. A. (2014). File sharing and the history of computing: Or, why file sharing is called “file sharing”. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 31(3), 198-211.

Session 17 10/14/2020 – User-generated news and misinformation (potential guest speaker)

Required Reading:

- Karlis, N. (2018, Sep 18). How YouTube became a powerful far-right propaganda organ. *Salon*. Available at: <https://www.salon.com/2018/09/18/how-youtube-became-a-powerful-far-right-propaganda-organ/>
- Marantz, A. (2017, December 11). The Live-Streamers who are challenging traditional journalism. *The New Yorker*. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/the-livestreamers-who-are-challenging-traditional-journalism>
- Mortensen, T. B., & Keshelashvili, A. (2013). If everyone with a camera can do this, then what? Professional photojournalists' sense of professional threat in the face of citizen photojournalism. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, 20(3), 144-158.

Unit 8: Love & Intimacy Online

Session 18 10/19/2020 – Dating apps and livestreaming services

Required Reading:

- Chan, L. S. (2016). How sociocultural context matters in self-presentation: A comparison of US and Chinese profiles on Jack'd, a mobile dating app for men who have sex with men. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 20.
- Niesen, M. (2016). Love, Inc.: Toward structural intersectional analysis of online dating sites and applications. In S. U. Noble & B. M. Tynes (eds.) *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online* (pp.161-178). Peter Lang.
- Zhang, G., & Hjorth, L. (2019). Live-streaming, games and politics of gender performance: The case of Nüzhubo in China. *Convergence*, 25(5-6), 807-825.

Unit 9: Researching the Internet

Session 19 10/21/2020 – Ways to study Internet culture and case study as method

Required Reading:

- USC library guide for case study design
<https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/casestudy>
- Choose two case studies from the readings of prior sessions
- Review your reading responses on the first 2 weeks

Session 20 10/26/2020 – Student Presentations

Session 21 10/28/2020 – Student Presentations

Unit 10: Internet & Memory

Session 22 11/2/2020 – Vine and Myspace: platform death and nostalgia

Required Reading:

- Brown, D. (2017). The death of vine, and the volatile nature of new media. *Researching Sociology*. Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/82199/>
- Herrman, J. (2020, Feb 22). Vine Changed the Internet forever. How much does the Internet miss it?. *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/22/style/byte-vine-short-video-apps.html>
- Solon, O. (2018, Jun 6). Meet the people who still use Myspace: 'It's given me so much joy'. *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/jun/06/myspace-who-still-uses-social-network>

Assignment Due:

- Final paper topic due

Session 23 11/4/2020 – The Internet as a participatory archive (potential guest speaker)

Required Reading:

- Hristova, S. (2013). Occupy wall street meets occupy Iraq: On remembering and forgetting in a digital age. *Radical History Review*, 2013(117), 83-97.
- Liu, J. (2018). Who speaks for the past? Social media, social memory, and the production of historical knowledge in contemporary China. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 21.

Unit 11: Nature Goes Online

Session 24 11/9/2020 – Nature goes online

Required Reading:

- Aspling, F. (2015, November). Animals, plants, people and digital technology: exploring and understanding multispecies-computer interaction. In *Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Advances in Computer Entertainment Technology* (pp. 1-4).
- Fellenor, J., Barnett, J., & Jones, G. (2018). User-Generated Content: What Can the Forest Health Sector Learn?. In J. Urquhart, M. Marzano, & C. Potter (Eds.), *The Human Dimension of Forest & Tree Health: Global Perspectives* (pp. 139-163). Palgrave Macmillan.

Conclusion: Imagining the Future of Internet Culture

Session 25 11/11/2020 – Review, evaluation, and imagination
Class activity: Imagining the future of Internet culture
(inspired by the *Civic Imagination Project*)

Required Reading:

- Punathambekar, A. (2012). On the ordinariness of participatory culture. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10. doi:10.3983/twc.2012.0378
- Jenkins, H., & Carpentier, N. (2013). Theorizing participatory intensities: A conversation about participation and politics. *Convergence*, 19(3), 265-286.

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