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Adolescent Media Consumption and Behavioral Outcomes: Exposure to Violent Media Content as a Risk Factor for Aggression and Delinquent Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This studies investigate the relationship between online aggression and delinquent behavior among adolescents. The rapid increase in Smartphone ownership and social media use in Tripura has raised concerns about young people's exposure to violent, provocative, and cyber bullying –related content, and the possible influence of such exposure on their behavior. Based on bandura's social learning theory and the general aggression model, the study examines whether experiences of online aggression are associated with delinquent behavior in real – life settings. A cross- sectional research design was adopted, and data were collected from 100 adolescents aged 13 to 18 years residing in observation homes. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation from different districts of Tripura. Aggression was assessed using the Buss-Perry aggression questionnaire (BPAQ), patterns of social media use were measured through the social media use integration scale (SMUIS), and delinquent behavior was evaluated using a self –reported delinquency checklist adapted for the Indian context. The findings revealed a significant positive association between greater social media use, higher aggression levels, and increased involvement in delinquent behavior. The results highlight the importance of promoting digital literacy and implementing focused intervention programmes to reduce online aggression and minimise its potential contribution to juvenile delinquency in Tripura.

Keywords: Online Aggression, Social Media Use, Juvenile Delinquency, Adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Social media hasbecome one ofthemost changed forces in human communication, identity building and interactionofcultureinthe21stcentury.Socialmediaisa different kind of media, where communication is dynamic, interactive and user-generated, in contrast to traditional media channels , which are more one-way. They have become an integral part of people's lives and affect their sense of self, social relations and social, political and economic interactions .The data indicates that around 5.41 billion of the active social media user accounts spend 3 to 6 hours daily on messaging apps like WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook. Widespread availability of inexpensive smart phones and inexpensive internet data plans is one of the main factors that is responsible for the growth of social media in India. According to Data Report al 2025, India had around 491 million active social media user accounts or 33.7% of the population, which is one of the largest social media markets in the world by January 2025.Digital technologies are being used in ways that can increase the accessibility of these technologies, with adolescents, especially those in the age group of 13–18, being much more engaged in digital interactions. Many of these youth use the social media not only as a recreational tool but it's their social life. It is an arena in which they make friends, discover themselves, seekacknowledgment andengage incultural activities that affect their psychosocial growth

Social Media as a psychosocial place

The psychosocial aspect of social media is its ability to offer adolescent with a space where they can create their identity, connect with peers and gain social recognition. Developmental psychology emphasizes this phase, adolescents is a crucial stage for exploring identity (Erikson, 1968) during this phase, and adolescents seek autonomy from their parents while also valuing peer approval. Social media platforms offer a unique space where this developmental task takes place on a global

scale. Adolescents share content, post pictures, engage in group chats, and participate in online trends all of which serve to affirm their sense of belonging.

Recent research support this idea. Uhls et al. (2020) observed that adolescents often use Instagram and TikTok as symbolic arenas to negotiate peer approval and experiment with elf- expression. Similarly, Valkenburg, Beyens, and Pouwels (2022) highlighted that the social rewards (like, comment) adolescents receive online directly contribute to their sense of competence and self – worth, reinforcing the role of digital platforms as psychosocial spaces.

However, this psychosocial ground is not without its challenges. The very features that make social media attractive, anonymity, immediacy, and wide viabilitycan also foster hostility and aggression. Online environment often blur the line between playful banter and harmful behaviors, allowing act such as trolling, cyberbullying, online threats, and exposure to violent meme to become normalize. Research has shown that adolescents who experience cyberbullying or online harassment are at a higher risk of suffering from depression, low self-esteem, and aggressive relation (Kowalski et al., 2014) More recently, Nesi (2021) emphasized that constant exposure to online peer evaluation create emotional volatility, heightening susceptibility to both victimization a Griffiths (2020) found that problematic social media use is positively correlated with cyber-aggressive tendencies, particularly when driven by peer validation.

Understanding Virtual Aggression

Virtual aggression refers to aggressive behavior that takes place in online environments, such as social networking sites, messaging apps, and gaming forms. Unlike traditional forms of aggression, which are limited by physical proximity, virtual aggression transcends both spatial and temporal boundaries. Common forms of this behavior include cyberbullying, flaming, doxing, exclusion, and exposure to violent or degrading content (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018). These behavior are particularly concerning during adolescence, as they exploit the psychological vulnerabilities associated with this developmental stage, which include heightened sensitivity to peer opinion and emotional volatility.

The anonymity provided by online spaces often encourage adolescents to act in ways they might not in face to face interactions. Additionally, digital content has a permanent and pervasive nature- posts and message can be screenshotted, shared, and circulated, making the harm more enduring. For victims, this results in prolonged exposure to aggression, while for perpetrators, it provides a platform for repeated hostile actions that may escalate into offline aggression. Studies, such as those by Barlett et al. (2021), show that repeated exposure to online aggression not only increase tolerance for hostile interactions but also predicts subsequent incidents of online aggression. Furthermore, a meta-analysis by chen et al. (2023) confirmed that virtual aggression significantly raises the risk of delinquent behavior, especially when reinforced by peer approval and the sense of group belonging.

Adolescence and Its vulnerabilities

During adolescence, individual are particularly vulnerable to the influence of online aggression. This developmental stage is characterised by identity exploration, challenges in emotional regulation and in increasing susceptibility to peer influence (Steinberg, 2024). Neurological research shows that the adolescent brain, particularly the prefrontal cortex which is responsible for impulse control and decision – making – is still developing (Casey, Jones ,& somervile, 2011). Consequently, adolescents are more likely to react impulsively to online provocations.

In India, and especially in regions like Tripura, cultural and social dynamic further exacerbate this vulnerability. Adolescents in smaller state are typically caught between the pressure of modernization and digitalisation, and at the same time experiencing pressures from tradition community expectations. Social media is a way of communication and sign of modernity and status for many youths from Tripura. This situation increases the urge to interact with online products, even if they are not beneficial. Recent studies in India, such as those by Sharma and Gupta(2022),highlighted that adolescents in smaller states are at a higher risk due to limited accessto digital literacy programs and insufficient parental monitoring, which increase their susceptibility to online dangers.

Link between virtual Aggression and Delinquency

The connection between virtual aggression and delinquency has been increasingly documented in both global and national research. Aggressive behavior learned and practiced in virtual space often translate into real-world delinquent acts, such as physical fight, vandalism, theft, or group violence. The National Bureau (NCRB, 2023) reported an increase in cases where disputes on social media were cited as triggers for juvenile's crimes in India. For example fight often break out derogatory comment made online and group conflicts initiated in WhatsApp chats have become common occurrences in police report.

In Tripura, limited data suggested that disputes on social media increasingly leading to juvenile offense, according to evidence from school, local media, and the Tripura juvenile justice board (JJB). Teachers and practitioners report that student frequently bring conflicts from online interaction in to the school environment, resulting in fight, bullying, or group relation. In several cases handled by the JJb, adolescent admitted that their delinquent behavior was motivated by attempts to defend their honour, respond to insults or maintain group loyalty stemming from interaction on digital platform. These observation highlight the urgent need to examine virtual aggression as a pathway to delinquency within Tripura's unique socio-cultural context.

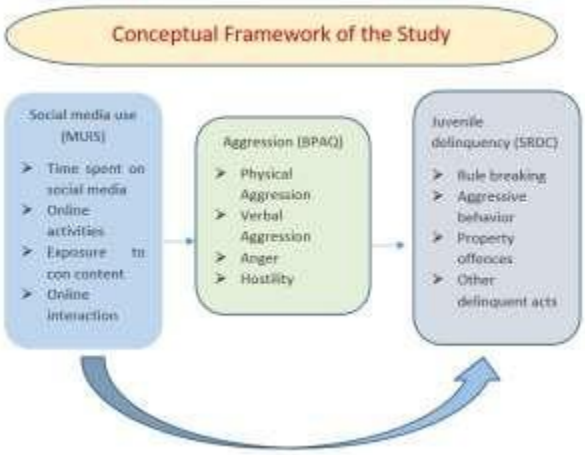
Supporting this ,a study by Wachsetal.(2021)found that online peer conflict often predict offline violence across various cultural settings, while recent India data (Mishra & Kumar 2022) indicate that cyberbullying and online aggression are strongly associated with school based delinquent behaviors, such as truancy and physical flights.

Theoretical Explanation

Psychological and criminological theories offer valuable frameworks for understanding how virtual aggression can lead to delinquent behavior . Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) suggest that individual learn behaviors by observing and imitating role models. On social media , adolescence are frequently exposed to aggressive behavior from various models, including peers involved in cyberbullying and influencer promoting hostile discourse. When these aggressive behaviors receive attention and validation, adolescents may come to view aggression as an acceptable response.

The General Aggression Model (Anderson & Bushman, 2002) explains that repeated exposure to hostile online cues heightens aggressive thoughts, emotional arousal, and physiological readiness for aggression. Over time, this exposure lowers the threshold for violence in real life situations. For example, frequent online arguments can predispose adolescents to interpret ambiguous real word interactionsas provocations. Recent studies (Kircaburun et al., 2021) have confirmed that adolescents exposed to online aggression how increased levels of impulsive aggression in offline contexts.

From a criminological perspective, Sutherland's Differential Association Theory (1939) highlight that deviant behaviors are learned through association with peers who consider aggression acceptable. Online groups and communities can create an environment that promotes such norms, leading adolescents to adopt delinquent behaviors as a part of their group identity. Similarly, Agnew's General Strain Theory (1992) posits that negative experiences such as cyberbullying, social exclusion or unfavorable comparison on platforms like Instagram can create emotional strain. Adolescents may attempt to relieve this strain through aggression or delinquency. Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross,1976) adds that prolonged exposure to violent online content shapes adolescents perception of reality, leading them to see aggression as normal and necessary for resolving conflicts. Finally Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner,1979) suggests that adolescents tend to adopt the norms of online groups to maintain a sense of belonging. When these groups glorify aggression, individuals may engage in delinquent acts to demonstrate loyalty and seek peer approval.



Note: The framework proposes that higher social Media Use increase Aggression, which in turn increases the likelihood of juvenile Delinquency.

Significance of the Study

The literature clearly indicates that virtual aggression is not an isolated occurrence, but rather that there is a strong connection between virtual aggression and the psychosocial development of the adolescent and the escalation of juvenile delinquency. Three theories, social learning, aggression and group identity, combine to account for the delinquent behavior of people in the real world that results from hostility in the Internet .The period of adolescence is a time that is at a higher risk of such problems in areas experiencing quick cultural transformations and technological advancement, such as Tripura. The study is important because it connects to the evidence from the global context to the socio-cultural context of the local level, highlighting the need for interventions that are sensitive to that particular context. This study enriches the existing theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of virtual aggression and its impact on the delinquency of the underrepresented population of Tripura and provides some practical hints to the educators, policy makers, and juvenile justice workers Who want to create effective prevention and rehabilitation programs.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine patterns of social media use among adolescents involved in juvenile delinquency in Tripura.
2. To identify the form and prevalence of virtual aggression among juvenile delinquents in Tripura.
3. To analyse the relationship between social media use ,virtual aggression and juvenile crime within the socio- cultural context of Tripura.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the patterns of social media use among adolescents involved in juvenile delinquency in Tripura.
2. There is no significant presence of virtual aggression among juvenile delinquents in Tripura.

3. There is no significant relationship between social media use, virtual aggression, and juvenile crime within the socio-cultural context of Tripura.

Sample of the study

The study was conducted with a sample of 100 juvenile delinquents aged 13-18 years from the state of Tripura. Participants were selected from observation homes located in different districts to ensure representation across the state. All participants were officially registered under the Juvenile Justice(Care and Protection of Children)Act and were residing in observation homes due to involvement in offenses such as theft, physical assault, substance-related violations ,or conflicts originating from social media interactions.

Sampling Distribution

The study sample comprised 100 juvenile delinquents residing in observation homes across different districts of Tripura .A purposive sampling method was used to ensure that the participants represented juveniles in conflict with the law from multiple regions of the state.

Procedure of the study

The study was conducted with 100 Juvenile delinquents living in observation homes of various districts in Tripura.It was ensured that there was prior consent from the juvenile justice Board and the juvenile observation home authorities and that participants would not be forced to participate and that it would be confidential. Data collection was carried out using the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ(to assess aggression, Social Media use Integration Scale (SMUIS) to measure social media patterns and a self- reported Delinquency Checklist which was adapted for the Indian context to record delinquent behaviors. The questionnaires were given both in small group as well as individually with appropriate instructions to make it clear and easy to understand. Collected data were then coded, tabulated and analysed with both descriptive and inferential statistical method to explore the association of social media use, virtual aggression with juvenile delinquency in Tripura.

TOOL USED

The Buss- Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ), developed by Buss and Perry in 1992, is a widely used instrument for assessing Aggression. It contains 29 items rated on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (‘extremely uncharacteristic of me’) to 5 (‘extremely characteristic of me’).The questionnaire is designed to Measure four distinct components of aggression; physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. A total aggressions core is obtained by humming a cross all items, with higher scores reflecting greater aggression tendencies. The BPAQ demonstrates good psychometric properties, with internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach’s alpha) ranging between 0.72 and 0.89 across its subscales, and construct validity supported through correlations with behavioral and observational measures observational measures of aggression.

The social Media Use Integration scale (SMUIS), developed by Jenkins- Guarnieri and colleague in 2013, was employed to assess the integration of social media into the daily lives of adolescents. The scale include 10 items rated on a six- point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. It measures two major aspects of social media use: the emotional connection and social integration associated with social networking, and the extent to which social media is embedded in social routines. Scores can be calculated for each dimension as well an overall total, with higher scores indicate a greater level of integration of social media into daily life. The SMUI has shown throng psychometric properties, with overall reliability reported at 0.87, and validity supported through significant associations with measures of social connectedness, self – disclosure, and psychological well-being.

The third tool, the elf – Reported Delinquency checklist (SRDC) adapted for the Indian context, was used to measure the prevalence of delinquent behavior among juvenile offenders, was used to measure the prevalence of delinquent behavior among juvenile offenders. This checklist presents a range of common delinquent acts, including truancy, theft, vandalism, substance use, and other behaviors that typically bring adolescents into conflict with the law. Respondents indicate whether or not they have engaged in each behavior, usually in a dichotomous format (Yes- 1, No- 0), and in some cases, the frequency of involvement may also be recorded. The total core reflects the level of delinquent involvement, with higher score indicating greater delinquency. The Indian adaptation of the SRDC has been validated through expert review for content relevance and has demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha reported at approximately0.76,making it a culturally appropriate and reliable instrument for studying delinquent behavior in Indian adolescents.

DATA AND RESULT

1. Patterns of Social MediaUse (Objective1)

Table 1.Showing the Descriptive Statistics of Social Media Use (SMUIS)

Variables	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
SMUIS	100	41.72	7.85

Table 1 shows that the descriptive statistics of the Social Media Use (SMUIS) of the respondents. In all, 100 people were included in the study. The mean score of Social Media use was 41.72, which shows that the participants had a moderate to relatively high social media use. The overall standard deviation of the scores related to social media usage was 7.85, indicating a moderate amount of variation in the scores of the participants.

This means that while the social media usage trends were similar, there were some variations in how much social media individuals used.

2. Prevalence of Virtual Aggression (Objective 2)

Table2.Showing the Descriptive Statistics of Aggression (BPAQ)

Subscale	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
PhysicalAggression	100	27.31	6.45
Verbal Aggression	100	16.24	4.18
Anger	100	21.07	5.62
Hostility	100	23.92	5.89
TotalAggression	100	88.54	14.62

Descriptive data for aggression as assessed by Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) are given in Table 2. The results showed that the mean score of Physical Aggression was 27.31 with a standard deviation of 6.45, which was considered as moderate in terms of physical aggressive tendency of the population. The Verbal Aggression scores were mean of 16.24 and standard deviation of 4.18, which are relatively low scores of the verbal aggressive behaviour. Participants' mean scores of Anger were 21.07 with standard deviation of 5.62, which indicated a moderate level of emotional arousal and irritability. The same applies to Hostility, which had a mean score of 23.92 and a standard deviation of 5.89, suggesting some negative attitudes and feelings and suspicion of moderate levels. Overall, Total Aggression had a mean score of 88.54 with a standard deviation of 14.62; indicating that the participants were moderately aggressive. Standard deviation values for the subscales reveal some variation in participants' aggression level.

4. Relationship between Social Media Use, Virtual Aggression, and Juvenile Delinquency(Objective3)

Table 3. Presents the correlation of the three variables–Social Media Use, Aggression and Delinquency among juvenile delinquents of Tripura.

Variable	SMUIS	BPAQ	SRDC
SocialMedia(MUIS)	1	.46**	.39**
Aggression(BPAQ)	.46**	1	.52**
Delinquency(SRDC)	.39**	.52**	1

Note:**p<.01

The correlation between Social Media Use (SMUIS), Aggression (BPAQ) and Delinquency (SRDC) is shown in Table 3 in relation to juvenile delinquents of Tripura. It was found that there was a significant positive relationship between Social Media Use and Aggression(r=.46,p< .01), which means that as the amount of time spent on social media increased, the aggression levels of participants also increased.

Social Media Use also had a significant positive correlationwithDelinquency(r=.39,p<.01),indicating that as much as social media is used, the greater the delinquent behavior . In addition, there was a significant, positive correlation between Aggression and Delinquency (r=.52,p<.01), suggesting that the higher the aggression score the higher the score for delinquency.

Overall, the findings indicate that there is significant interrelationship between the use of social media, aggression and delinquency among juvenile delinquents in Tripura. Positive correlations suggest that the more social media involvement and aggression are used, the greater is delinquent behaviour.

Findings of the study

1. According to the study, the level of social media ue among the respondents was moderate to relatively high as shown in the mean score of SMUIS(41.72).
2. The standard deviation of 7.85 in social media use suggested moderate variability among participants, indicating differences in the extent of engagement with social media platforms.
3. The findings indicated that in general, the participants' aggression level was moderate with the overall aggression mean score of 88.54.
4. In the subscale of aggressive tendency, the higher mean score was obtained in physical aggression (27.31) in comparison to other subscales of aggression.
5. The verbal aggression was with the lowest mean score (16.24) indicating relatively the lowest level of verbal aggressive behavior.
6. The mean scores of Anger (21.07) and Hostility (23.92)showedmoderatelevelofemotional

Irritability, resentment and negative attitudes among the participants.

7. Social Media Use also had a significant positive correlation with Delinquency ($r = .39$, $p < .01$), indicating that the higher the social media use, the more delinquent behaviour there was.
8. Aggression showed a high positive correlation with Delinquency ($r = .52$, $p < .01$) which means that those who had high scores in the aggression section of the questionnaire were more likely to have delinquent tendencies.
9. In conclusion, the results have indicated that there is significant association between the use of social media, aggression and delinquency in the case of juvenile delinquents in Tripura region.

DISCUSSIONS

The present study aimed to examine the prevalence of social media use, aggression and the relationship between the two with juvenile delinquents of Tripura.The results showed that the social media users were at moderate to relatively high social media usage level. This suggests that social networking sites are a crucial component of teenagers' lives and can affect their emotions, attitudes and behaviour. Because of their developmental stage, they require peer approval, and their increased exposure to online content, adolescents are especially susceptible to influence from online interactions. The results of the study also revealed that the overall level of aggression of all the subjects was moderate. The physical aspect of aggression had the highest mean score and verbal aggression had comparatively lower scores. Anger and hostility were also present at moderate level indicating that a large number of juvenile delinquents are emotionally unstable, irritable, resentful and have negative attitudes. Based on these results, it is evident that juvenile delinquents' aggression is not just physical but also emotional and cognitive. The correlation analysis indicated that there was a positive correlation between social media use and aggression. The discovery indicates that more involvement with social media can lead to aggressive behavior in teenagers. High levels of violent experiences, cyberbullying, online conflict and aggressive online interactions can lead to an increase in aggressive thoughts and behaviours. Social Learning Theory is a theory of learning suggested by Albert Bandura which states that people observe and imitate behaviors. Repeatedly seeing aggressive roles on social media can lead the youths to internalize such behaviour and act on it in real life. The results are in line with previous studies. Kircaburun et al. (2019) found that problematic social media use was significantly related to adolescent aggression and emotional problems. Likewise, Anderson and Bushman (2001) concluded that frequent and consistent exposure to violent content in the media leads to increased aggressive cognition, feelings and actions. Another study by Coyneet al.(2018) confirmed that there was a positive relationship between media exposure and aggressive behavior among youth. The present results are consistent with the above research, which indicate that social media can be a risk factor for adolescents' aggressive tendencies. Another significant positive correlation was between the use of social media and delinquency in the study. This suggests that the more time spent on the social media websites, the higher the chances of adolescents exhibiting delinquent behaviours . Adolescents can be exposed to deviant peer groups, risky online challenges, anti social behaviours, and harmful content, which can foster and reinforce rule breaking behaviours through the social media .Poor supervision and inadequate emotional regulation in adolescence might make them more susceptible to such influences .The present finding is in accordance with the previous studies. According to Valkenburg and Peter (2011)heavy use of the Internet and social media can have detrimental effects on the behavioural adjustment of adolescents and problem behaviour. Hinduja and Patchin (2010) found that risky digital behaviours, cyber bullying and online interactions were related to delinquent behaviours among adolescents. In a similar manner, Sharma and Gupta (2020) found that the problematic use of social media was a significant predictor of behavioural problems and antisocial behaviour in Indian adolescents. Moreover ,there was a significant correlation between aggression and delinquency, with aggression showing a positive correlation. This indicates that there is a correlation between adolescents who are more aggressive and engaging in delinquent behavior . Aggressive persons can be impulsive, control their emotions poorly, be hostile, and have problems adjusting socially, these can result in them becoming involved in antisocial activities .Often aggressive behaviour may serve as a risk factor for juvenile delinquency and criminality. This observation is confirmed by some previous research. Farrington (2005) found aggression to be one of the most consistent factors predicting juvenile delinquency and subsequent delinquent behavior . A similar finding was reported by Loeber and Hay (1997) who found that disruptive and aggressive behavior in adolescence was a major risk factor in terms of delinquent involvement. Sharma and Marimuthu (2014) found that in Indian context, the adolescents who were emotionally unstable and aggressive were more likely to engage in antisocial and delinquent activities. In general, it may be concluded that social media use and aggression area significant factor to impact the delinquent behaviour of youth in Tripura .The outcomes show that parental monitoring, training in emotional regulation, psychological counseling and responsible digital media usage are key issues among adolescents. Emotional management, social skills, and healthy online behaviour programs can be starting points for early interventions that can help reduce aggression and delinquency among youth.

CONCLUSION

The research aimed to understand the connections between the use of social media, aggression, and juvenile delinquency among juvenile delinquents in Tripura. It was found that the participants displayed a fairly high level of social media use as well as a moderate level of aggression. For aggression dimensions, physical aggression was the most pronounced one, followed by anger and hostility, although both of these latter features remained at a moderate level, respectively. Also, social media use,

aggression and delinquency had a significant positive association. Increased social media use led to heightened aggression and an increase in delinquent behaviour. Same thing, aggression was strongly linked to delinquency, implying that aggressive traits could be a major determinant of antisocial and delinquent behavior among juveniles. Seems like spending too much time using social media without adequate guidance may impact how teenagers manage their emotions and behavior, resulting in higher incident so f aggression and delinquent behavior. Also, factors like psychological, behavioural , and environmental play critical roles in juvenile delinquency. The results point to the desirability of early psychological intervention, parental oversight, awareness related to reasonable social media usage, and the organization of counseling sessions for young people. To nurture emotional regulation, the development of effective coping and behavior online as well as to curb negative youth behavior schools families, and psychological experts should collaborate closely. These preventive and rehabilitative steps may be effective in minimizing teenage aggression and delinquent behavior as well as fostering their healthy mental growth.

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