

**TWITTER AS A TOOL FOR THE MOBILISATION OF THE #BRINGBACKOURGIRLS#
CAMPAIGN AMONG UNDERGRADUATES**

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Abstract

This study examined the role twitter played in mobilising youths to join the #bringbackourgirls# campaign. It sought to examine the extent to which social media sets agenda for the society and mobilizes people to join a cause using the #bringbackourgirls# campaign as study. Survey method was employed and questionnaire was used as instrument of data collection. The population were University of Lagos students. A sample size of 500 respondents was drawn from the population out of which 473 responded effectively to the questions. The finding revealed that 90% of the respondents have a twitter account and they access them regularly. About 70% of the respondents stated that social media were their main sources of information on the campaign. Furthermore, 57% believed that twitter is an effective tool for sourcing information and mobilisation. Recommendations were made among others that efforts should also be made to institute a form of regulatory framework for social media as unscrupulous elements can use the platform to mobilize people to cause disorderliness in the nation.

Keywords: Bringbackourgirls campaign, mobilisation, social media, Twitter

Introduction

According to Oyesomi, Oyero, & Okorie (2014), the mass media are generally defined as those channels of communication which are capable of reaching heterogeneous audiences simultaneously with uniform messages. However, entrance of the social media networks in the mass communication circle, have caused a shift in the way mass media messages are created, sourced and received; such that citizens have been able

to get actively involved in the creation and transmission of information due to the participatory and interactive nature of the platform.

As the Internet has become ever-present, quicker, and ever more accessible to non-technical communities, social networking and mutual services have grown rapidly, enabling people to communicate and share interests in many more ways (Oyesomi, Ahmadu & Itsekor). Audience members now prefer to source news and air their opinions on the social media platforms where they feel they have a stake in. The increase of social networking sites, combined with an increase in the number of mobile devices and apps, has fundamentally distorted the way people communicate and work with each other. Traditional hierarchical relationships have been redefined, while access to and dissemination of information has changed dramatically. Social media has been a major factor in these changes, by providing a platform on which communication is instant, decentralized, and truly global. These social media sites support the need for social interaction, using web tools to transform media monologues into social media dialogue. (Ekeanyanwu, Kalyango, Peters, 2012)

Oyesomi and Okorie (2013) are of the view that participation refers to the act of taking part in an event process. The participatory function of the social media has resulted into a form of popular public opinion formation such that individuals make their opinion public, it gets the attention of like-minded individuals which makes them join the same cause and follow the same line of action. Audience members are influenced by the views of certain persons particularly celebrities and top government functionaries and decide to follow their actions for a change to be effected.

Social media has created an avenue for citizens to be able to organize and execute a movement, campaign or revolution on issues that may displease them in order to call for a change in the way things are done in the society or to call for a change in the government of the day. The role of Social Media in protests and revolutions has garnered considerable media attention in recent years. Current conventional wisdom has it that social networks have made regime change easier to organize and execute. (Papic & Noonan, 2011).

Abisola, Oyesomi, Okorie & Omole (2014) are of the opinion that the aim of the different forms of social media are to create a social, relaxing networking or linking platform for people from all over the world to communicate and exchange ideas and also build friendships, with the diverse emerging sites, people have loads of variety to choose from. This makes it plain that the potential of the media to impact virtually every aspect of young people's lives cannot be ignored. (Oyero and Oyesomi, 2014).

The important role of social media in mobilizing the citizenry for a cause was examined in this paper, with special focus on the role twitter played in the mobilization of Nigerians especially the youths in joining the "bringbackourgirls" campaign. The paper also assessed the extent to which social media specifically twitter, helps in creation of awareness and social mobilization.

Objectives of the study

This study is aimed at finding out the following:

1. To find out the extent to which respondents use twitter
2. To find out the extent to which twitter has mobilized youths in participating in the Bring-back-our-girls campaign.
3. To situate the place of twitter in the sourcing and dissemination of media messages.

Research questions

1. To what extent do respondents use twitter?
2. To what extent has Twitter mobilized youths in participating in the Bring-back-our-girls campaign?
3. What is the place twitter in the sourcing and dissemination of media messages?

Overview of the #Bringbackour girls campaign#

The abduction of the over 200 secondary school girls by the Islamic terrorist sect known as Boko Haram is what has led to the "bringbackourgirls" campaign. The hash tag, #bringbackourgirls was first seen on twitter on the 23rd day of April 2014 by a Nigerian lawyer named Abdulahi Ibrahim. It was believed that he tweeted this amid complete dissatisfaction with the government's response to the incident of the kidnapping case.

The tweet came in when the former Nigerian Minister of Education Obiageli Ezekwesili was giving a live address on the issue of the kidnapping and the government's response to it. As the initiator of the tweet watched this address, he tweeted as follows "Yes, #BringBackOurDaughters #BringBackOurGirls declared by @obyzezeks". Some hours after the tweet was posted, the former education minister whom Ibrahim Abdulahi quoted, retweeted the tweet to her many followers and also, encouraged her followers to keep using

the hash tag "#bringbackourgirls" to keep the momentum until the girls are rescued as this added more heat to the campaign.

This joint collaboration by the two activists on April 23rd had a massive impact on the social network (twitter). The following week, twitter users in Nigeria used the hash tag mostly at the end of their every tweet thousands of times per day, which drew massive attention to the plight of the kidnapped girls. The first breakthrough in the campaign's popularity came on April 30th when twitter references to "BringBackOurGirls" shot up to over one hundred thousand tweets every day. The hash tag was found trending on twitter and celebrities, top government functionaries at home and even abroad made use of the hash tag. The hash tag was used by the American first lady Michelle Obama via twitter as she expressed how outraged and heartbroken she was at the crime in Nigeria.

The hash tag was also used by the British Prime Minister, David Cameron in a television interview when he said that Britain will do all she can to recover the abducted girls. As at today, the "BringBackOurGirls" campaign has been used over three million times on twitter and it has been regarded as not just a national campaign but a global one.

Social media and the place of communication

To communicate, there should be proper matching of audience, message and medium, the audience to communicate with or to can be identified by looking at the people's awareness of the topic in general; the geographical location; and organisational characteristics of the target group. (Oyesomi, Okorie, Ahmadu & Itsekor, 2014). Communication is an important aspect of human life. It is the exchange of information and ideas which flows from the source of the information to the final consumers of the information i.e. the mass audience. The mainstream media which are radio, television, newspapers and magazines used to be the sole providers of information before the birth of the internet. When the internet came into place, social media came and changed the way information is being disseminated. The social media became a major tool used by audiences to source for information and to express their mind as it grew older. Social media have empowered people globally, serving as a platform for the expression of views on both personal and global issues.

Ozuru & Ekeanyanwu (2013, p.88), also agree with this notion that "social media networks have spiced up ways in which information are disseminated". Social media platforms have also increased the capacity of societies and people to tell their own stories, generate their own stories and people to disseminate same without the traditional gate keeping managed by the traditional media. (Ozuru & Ekeanyanwu, 2013)

Agenda Setting theory

Moemeka (2000, p.34), gives a background to this; agenda Setting is a theoretical perspective about the process, on the part of the mass media, of sifting out (from among many) certain issues which they (the media) consider very important to society, and focusing special and constant attention on these issues with the main purpose of getting the public to discuss them. The constant and specific attention paid to such issues by the media help to keep the issues alive and generally lead to public discussion of the issues. Agenda setting is directed towards eliciting appropriate action/actions (for or against) this issues being publicly discussed.

One of the primary functions of the mass media is to set agenda in the society and create topics that will be discussed among members of the society. Moemeka (2000, p.34), considers agenda setting on the part of the mass media, of sifting out (from among many) certain issues which they (media) consider very important to society, and focusing special and constant attention on these issues with the main purpose of getting the public to discuss them. The media does not tell us or teach us how to think in the society, but they tell us what to think about by bringing up topics of discussion among its users. The media has the power to set agenda in the society. McCombs & Shaw (1993, p.62), says thus; "Agenda setting is considerably more than the classical assertion that the news tells us what to think about. The news also tells us how to think about it. Both the selection of objects for attention and the selection of frames for thinking about these objects are powerful agenda-setting roles".

The Technological Determinism Theory

Most interpretations of technological determinism share two general ideas which Sparks (2002, p.2) noted that:

The development of technology itself follows a predictable, traceable path largely beyond cultural or political influence, and that technology in turn has "effects" on societies that are inherent, rather than socially conditioned or produced because that society organizes itself to support and further develop a technology once it has been introduced.

Marshall (1982,p.15) posited that “societies have always been shaped more by nature of the media with which people communicate than by the content of the communication”. In summary, Marshall was of the opinion that “the medium is the message”. This statement could be used as a peg for the reason most youth surf the net or join the social networks.

Many young people do not really have a clear cut objective of visiting the internet, but because he or she believes a friend is hooked on the internet, it becomes a misnomer for him or her not to be online. As the youths surf the net they join some social networks and consequently participate in political debates and other politically related activities. As they do so, they consciously or unconsciously participate in the political process.

Method

The method adopted for this study is survey. The population of the study are University of Lagos students. It has a total population of about 39000 students at it is located in Akoka Lagos state. The higher institution was picked because the population has a large number of students this will make the researcher able to get diverse opinion about the topic. The sampling techniques adopted by the researcher for this study were the multi-stage and cluster sampling technique. This sampling techniques were chosen because the population was large and it was necessary to cluster them and make them in stages to administer the questionnaire with ease. The researcher first clustered the research into faculties. There are 9 faculties in UNILAG which are Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of education, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Law, Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Social Science and Faculty of Pharmacy. Four Faculties were randomly selected: Faculty of Arts, the Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Education and faculty of Law were chosen randomly. Departments were randomly picked from the faculties. The sample size of the study is 500. 125 respondents were randomly selected from the department, making a total of 500 respondents.

Result

It is important to note that only 473 copies of the questionnaire were effectively filled and useful for analysis. From the demographic data, the study had more male respondents than female respondents. It could be inferred that in the five faculties under study, more male students than females exist. It could also be inferred that in the University of Lagos, more male students exist than females. Also, on a wider scale of extrapolation, this could be a mirror of the Lagos State society and the Nigerian society at large, that there exist more males than females

More respondents were between the ages of 19-24 followed by respondents between ages 15-18. Few respondents fell between the age ranges of 25-34 and 35 and above. It can also be said here that more respondents were in their third fourth or final years of their study, followed by those who were in their first or second year since the average minimum entry age into the university is age 16 and most courses on an average last for a maximum of four to five years. This could also be a representation of the Nigerian society where most university students are young adults with fewer teenagers and older citizens (especially in federal universities).

Table 1: General Information on Respondents’ use of Twitter/social media

Response	Do you make use of social media? (%)	Do you have a Twitter account? (%)
Yes	98.2	90.1
No	1.8	9.9
Total	100 n=473	100 n=473

98.2% of the respondents make use of the social media while 90.1% have a Twitter. This statistics is favourable to the study which centres on Twitter users in the *Bring back our girls’ campaign*. This also means that most of those who were active on social media also had a Twitter account. This findings can also

be inferred to a general context where it is seen that besides from Facebook, Twitter has the highest number of users.

Table 2: Respondents’ Frequency of Twitter usage in the activities of the campaign

Response	How often do you log into Twitter? (%)
More than five times a day	9.2
Less than three times a day	6.2
Daily	12.5
Weekly	21.2
Monthly	16.5
I am constantly logged in	24.2
I am never logged in	9.9
Total	100 n=473

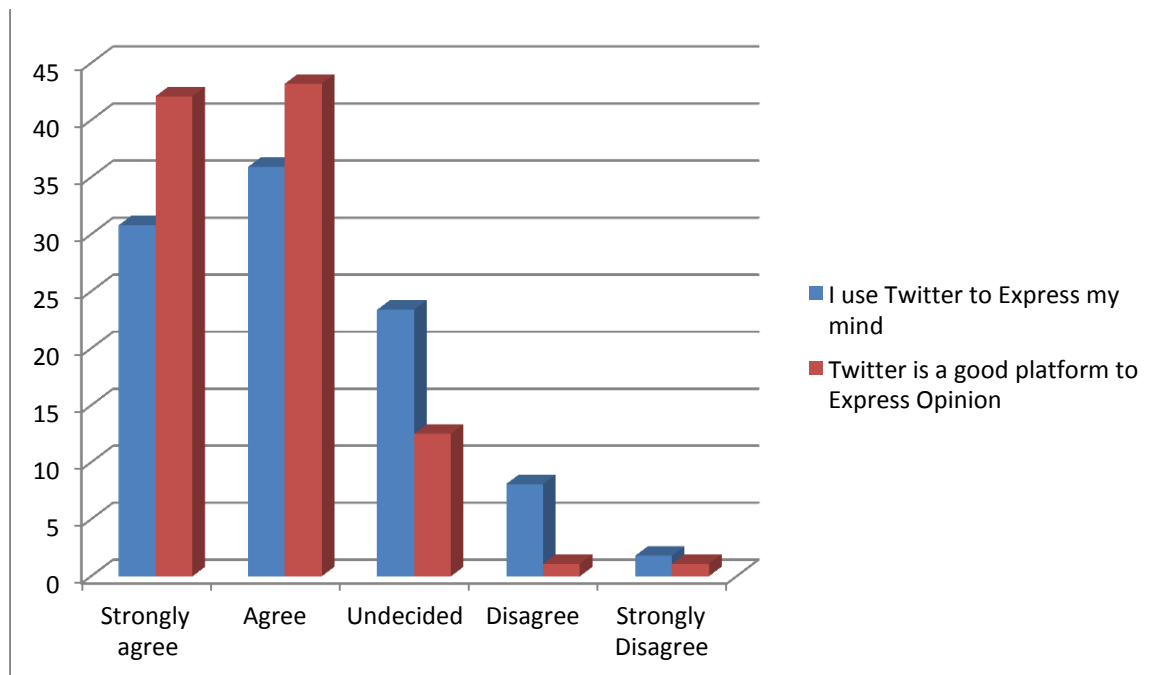
This is a follow up to table 1 because it is not enough to be subscribed to social media platform; the frequency of usage also counts. More respondents were constantly logged in followed by those who logged in weekly and monthly. Respondents who could count definitely the number of times they were logged in were the fewest represented by the data. This could be understood since such activities are continuous and become a part of the daily routine of an individual that it begins to almost involve subconscious actions. Also with the rise of smart phones and the increased presence of Wireless services, constant connectivity to internet and social media platforms are becoming a regular feature in societies today. This could be an explanation for the highest representation of those that are constantly logged in.

Table 3: Respondents’ justification for Twitter usage

Response	What do you use Twitter for? (%)
Communication	28.6
Information	32.2
Meeting new people	12.1
Advertising	8.4
To follow trends	8.8
None of the above	9.9
Total	100 n=473

Most respondents used Twitter to get information followed by the use of Twitter for communication. Meeting new people, advertising, following trends and those who never used Twitter had the lowest representation. Social media platforms provide almost constant information with the likelihood of latest updates existing. Also these platforms exist that allow almost constant interconnectivity at a somewhat inexpensive rate.

Figure1: Respondents’ Level of Twitter Use for information dissemination



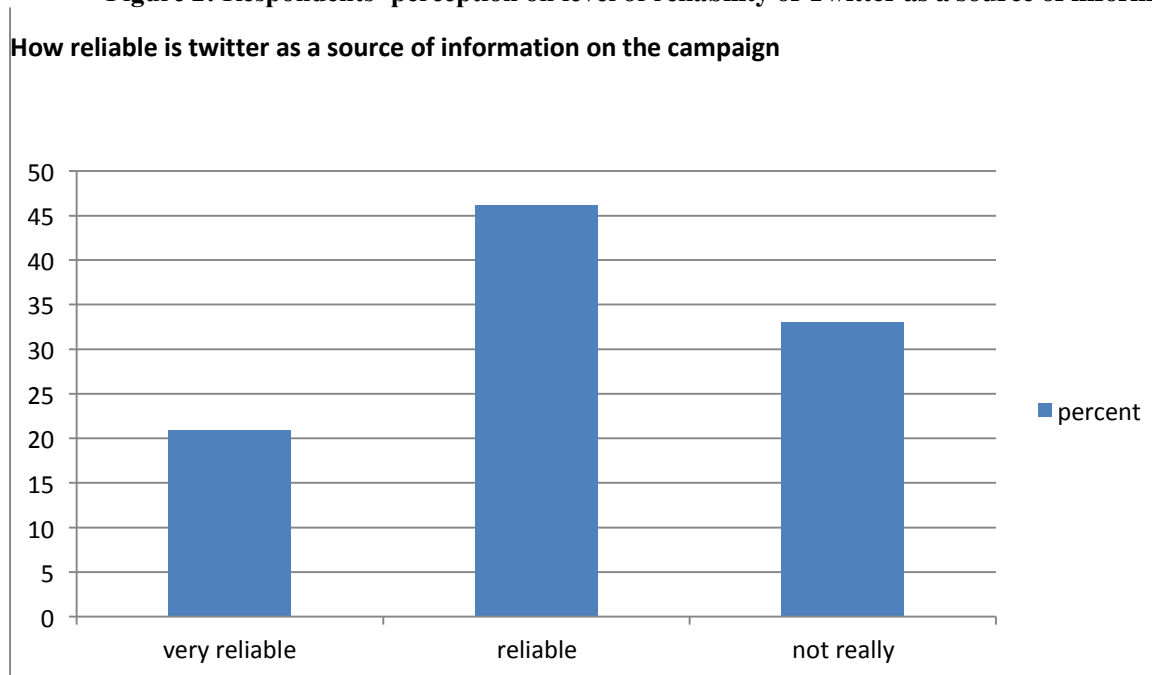
Many respondents assert the use of Twitter as an avenue for expressing opinions (35%). In the present world of citizen journalism and citizen participation in the public sphere, this could be a mirror effect of the wider society. Most respondents also believe that Twitter is a good platform for such an activity.

Table 4: Respondents’ perception of the effectiveness of Twitter for information dissemination

Response	Do you think Twitter is an effective tool for information dissemination? (%)
Yes	57.5
No	8.4
Maybe	21.6
Sometimes	12.5
Other	0
Total	100 n=473

Most respondents believe Twitter to be effective in information dissemination whether this information is emanating from them or others. Table 4 is clearly linked to Figure 1. This perception could be looked at in various lights. It could be that these respondents affirm the effectiveness of Twitter for information dissemination because of its cost value, the speed of connection, the preciseness of communication among many other reasons that could exist.

Figure 2: Respondents’ perception on level of reliability of Twitter as a source of information



These respondents who provided answers to the question of whether Twitter was a reliable source of information on the campaign responded to the enquiry as to the degree of this reliability. Most respondents believe Twitter to be reliable at least to a good extent.

Figure 3: Respondents’ perceived mobilisation role of Twitter in the campaign

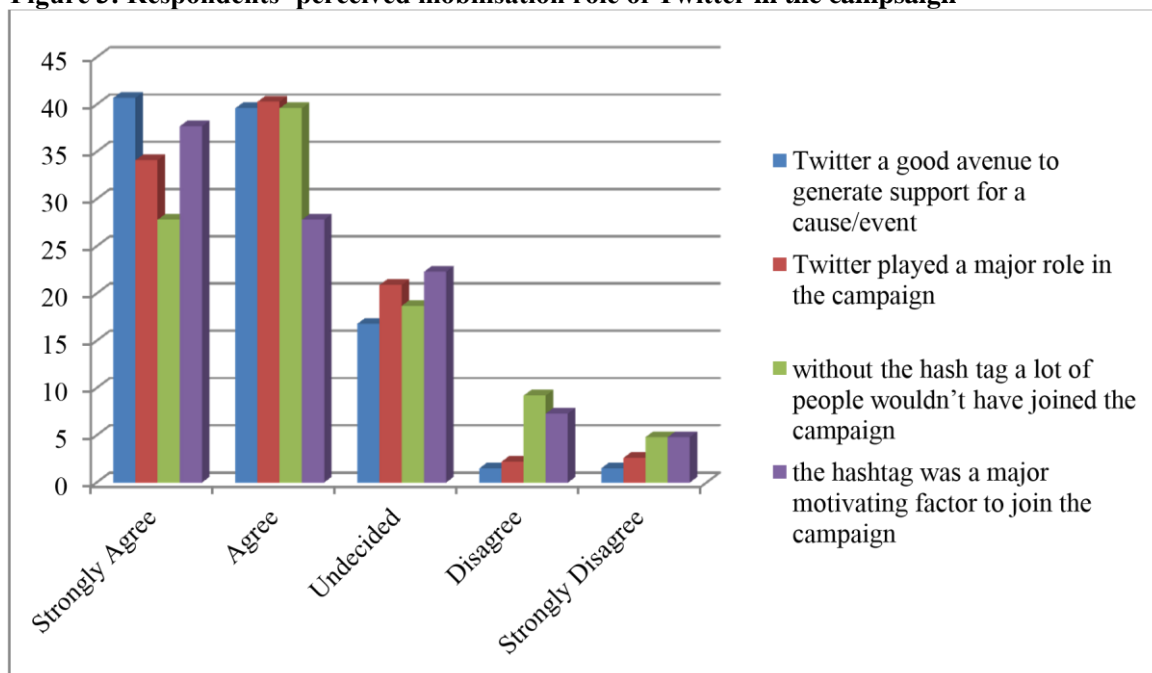


Figure 3 shows the varying levels of agreement of respondents to the fact that Twitter has played any sort of mobilisation role in the #bringbackourgirls campaign. More respondents believe that without the Twitter campaigns, they would not have been involved at any level with the cause for the release of the Chibok Girls.

Discussion of findings

In respect to the findings of this study, most respondents fell in the young adult age group (youths). 90.1% of respondents had a Twitter account. That is, these respondents would have been able to respond intelligently to the questions posed. Also, most of these respondents accessed their Twitter account on a regular basis. This finding is in support of Okafor, Chukwuemeka, Ebenezar & Patience (2013, p.79) where they said common citizens take the initiative to report news or express views about happenings within their communities via social media. It also showed that respondents believe without Twitter, many people would not have joined in the “bring back our girls’ campaign. These respondents also believe that the Twitter campaign was a major factor in their participation in the campaign.

As earlier stated, Twitter might not have told people what their line of thought about the Chibok girls’ abduction and the movement for their release but it definitely placed the news item and the campaign in their view. McCombs & Shaw (1993, p.62), opine that agenda setting is considerably more than the classical assertion that the news tells us what to think about. The news also tells us how to think about it. Respondents believe that the social media are more accessible for information sourcing and they would prefer to get informed via the social media. Respondents also believe that twitter is a reliable source of information. 32.2% of respondents stated that the reason they use Twitter was because of their need to stay informed. Table 4 reveals that respondents believe that twitter is an effective tool in information dissemination. Respondents perceive that information provided by social media is not only effective but reliable. Respondents also believed that twitter was highly effective in their sourcing of information during the *bring back our girls campaign*. This information was not only available, effective and reliable but all these made it adequate to enable these individuals form opinions about the campaign. This finding agrees with Ekeli & Enobakhare (2013, p.119), where they said that social media have become an integral part of how people communicate, stay in touch, keep on top of new developments, and otherwise connect with the world around them.

Conclusion

Communication is an important aspect of human existence. Today, technology has made it easy for humans to communicate all over the world and to be informed on issues that concern them. The vast advancement in this technology has led to the birth of the internet which has given rise for social media networks to come into place in the 21st century. Thus, social media have changed the flow of communication and ideas among humans as a result of their distinct characteristics of participation, openness, interaction. As it stands now, individuals can freely express themselves and get involved in issues and happenings around them without any form of infringement or fear.

Recommendations

This study has established the vital role of social media in drawing attention to issues and mobilising audience members to take action on a particular issue. The study therefore offers the following recommendations.

1. The Federal Government should pay serious attention to the social media as it is a trend among members of the society; in order to find out the views of citizens on serious national issues. Solutions proffered on these social media networks by its users can help a long way to solve the problems.
2. Efforts should also be made by governments to institute a form of regulatory framework for social media as unscrupulous elements can use the platform to mobilize people to cause disorderliness in the nation.
3. Social media which are referred to as the ninth wonder of the world because of their vast growth in the 21st century as one which should be taken into consideration by the traditional media in African countries. The social media has come to fix up the major undoing of the traditional media and all that can be done by the traditional media are to adopt the virtues of social media, adapt them to journalistic practices, and create new ways of packaging and disseminating news to the public and there will be a more organised form of feedback from the consumers of the information from the traditional media via the social media. This strategy is very much in place, that is what is called media synchronization (old media and new media, having symbolic relationship)

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