

## The Virtual Social Networks and Couples' Commitment

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**Abstract:** Technologies and various media have affected social institutions such as family and cause shape changes in relationships within the family. One of the means of communication that are easily and widely used in the household is Internet. With the entrance of media, especially the Internet to the family, changes in personal, social, public and private relationships are occurred. The use of social networks gets more and more popular day by day and it can be said that information technology has become an integral part of life. As social networks in diminish face-to-face relationship which can be especially seen in the relations between spouses. This study aims to evaluate the impact of social networks on the couple's commitment with descriptive and analytical method. Because the sample in this study is in synchrony with the population, a sample of married couples working at the Red Cross, Social Security Organization and medical universities are selected by convenient sampling technique. Questionnaires are provided after their approval, the sample size is 300 persons. Results show that there is no significant difference in using social networks between genders. There is an indirect significant relationship between using social networks couples' trust. There is an indirect significant relationship between using social networks couples' commitment. There is a direct significant relationship between using social networks couples' dependence. Finally it can be said that despite the positive results of using social networks, they also have negative consequences such as a kind of alienation called living alienation which is emerging. In other words self-alienated and alien self are occurring.

**Keywords:** The virtual social networks, couples' trust, couples' commitment, couples' dependence to networks.

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### Introduction

Every society faces many social problems. But some problems are of higher importance. Development of new technologies in the modern world today, shapes a variety of means of communication. However, the facilitation the life with these relations cannot be denied but on the other hand modern technologies harms cannot be ignored. Today is the era of media development. The development of digital technologies and the compression of time and space are the characteristics of this era. The entrance of mass media into the community at any point have its own impact on society construct especially non-industrial societies and consumer communities and change social relations between people; Changes that are constructive sometimes and destructive at times. Their positive effects is the spread of non-science education and accelerate the transmission of culture and communication and the negative effect is lower social and familial relations emotionally and lower interactive communication between individuals and consequently crises and conflicts between the youth and the family. Economic, social, and cultural changes in communities affect the family (Ritzier, 2004) and occurring conflicts in family cause problems at the individual, institutional and social levels. Today the role of the family in developed countries is changed. These changes provide many conflicts and marital problems. According to

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sociologists and psychologists in recent years a sense of security and comfort in intimate relationships between men and women is converted into weakness and families are increasingly faced the destructive forces (Sotoudeh quoting Fathi, 2011). Internet has become part of our everyday lives and relationships of people on the Internet around the world can easily be considered as interpersonal relationships. Although the Internet has a global setting around the world to provide relations but also the type of these relationships have increased concerns in recent years and certain problems have arisen as a result of increasing Internet connections.

Due to the hidden identity of users in virtual networks, relationships created in them create misunderstandings and as a result, emotional trauma. These relationships may extend the to the real world and have harmful consequences. Charm, capabilities and special features of cyberspace has turned it into an environment for social interaction. Cyberspace is a feature of modern life and is defined as any phenomenon that affects human life. Excessive use of the Internet can create problems for families including the negative impacts on marital relations and increase conflict and the rise of divorce, increased mistrust and lies between the family members and loss of face-to-face relations. Reports indicate that online relationships can lead to marital conflict, separation and even divorce among couples and families (Cooper, 2009). According to a couple statements referring to therapists and counselors, these relationships were significant and important to them as well as romantic relationships in the real world (Merkel, 2000).

Virtual social networks are the new generation of social relations space at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century and have changed the ways of communication among human beings and although they have a short the life, they have a lot of influence in the lives of people. Social networks have an important role in today's world and their role cannot be ignored. Networks influence on various aspects of personal and social life. According to communication experts, social networking reduces face-to-face relationships. Because the Internet facilitates the establishment of friendship and love, it is more considered in the field of non-ethical issues to the extent that the Internet makes it easy to infidelity in marriage and establishes illicit relations (Russell Clayton, 2012). Family is the most important social institution that any failure in it will cause problems in the broader community and the security and peace in the family have positive consequences and is the first stage of peace in the couple's lives. The family is the first institution to meet the needs of human nature, especially the need for a social life and the closest and deepest of human interaction is defined in family. Changes in family structure and its impact on everyday life have put families on the path to new needs. Today the Iranian families face numerous challenges. And family changes due to the influence of modernity are necessary. If the problems arising from family conflicts in a society deepen and strengthen, family would be in danger and as a result the strength of community and social system would be threatened (Enayat, 2012). The age of communication has caused the family to be changing. Researchers conducted in Iran about the virtual space indicate that they are used more for discussions and chat and tendency toward heterosexual relations in these networks and this causes the formation of emotional relationships outside the family. Lack of proper communication between spouses will cause emotional gaps in both sides and increase orientation to other people other than the spouse.

Researches that has been done in this area indicate that Facebook is the reason of marital disputes and divorce, but now based on a study done by "Divorce online" in the UK, it seems that this social network at least in this country has become one of the leading causes of divorce. Such studies have never been done in Iran. In Iran, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter attract many people despite being filtered and researches on the effects of these phenomena in families are necessary. Great deals of researches have been done about the use of the Internet and its impact on the generation gap between parents and children, but there is an open space for research about the impact of the Internet, especially social networks between spouses. Therefore, this research seeks the influence of social virtual networks with an emphasis on Facebook on spouses' relationships in Iran. Do virtual social networks have effects on the couple's commitment?

## Theoretical Considerations

George Homans and Peter Blau are the most famous authors and scholars of exchange theory. Exchange theory based on analysis of small groups tries to study the society (Adibi, 2005). The basic assumption of exchange theory is that people do those behaviors that they gain rewards for performing them and avoid behaviors that previously have cost them a lot (Dillini, 2011). Exchange theory discusses the act of mutual gain and what people are paying instead to the opposite side. Homans believe that things can be exchanged in every interaction. This transaction will not be limited to economic issues as rewarding good social behavior include other forms of approval, respect, love, compassion, loyalty and other immaterial or symbolic aspects (Dillini, 2011). He believes that each social institution is based on the principle of constant exchange and stresses that institutions are a complex network of exchanges (Adibi, 2005).

People always communicate with others in life and try to earn interest for them in this regard. Any communication with others is tantamount to a kind of exchange. Exchange theory tries to show that the treatment they received change in terms of rewards and costs. Interaction is maintained equal between parties when the relationship between rewards and costs stays equal. In fact, that's what a relationship is and what it costs to acquire, then compared the results with those of other parties earned him comparison. If it feels inequality then it is likely that the relationship will be in danger. To explain the relations between husband and wife and between groups who must negotiate to reach an agreement, the point of view of social exchange is used (Riahi et al., 2002). Thus, from the perspective of the theory of the relationship between spouses is a kind of exchange that begins early in life. If the mutual rights and treat them as rewards and costs of life is based on mutual exchange flows. On the other hand the cost of rewards for couples leads to feelings of injustice and inequality, and the exchange led to a break with the mutual relations (Jalilian, 2000). The more the rewards that a couple receive from other couples the payments will be less (in reality or imagination), or the fees paid by one of the spouses to other couples is higher than the actual or expected the individual feels a loss (Fatehi, 2012).

Therefore, in a society that has little benefit for the person to bring the focus of marriage, especially when one can own emotional needs at a lower cost and other means to obtain sexual relations it will change spousal relations. And online communication can lead to the formation of a new relationship for the married and this can cause problems in the family and between partners. Functionalist scholars consider society as a system of interconnected members and all the components of the social system cope with every element which helps to maintain general stability. A tendency toward stability or balance in society is in functionalism doctrine therefore a social change is likely to be destructive unless it is done fairly quiet for a change in a component usually will be followed by change in other components (Robertson, 1944). For example, if the culture has expanded rapidly, and other elements of the social system can adapt itself imbalance will arise.

Robert Merton states that explicit and hidden functions are different. Explicit functions are those who committed premeditated, while the hidden functions take place without premeditation (Giddens, 2009). Merton states that all aspects of the social system at all times does not have positive function and some elements may have negative function, and those with negative function may result in the destruction and disruption of social order. Sometimes an element may have a positive and negative function (Robertson, 1944). According to functionalists point of view it can be concluded that the media and means of communication for communities will have two types of function. The positive function which results in the spread of education and culture transfer and accelerate the communication and a negative function of shaping secret and out of the norm work relationships, lower social relationships and reducing families' relations and the formation of the crisis of differences between the members of the family and conflict. Emile Durkheim was the first to note the individual and collective imaginations in an article in 1898 coined the term social imagination. He thought the same way as distinguishes individual from collective thinking and believes that individual ideas should be considered as a psychological issue (Fatehany quotes Herzliech, 1970).

But Serge Moscovichy entered the word imagination into the social sciences. Humans live in a world where he has contact with objects, laws, regulations, principles, and people. These encounters bring him interpretations and perceptions about surrounding which are not always the same. The images that emerge from these things vary from person to person and from time to time even in one person. Change factors are various. These factors are individual, social, economic, cultural and institutional in some cases. What human being understands is not a simple image but an impression for a picture is a spontaneous rapid uptake and impact. While an idea is a form and manner in which a file is significant due to the psychological and cultural characteristics of what it has to resort (Fatehany quotes Mollo, 1974).

According to Thorne, what we see is not an issue but a look at an issue that may not correspond to reality and part of the subject matter, because it is supposedly a look and an impression. Since the subjects are not the same, in other words human thoughts and culture is not the same and also as humans' cultural capital are not the same, so think something special is different from person to person, so of course, thought of the same thing, is different from a class to another. Social imaginations can be a mean by which human action, his position in society is guided and as a result, reveal the reaction of people on the issues they face (Fatehany quotes Doise and Palmonari, 1986). When we establish a communication with our environment, we are looking for communications, social perceptions are formed and then the social imagination, guide the relationship between people. In fact, the visual behavior will follow. This is supposed to, how we handle that as well. Accordingly, the human behaviors in social networks are different. But other forms of evil and worthless provide the context for the emergence of conflicts.

Habermas recognizes the communicative action as a form of social action aimed at achieving understanding (Habermas, 2006). According to this theory, the actors achieve a common understanding through reasoning, consensus and cooperation; they interact with each other (Mahdavi, 2007). From the perspective of Habermas in modern industrial societies, the act of instrumental rationality digests understanding and communication in their field of action and much of people's actions are based on it. Habermas's theory of communicative action is related to interactive environments on the Internet. Interactive environments on the Internet, maintain in environments where users cannot tell that two-way communication such as chat. Debate about Internet and interactive space is where the ideal Habermas discourse is realized and thus it can be raised as: Habermas believes that there are certain basic needs that all free people have and it to be discovered by anyone who is close to them. Given that the discourse on the Internet, especially on the Internet where people can easily discuss their needs and this discussion of needs form an atmosphere of dialogue and discussion and debate new ideas. According to Habermas from the seventeenth century onwards, with the rise of industry and changes in the public sphere changes in lifestyles and "public domain as a set of relationships and negotiations by the media (press)" are emerged (Slevin, 2002). However, before the industrial revolution, humans for the exchange of ideas and the relationship between the mind and the expression of social and political problems in a specific location gathered together and talk out "Thus they went to cafes and restaurant clubs to discuss issues of artistic and literary works, exchange ideas and by increasing the scope of such meetings, the issues extended beyond art and literature and political issues and government policies were adopted "(Alikhah, 2000).

Although Habermas does not discuss the Internet and refers to the press in mass media, but in the generalization of Habermas' theory it could be said that Internet (although virtual) is the public sphere formation place. With the Internet people can think about the things they criticize and rethink and modify it. The ideas could be tested in Internet chat rooms and forums in which policy can be effective in creating these spaces and their generalizations beyond the realm of a community. According to Habermas entering the Internet and create an atmosphere of dialogue leads to the formation of intimate atmosphere and feelings, and the feelings of people make more intimate, resulting in a expressing themselves about their needs in this environment and emotional energy consumption that may have an impact on family values.

David Riesman is a thinker who focuses on communications as the axis of human societies. In his first chapter of his famous book "The Lonely Crowd", divides the evolution history of human society into three periods that replaces each other over time. He believes that the current industrial societies are moving toward the third society which is the period of economic prosperity and abundance. The three background of the evolution of human society in terms of compliance from Riesman's view are:

1. Traditional or ancient society: Riesman this calls period "functional tradition". During this period, traditions transfer culture and every generation links with the previous generations through the open sharing traditions and making the unity and identity of the human family (the human race). In the course of the future the paths are the same ways that our ancestors have for centuries (Robertson, 1996). Examples are many third world countries where the economy is still dominated by poverty or scarcity (Dadgaran, 2006).
2. The individualism society: Riesman recognizes the second stage in the evolution of human society in which the culture of the society tends to make humans guided from within (Kazno, 1986). The second period, from the perspective of Riesman is a period in which we face a decline in the importance of tradition in the face of social existence; this reduction causes the shortcomings in homogeneity of the of human behavior and action, because all people do not follow the same patterns in social life (Dadgaran, 2006).
3. The society of consumption: Riesman human society in the third stage gives its place to a new society. This period is "other functioning". The era of mass media and phenomena such as remote guidance, fetish worship (Fetishism), Commodification and identity crisis. During this period, some use magical powers mass media to influence and to induce specific patterns of social thought. Man in this period, sought to relieve the traditional ties of family, relatives, neighbors and friends and are very vulnerable to the powerful media operators as well as the temptation of it. According to Riesman this period will be recorded in human history as the period in which the media and their managers make patterns of social life.

Media make people, not in the family or the Hermitage, but among groups of friends and peers, the impact of media training continues throughout the life of man and the media such as television and radio constantly stereotype people and conduct "a lonely crowd" and behavior in order to give them (Dadgaran, 2006). The third period is a period with a strong rule of mass media and alienation of human beings (Saroukhani, 1997). It can be concluded from his comments that at the moment due to the domination of mass media on people's lives and alienation of individuals, human beings are dependent on networks, and life is not possible without the mass media, especially in the family and this can create problems for people. The theory of the addressed dependency originally proposed in 1976 by Sandra Ball Rokeach and Melvin Defleur. According to this theory the social structure can affect the dependency of the media audience. Confusion, conflict and rapid changes in society, anxiety, mental confusion and lead more people to be dependent on the media. In this regard Ball Rokeach and Defleur note that in a complex society many new topics may be addressed and assured them of new items added to it, and this ambiguity refer patients to the media. Dependence on the continued needs of urban life leads to greater impact on the audience in the media (Zarsad, 2009).

Based on the above theory there is an integrated relationship between the audience and the media and a broad social system. Each person in order to obtain the information they need draws specific goals. Little by little they get dependent on the media but not equally to all media. Two factors are involved in determining the degree of dependence to the media:

1. People tend to that media that meet most of their needs and not the media that did not meet the needs.
2. Another important factor is social stability. When society changes and conflicts reach a peak, organizations, institutions and media companies will have to make individual beliefs, attitudes and perceptions and concerns of its previous practice and new elections will also re-evaluate. In such circumstances, reliance on media information increases. But a stable condition may decrease the dependence on the media

According to the author, couples the relatively new medium of the Internet and social networking will change their expectations and will eventually lead to damage to the relationship between spouses. The newest and most prominent media uses and gratifications theory and their theory, the theory of "audience need seeking" which is another name for the "use and satisfaction" that the audience sees the beginning of the relationship. Using the media starts with need that could be due to acquisition of knowledge or leisure. This theory is based on two principles: the first principle knows the audience dynamic and active. The second principle is associated with multi-variable communication process. According to this theory, the audience is aware of their needs with a choice of different media and, therefore he is the initiator of communication. Audience is dynamic; the audience is searching for his own satisfaction therefore experience different methods. As for the needs of knowledge, chooses their preferred media consciously and consciously (Zarsad, 2009).

Use and satisfaction theory assumes that people are more or less active in looking for content that provide the greatest satisfaction. Degree of satisfaction depends on the individual's needs and interest. The more people feel that their needs are being met with an actual content, the content it is more likely to be chosen (Vindal and others, 1998). According to this theory, people know their needs and in order to fix it, consciously, choose a media from the various media that compete to meet his needs. According to this theory, there is a direct relationship between the audience dependence and media effects on behavior and attitudes, but due to the dynamics of the audience, the impact of media is positive because of fixing his needs. Although factors such as policy actions by governments and companies in the global economic dominance of the media and their use in business, using the power of media agencies and cultivating public opinion, led to the formation of critical views on the role of the media, however, like any phenomenon positive and negative usage can be chose to meet some of their needs. In other words, that person's motivations for getting satisfaction lead to the media. The researchers with this approach consider the audience active in choosing the media content and emphasize on personal needs, orientations and social activities and personal characteristics (Nikoo et al., 2003).

McQueen in the framework of the theory recognizes the audience needs the media in various ways such as entertainment, personal identity, supervision and personal relationships. According to this theory can be deduced that one of the demands which can be resolved by the modern communication media is the formation of personal relationships. What is abundantly formed in virtual social networks and users need to have resolved them are hidden personal relationships.

## **Research Method**

This study is a survey done with descriptive-analytical method. Because the sample in this study is in synchrony with the population, a sample of married couples working at the Red Cross, Social Security Organization and medical universities are selected by convenient sampling technique. Questionnaires are provided after their approval, the sample size is 300 persons. Since the same resources to achieve the objectives of the study are not made for this purpose a researcher-made questionnaire is used. The questionnaire includes several sections as follows: a demographic questionnaire that includes: questions on demographic variables such as age, sex, education, marital status, work, housing, etc. And inventory of virtual network, a comprehensive questionnaire of marital conflict and marital satisfaction scale. For the preparation and design of the questionnaire the library articles, theses and research or similar research are used. To measure the reliability of the questionnaire the Cronbach's alpha scale which measures the internal consistency of the items is used and calculated as 0.76.

## **Research Findings**

### **Descriptive Results**

The descriptive findings of this study show 50 percent of the respondents are female and 50 percent are male. The lowest age is 23 years old and maximum age of those is 50 years old. Most people are over the age of 34 years old. Half of the respondents' ages are equal to or less than 35 years old and the other half is over it. The average age of the sample is 35 years old. The overall assessment of the respondents'

age shows that the variable's distribution is normal. The lowest length of marriage belongs to those who have 1 year with the highest duration of marriage belongs to those who have expressed 26 years. Most time length is married for 10 years. Half of the respondents are married for a time equal to or less than 10 years and the other half stay over it. The average length of marriage is 10 years. The overall assessment of the duration of marriage shows that this variable's distribution is normal. In the education variable 25 have high school diploma (8.9%), 190 people have diploma (67.9%), 40 people have bachelor's degree (14.3%) and 25 people have master's degree (8.9%). In employment status variable 255 people are working full-time (89.5%) and 30 people (10.5%) are unemployed. In the case of geographical location variable 55 people or 20.4% reside in north, 100 people or 37% in downtown, 70 people or 25.9% in south and 45 people or 16.7% reside in towns around the city.

**Inferential Results**

Hypothesis 1: The amount of social networking is different between genders.

**Table (1): The difference or indifference in the use of social networks, differentiated by gender by comparing the averages**

The amount of social networking	N	Mean	Std.	Std. Error
Female	150	3.07	2.149	0.175
Male	150	3.42	2.752	0.225

	Levene's Test		Independent T			
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig	Mean
The variance between the two groups	3.578	0.060	-1.216	298	0.225	-0.35
The variance within the two groups			-1.216	281.464	0.225	-0.35

According to Levene's test, the level of significance of the test is 0.060. In other words the variance between the two groups is equal and the significant level 0.225. Because it is more than 0.05 it is indicative of significant indifference between men and women who use the virtual social networks. Therefore, the hypothesis H0 is accepted and H1 hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between the use of social networks and couples' trust.

**Table (2): Measurement of the relationship between the use of social networks and couples' trust**

	The amount of social networking	The amount of couples' trust
Pearson correlation	1	-0.780
Sig	-	0.000
N	300	300

Since the variable (The amount of social networking) and variable (The amount of couples' trust) are both interval the Pearson correlation test is used and at 95% significance level the Sig is 0.000 which is lower than the desired level of 0.05 which indicates a significant association between the amount of social networking and couple's trust, and considering the correlation coefficient of -0.78, it shows the relationship between two variables is strong and in reverse. According to the information and rejecting the hypothesis H0, the H1 hypothesis is confirmed.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between the amount of social networking and the commitment of spouses to each other.

**Table (3): Measurement of the relationship between the use of social networks and the couples' commitment**

	The amount of social networking	the couple dependence on social networks
Pearson correlation	1	-0.800
Sig	-	0.000
N	300	300

Since the variable (The amount of social networking) and variable (The couples' commitment) are both interval the Pearson correlation test is used and at 95% significance level the Sig is 0.000 which is lower than the desired level of 0.05 which indicates a significant association between the amount of social networking and the couples' commitment, and considering the correlation coefficient of -0.80, it shows the relationship between two variables is strong and in reverse. According to the information and rejecting the hypothesis H<sub>0</sub>, the H<sub>1</sub> hypothesis is confirmed.

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between the amount of social networking and the commitment of spouses to each other.

**Table (4): Measurement of the relationship between the use of social networks and the couple dependence on social networks**

	The amount of social networking	the couple dependence on social networks
Pearson correlation	1	0.820
Sig	-	0.000
N	300	300

Since the variable (The amount of social networking) and variable (The couple dependence on social networks) are both interval the Pearson correlation test is used and at 95% significance level the Sig is 0.000 which is lower than the desired level of 0.05 which indicates a significant association between the amount of social networking and the couple dependence on social networks, and considering the correlation coefficient of 0.82, it shows the relationship between two variables is strong and direct. According to the information and rejecting the hypothesis H<sub>0</sub>, the H<sub>1</sub> hypothesis is confirmed.

## Conclusion

The results show that 50 percent of 300 respondents are female and 50% are male. Minimum age is 23 years old and the highest age is 50 years old. The average age of the sample is 35 years old, the lowest length of marriage belongs to those who have 1 year with the highest duration of marriage belongs to those who have expressed 26 years. The average length of marriage is 10 years. The overall assessment of the duration of marriage shows that this variable's distribution is normal. In the education variable 25 have high school diploma (8.9%), 190 people have diploma (67.9%), 40 people have bachelor's degree (14.3%) and 25 people have master's degree (8.9%). In employment status variable 255 people are working full-time (89.5%) and 30 people (10.5%) are unemployed. In the case of geographical location variable 55 people or 20.4% reside in north, 100 people or 37% in downtown, 70 people or 25.9% in south and 45 people or 16.7% reside in towns around the city. Most of the users use Viber and Facebook with 48% and 34% respectively. And the most way of access is via cell phone (61.5%) and most using time is between 6 pm to 12 pm with 60.9%.

Analytical findings reflect the fact that of significant differences in the use of virtual social networks between men and women. However, an inverse relationship between the use of social networks and trust couples is approved. With increasing use of social networks, the couples' trust declines. These findings correspond with previous studies Abdi (2011) and Clayton and Jesse. This hypothesis is consistent with Durkheim's theory of social imagination. According to this theory, people do not have the same

understanding of things around them, and this interpretation may vary from one person to another. Social vision will guide the actions of individuals. When we are communicating with the surrounding environment, we are looking for communications which are socially constructed notions that will guide the relationships between human beings. According to these ideas the human behavior in the social networks are different, and this difference in visions create mistrust and lack of commitment for the partners in married life. And the correlation between the use of social networks and the commitment of spouses to each other is confirmed in the opposite direction. In other words, there is an inverse relationship between the use of social networks and the commitment of spouses to each other. With increasing the use of social networks, commitment to each other is reduced. This hypothesis is also consistent with Durkheim's theory of social imagination. The correlation between the use of social networks and couples' dependence on social networks is approved. In other words, there is a direct and positive relationship between the use of social networks and couples' dependence on social networks. This hypothesis is consistent with the theory of David Riesman that communications play a role as the axis of human societies and human societies is now in the world's third stage of the movement that is the era of the communications. In this period humans try to pale the traditional and family relations and are vulnerable to the media, and the temptation of it. Riesman dubs this era, the ruling of mass media and people's alienation. As a result, in addition to the positive functions of social networks for families and couples it also has implications in principle to the formation of a certain type of hidden-revealed relationships. Couples in this new relationship say what they have in mind and in reality their wives are strangers. The findings reflect the fact that the activity in the virtual network is reducing the couple's mutual commitment in terms of time and in terms of content. In other words a form of alienation in the name of alien life is taking shape.

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