

Increasing Customer Engagement Through Social Media Marketing Training for Merchants at Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo

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ABSTRACT

The Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo Merchants Association is currently facing competition challenges from online traders as well as a lack of technological knowledge. These obstacles make it difficult for merchants to compete. To address these issues, training and mentoring activities on the use of social media were conducted in October 2024, attended by 50 association members. The method applied was the PAR (Participatory Action Research) method. The activity results showed an increase in the engagement rate on participants' accounts. The engagement rate, which was previously below 1% (low engagement), significantly increased to more than 3% (high engagement). This increase demonstrates that the program effectively improved customer engagement. Recommendations for the program's sustainability include conducting advanced training and initiating the formation of a digital community for Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo Merchants. It is hoped that this activities can continue and provide long-term benefits for the Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo Merchants Association.

Keywords: social media marketing, digital marketing, customer engagement, engagement rate

1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving digital era, the role of social media has become increasingly important and necessary across various fields such as education, health, and business (**Torous et al., 2021**). The significance of social media in the business world continues to grow in today's digital age (**Vitara & Sari, 2024**). In a business context, social media functions not only as a marketing tool (**Prodanova & Van Looy, 2019**) but also as a platform to build relationships with customers. Businesses can use social media to listen to customer feedback (**Dewi & Sari, 2023**) and provide more responsive customer service. Additionally, social media can strengthen relationships by offering special discounts and loyalty reward campaigns (**Ram et al., 2025**).

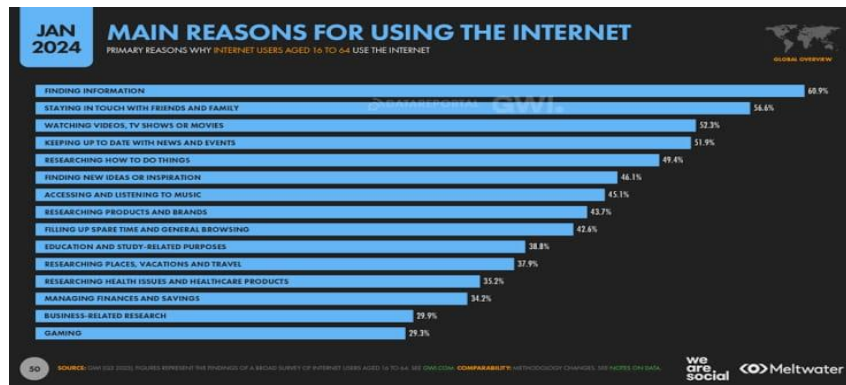


Figure 1. Reasons for Internet Use
Source: (We Are Social, 2024)

According to data from **We Are Social (2024)** at Figure 1, 43.7% of internet usage is dedicated to researching products and brands. Modern consumers tend to rely heavily on social media as a crucial source of information when searching for specific products or brands (**Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016**). In this context, having a business presence on social media is vital, as it is an effective way to reach and interact with potential customers who are conducting product research (**Dwivedi et al., 2021**).

This interaction with potential customers is known as customer engagement. Customer engagement refers to the interaction and involvement with customers through social media platforms (**Demangeot & Broderick, 2016**). It is key to building strong relationships with customers, enhancing their loyalty, and expanding the business's reach and influence (**Rane et al., 2023**). Previously, relationships between customers and businesses were limited to direct interactions in stores or through traditional communication channels like phone calls or letters (**Hänninen & Karjaluo, 2017**). However, with the emergence of social media, these boundaries have been removed, enabling customers to interact directly, in real-time, and across various platforms (**Parise et al., 2016**). For businesses, social media has become a highly effective tool to build brands, reach target markets, and influence consumer behavior (**Pütter, 2017**).

Customer engagement is a crucial concept in modern marketing strategies, involving active and emotional interactions between customers and businesses (**Hollebeek & Macky, 2019**). According to **Cheung et al. (2021)**, customer engagement includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions manifested in customers' interactions with a brand or company. **So et al. (2016)** emphasize that customer engagement is a key element in creating meaningful customer experiences, which can strengthen long-term relationships between customers and businesses. The success of customer engagement lies in the business's ability to understand customer needs and deliver relevant value (**Peppers & Rogers, 2016**). Common indicators used to measure customer engagement include: 1) number of interactions: likes, comments, shares, and saves on social media content; 2) audience growth: increase in followers on a particular platform; 3) interaction ratio: comparison between the number of interactions and followers to measure engagement levels.

In today's digital era, the role of social media in building relationships with customers (customer engagement) is especially important for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) (Huda et al., 2024). However, many MSMEs have yet to fully utilize social media's potential to enhance interaction and engagement with their customers. This also applies to the MSME members of the Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo Traders Association, who tend to

rely on conventional marketing methods, which are often less effective in reaching and interacting with potential customers in this digital era.

Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo, established in 2009 based on the idea of Joko Widodo when he was the Mayor of Solo, is a popular destination every Friday and Saturday night from 7:00 PM to 10:00 PM WIB. Visitors can find a variety of products ranging from fashion, culinary, souvenirs, to handicrafts, all reflecting the unique characteristics of Solo City. The challenges faced by MSMEs in utilizing social media involve not only limitations in technical knowledge and skills but also a lack of understanding of effective strategies to build customer engagement. Additionally, the MSMEs at Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo face increasing competition from both local competitors and businesses outside the region that can reach the local market through social media. Therefore, customer engagement strategies through social media marketing training are key to maintaining and improving their business competitiveness.

The problem is that not all merchants are familiar with social media. Based on preliminary survey results illustrated in Figure 2, out of 25 merchants, 9 have neither used nor owned any social media accounts. This means that only 64% of the merchants, or 16 individuals, have social media accounts. Moreover, among these 9 merchants, only 36% actively use their social media accounts to promote their businesses. In fact, in marketing management literature, consumer engagement is considered a substantial factor in marketing research (**Vander Schee et al., 2020**). Purchasing decisions are often influenced by consumer engagement, which can lead to satisfaction, loyalty, and trust (**Thakur, 2019**). This is supported by a previous study conducted by the author, which found that social media marketing can effectively enhance consumer engagement (**Sari, 2023**). In the study, the author discovered that the strategic use of social media, such as consistently posting relevant content and utilizing interactive features can increase attention, interest, and ultimately drive purchasing behavior. In other words, social media serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a dialogical space that fosters emotional connections between business owners and customers. This research serves as an essential foundation for the current community engagement, which aims to improve the digital literacy of market merchants so they can effectively leverage social media to build consumer engagement.

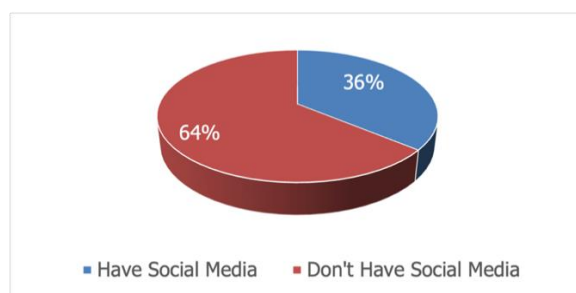


Figure 2. Ownership of Social Media Accounts Before the Training

Source: Authors (2025)

Based on this analysis, there is an urgent need to enhance the knowledge and skills of MSME actors at Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo in digital marketing. Therefore, this community service program aims to improve customer engagement through comprehensive social media marketing training using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method. This program is expected to empower MSMEs to utilize social media effectively, thereby increasing sales and economic stability. Through this program, MSME actors will gain the knowledge, skills, and support they need to succeed in the digital era and open new opportunities for business growth.

2. METHOD

This Community Service activity was conducted using the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method. The program was implemented in four stages: 1) problem identification and team consolidation, 2) training implementation, 3) implementation and mentoring, and 4) evaluation and reflection. The target participants were MSME actors who are members of the Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo Traders Association. The selection of MSMEs was based on criteria targeting communities of MSME actors engaged in various industries and representing the characteristics of Solo City. The activities took place from October to December 2024. The training sessions were held at Hotel Sarila Solo, Jalan Kalilarangan No.103, Jayengan, Serengan, Surakarta City. Meanwhile, the mentoring activities were conducted at the Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo location, Jalan Diponegoro, Keprabon, Banjarsari, Surakarta City. There were 50 participants in this community service program, all MSME actors at Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo. Training materials were delivered using PowerPoint, the Canva application for practicing promotional content creation, and smartphones for practicing photography, videography, and uploading content to social media.

Stage one: problem identification and team consolidation.

The initial step involved the team visiting the site to conduct observations and an initial survey by directly observing how traders interact with customers (Figure 3). The survey results identified that the main challenges faced by some traders at Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo were competition from online traders and technological challenges. These findings were used to determine relevant training materials and to conduct a Focus Group Discussion with the Chairperson of the Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo Traders Association to discuss proposals for the community service activities.

Stage two: training implementation.

The training began with a pre-test to assess participants' initial literacy levels regarding business marketing through social media. After the pre-test, the core training session covered the use of social media for marketing. This session included an introduction to Social Media Marketing, covering basic knowledge and benefits, and explanations of various social media platforms that MSMEs can use, such as Instagram, WhatsApp Business, Google Business, and Facebook. Next was a session on techniques for creating engaging and relevant content, conducted through product photography practice. Participants were first explained the concept of product photography, angles for taking product photos, photography techniques, and tips for taking product photos using smartphones (Figure 4).

The training concluded with a post-test to measure participants' understanding after the training. The pre-test and post-test contained the same questions. The results from these tests indicated the extent of participants' improvement in understanding social media marketing and their competence in applying social media marketing as a marketing tool. The training ended with closing remarks and participant testimonials.

Tabel 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Question Indicators

Question Indicators	Question Items
Social Media Marketing Concept	(1) and (2)
Customer Engagement Concept	(3) and (7)
Content Effectiveness	(4), (5), and (6)
Social Media Utilization Strategy	(8)

Stage three: implementation and mentoring.

The community service did not stop at training but continued with visits and mentoring at the business location, Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo. During this stage, the team provided intensive assistance in creating and uploading content to social media. The visits and mentoring aimed to ensure that business actors could implement the knowledge gained during the training. During visits, the team provided direct guidance on selecting and arranging products to be photographed, choosing the right time for photo shoots to capture natural lighting, and tips for creating more engaging content (Figure 5).



Figure 3. Field Observation and Initial Survey at Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo



Figure 4. Presentation of Social Media Marketing and Product Photography



Figure 5. Mentoring Activities for Community Service Participants

Stage four: evaluation and reflection.

After mentoring, the team conducted a final program evaluation, including collecting feedback from participants on the training and mentoring provided, measuring improvements in skills and knowledge through pre-test and post-test results, and assessing increases in customer engagement. The increase in customer engagement was measured by calculating the engagement rate (ER) based on customer interactions with traders' content on the Instagram platform. Indicators included the number of likes, comments, shares, saves, and followers. The engagement rate was calculated using the formula:

$$ER = \frac{(\text{Likes} + \text{Comments} + \text{Share})}{\text{Total Followers}} \times 100$$

The ER value is presented as a percentage, indicating the proportion of the audience actively interacting with the content compared to the total number of followers.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Measurement of Knowledge Improvement

Knowledge measurement in this training was conducted using a pre-test and post-test approach, designed to assess participants' understanding before and after the training. The pre-test and post-test sheets were also used to collect participants' profiles and the social media platforms they own. Each answer to the statements was assigned points according to its order: the first answer received a score of 3 (three), the second answer received a score of 2 (two), and the third answer received a score of 1 (one). The improvement in participants'

understanding before and after the training was measured. The knowledge measurement results using the pre-test and post-test approach are described in the following table:

Table 2. Improvement of Training Participants' Knowledge

Measurement Results	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Highest Score	21	24
Lowest Score	15	19
Average	18.76 out of 24.00	22.60 out of 24.00
Percentage Increase	20,47%	

Based on Table 2, the 20.47% increase indicates a positive impact of the training on participants' knowledge. This proves that the training successfully enhanced participants' understanding and knowledge of marketing through social media. Consistent with Valenstein-Mah et al. (2020), the increase in understanding and knowledge after training reflects the effectiveness of the training implementation. Although the duration of the training in this Community Service activity was limited, the material delivered successfully increased participants' understanding. This shows that the methods used, both in theory delivery and practice, were effective in helping participants grasp digital marketing concepts via social media.

The results also indicate room for further improvement. Although there was an increase, the average post-test score is still below the maximum score (22.60 out of 24.00). This suggests that additional reinforcement of social media marketing material is necessary. Therefore, the activity did not stop at training but continued with mentoring carried out by the service team.

3.2. Measurement of Customer Engagement Improvement

Measuring customer engagement before and after the social media marketing training can provide insights into the program's effectiveness in increasing customer involvement. This analysis was conducted by comparing quantitative and qualitative data from several interaction indicators on social media (**Boujena et al., 2021**). Below are the customer engagement measurement results before and after the service activities for some Instagram accounts of participants.

Bien Craft Handmade's Account (@bien.craft):

Bien Craft Handmade sells various ethnic fashion products such as bags combining batik and leather, wallets, and accessories. The brand embraces ethnic and batik themes in every product sold. Before participating in the training and mentoring, Bien Craft Handmade frequently promoted products on social media. However, the promotions were unstructured and underutilized Instagram's interactive features. The content was mostly monotonous, focusing only on products without engaging strategies such as storytelling, polls, or special discounts for interacting customers (Figure 6).

After participating in the training and mentoring, Bien Craft Handmade began implementing creative content strategies. According to **Onyekuru (2024)**, creative content not only visually showcases products but also includes stories or concepts relevant to the audience. For example, displaying products in everyday situations that highlight benefits and advantages. Since Bien Craft Handmade focuses on fashion products, during mentoring, the service team advised adding models to the content. This aligns with (**Bleier et al., 2019**), who state that adding models makes the content more visually appealing and demonstrates product usage in

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daily life. Additionally, this aims to attract new audiences, and ultimately Bien Craft Handmade succeeded in increasing its followers from 680 to 692 (Figure 7).



Figure 6. Content (Single Image) of Bien Craft Handmade's Account Before Training and Mentoring

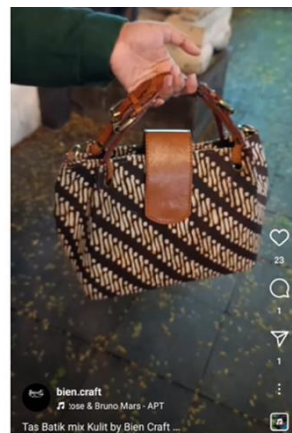


Figure 7. Content (Reels) of Bien Craft Handmade's Account After Training and Mentoring

Based on observations of the content, the engagement rate calculation before and after the Community Service activity is as follows:

Table 3. Analysis of Bien Craft Handmade's Account

Indicator	Before Training and Mentoring	After Training and Mentoring
Likes	3	23
Comments	0	1
Shares	0	1
Followers	680	692
Engagement Rate	0.44% (Low Engagement)	3.61% (High Engagement)

From Table 3, before the community service activity, the engagement rate was 0.44%, indicating very low customer engagement with Bien Craft Handmade's social media content. This means only a small portion of followers actively interacted, such as liking, commenting, or sharing posts. After the activity, the engagement rate increased to 3.61%, classified as high engagement. This significant increase shows a much stronger audience interaction with Bien Craft Handmade's content. More followers actively engaged by liking, commenting, or sharing.

This improvement is attributed to efforts during the training, including applying creative content strategies, using models in product displays, and optimizing Instagram's interactive features. With visually appealing and audience-relevant content, Bien Craft Handmade managed to build stronger relationships with its followers. As a result, not only did engagement rate increase, but brand recognition and trust also improved. This increase reflects the success of the strategies implemented.

Alfia Busana's Account (@alfiabusana):

Alfia Busana is a fashion business focused on selling batik clothing, based in Surakarta City, Indonesia. Alfia Busana sells offline through several outlets and online via WhatsApp, Instagram, and Shopee. Before the training and mentoring, Alfia Busana often promoted on

social media. The Instagram account was informative, providing important product details, contact information, and ordering links. However, promotions were inconsistent, and content posting was not well scheduled, resulting in less optimal reach (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Content (Single Image) of Alfia Busana's Account Before Training and Mentoring



Figure 9. Content (Reels) of Alfia Busana's Account After Training and Mentoring

After participating in the training and mentoring, Alfia Busana designed a creative and structured social media management strategy. The creative strategy highlighted product uniqueness by showcasing motifs and details up-close through photos or videos (**Alegro & Turnšek, 2020**). The team suggested showing variations of batik clothing use, such as in formal, semi-formal, or casual events, allowing the audience to see product versatility. This aligns with (**Lee et al., 2018**), who noted that content relatable to everyday life attracts more audience attention. The use of color and background also affects content quality (**Kim, 2024**). Suitable colors and backgrounds make products look more elegant and stand out, e.g., simple backgrounds with natural lighting create a professional yet attractive impression. These steps helped Alfia Busana maximize social media's potential to attract customers (Figure 9).

Based on the content, the engagement rate before and after the Community Service activity is analyzed as follows:

Table 4. Analysis of Alfia Busana Account

Indicator	Before Training and Mentoring	After Training and Mentoring
Likes	2	14
Comments	0	4
Shares	0	0
Followers	273	280
Engagement Rate	0.73% (Low Engagement)	6.43% (Very High Engagement)

From Table 4, before the community service activity, the engagement rate was 0.73%, indicating very low engagement. Only a small portion of followers actively interacted with Alfia Busana's content. After the activity, the engagement rate rose to 6.43%, classified as very high engagement. This shows excellent performance in attracting attention and encouraging active audience participation through likes, comments, and other forms of responses.

This surge reflects the success of more focused and creative content strategies, such as using models, higher-quality photos and videos, and leveraging Instagram features like Reels and Stories. This approach helped the audience feel more connected to the products, encouraging more frequent interaction.

3.3. Participant Satisfaction Survey Results

The questionnaire is available through the following link: <https://shorturl.at/Kq1OT>. The questionnaire was designed to collect data and feedback from participants of the social media marketing training at Ngarsopuro Night Market. It aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the training, measure participant satisfaction levels, and gather input to improve future training programs. The results of the participant satisfaction survey are presented in figure 10.

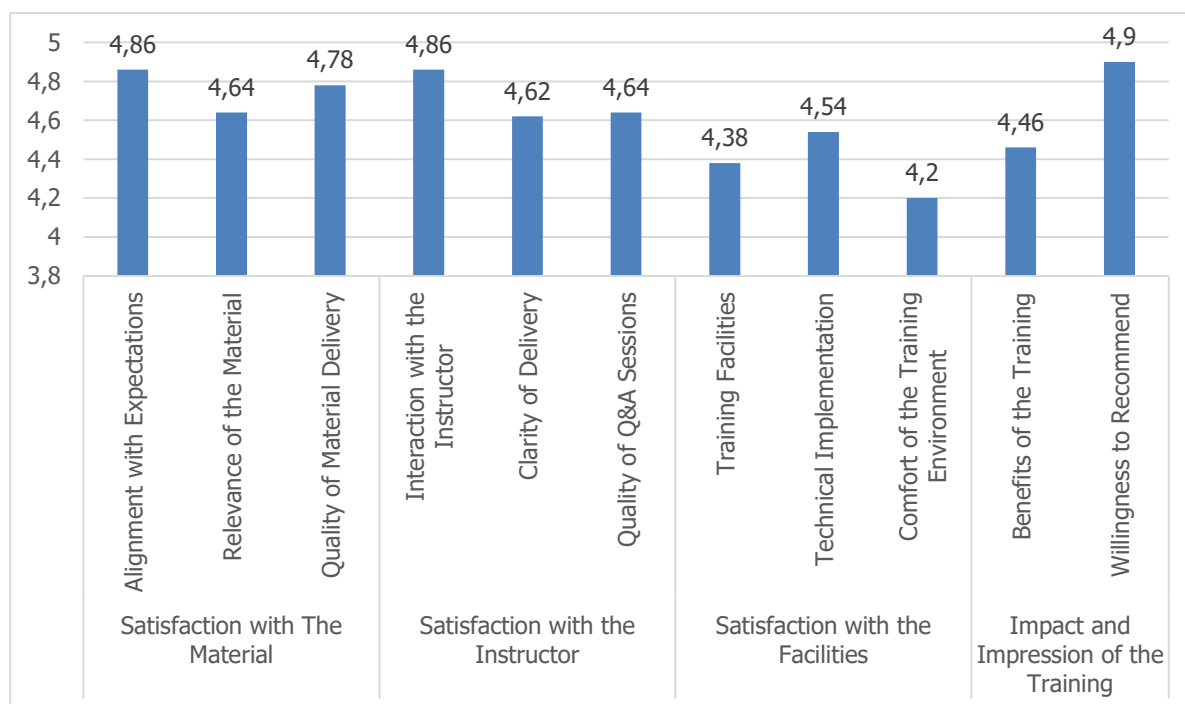


Figure 10. Participant Satisfaction Survey Chart

1. Satisfaction with Training Materials.

In terms of satisfaction with the training materials, the survey results show an average score of 4.76. This score is the highest among all factors evaluated. It indicates that participants were highly satisfied with the training materials, finding them relevant, high-quality, and well-delivered. To further enhance this satisfaction, organizers can focus on aligning materials more closely with participants' specific needs and continuously developing more dynamic and interactive delivery methods.

2. Satisfaction with Instructor Performance.

Regarding satisfaction with instructor performance, the survey results show an average score of 4.70. This score demonstrates that participants recognized the instructor's significant role in the success of the training, both through positive interaction and the ability to answer questions effectively. To maintain and improve this satisfaction, organizers can encourage instructors to further develop their communication skills, increase interactive discussion sessions, and provide more practical examples when answering questions to strengthen participant understanding. This approach will help ensure a more optimal and memorable training experience.

3. Satisfaction with Facilities and Support.

In terms of satisfaction with facilities and support, the survey results show an average score of 4.37. This is the lowest score among all factors. Although participants were generally satisfied with the facilities and support provided, there is room for improvement to meet higher standards. Organizers should conduct a more in-depth evaluation of participant needs related to facilities, technical implementation, and the training environment. Improvements in these areas can create a more enjoyable training experience and enhance overall learning effectiveness.

4. Impact and Impression of the Training.

With regard to the impact and impression of the training, the survey results show an average score of 4.68. This score reflects the success of the training in generating tangible benefits for participants. The high willingness to recommend the training indicates that the program not only met participants' current needs but also has the potential to attract more participants in the future. To ensure broader benefits, organizers should consider participant feedback to continually refine both content and implementation. This will help maintain the program's reputation while delivering deeper and more widespread impact.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The community service activities in the form of training and mentoring on the utilization of social media marketing conducted for the MSMEs of the Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo Traders Association successfully met their main objectives. The results of the community service activities show a significant improvement in managing business social media accounts. Many participants began creating content with more attractive visuals and messages aligned with their brand identity. One indicator of success was the increase in engagement rates on several MSME accounts participating in the program. Engagement rates that were previously at a low level, below 1% (low engagement), significantly increased to over 3% (high engagement). This increase indicates that the audience has begun to respond and interact with the content posted by the MSMEs. The training not only provided insights but also had a tangible impact on the digital marketing skills of the business actors, ultimately supporting the strengthening of their business sustainability through social media.

Based on the results of the social media marketing training conducted, several recommendations can be implemented to support the sustainability and effectiveness of this activity for the MSMEs of the Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo Traders Association. These recommendations include follow-up training with more in-depth material, as well as the initiation of forming a digital community for the Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo MSMEs. By implementing these recommendations, it is expected that the social media marketing training activities can continue and provide long-term benefits for the MSMEs of the Ngarsopuro Night Market Solo Traders Association, as well as enhance their competitiveness in the digital market.

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