

## **DIGITAL MARKETING AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE IN SMES DURING THE CORONA PERIOD**

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### **Abstract:**

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has caused unprecedented hardship for businesses everywhere, especially SMEs. As a result, implementing digital marketing techniques has become a crucial survival strategy and a way to maintain company operations. This study aims to look at how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the business performance of SMEs and how they use digital marketing. SME customers were given questionnaires as part of the descriptive methodology of this study. The data were examined using SPSS and AMOS statistical methods. By illustrating the symbiotic relationship between digital marketing activities and company performance in SMEs throughout the COVID-19 era, the study findings make an academic and practical contribution as the assessment of two critical variables – perceived usefulness and ease of use – was the focus of this research. The ensuing conversations clarified the complex interactions between these factors and their subsequent effects on performance trajectories. The results show different levels of digital adoption and how they impact market resilience, revenue generation and customer engagement. The benefits of increased engagement and flexible company

performance have been realized by SMEs that have adopted digital marketing while recognizing its value and finding it easy to integrate into their operations, underscoring the revolutionary power of digital marketing through social media platforms. Therefore, legislators, business support organizations and business owners can SMEs learn from the results of the study on the effectiveness of digital marketing as a proactive response to crises. Looking to the future, the study findings will ultimately help SMEs improve their digital marketing initiatives in order to improve business performance and resilience in the face of unpredictability.

**Keywords:** Digital marketing, Business performance, SMEs, Covid-19, TAM model, Social media

## Introduction

After the emergence of the Corona virus, there had to be instructions by countries to deal with this pandemic, especially on the commercial and economic level, and from here small and medium companies were part of this environment and very important in supporting business (A. S. Alnaser et al., 2020; Habes, Alghizzawi, Ahmad, et al., 2023). Taking these decisions and the impact of this pandemic was reflected on many sectors to include all companies, especially small and medium-sized companies (Adam & Alarifi, 2021; Alghizzawi et al., 2023). Accordingly, small and medium companies were subjected to many pressures, which led to the closure of many of them, due to their ability to bear is not sufficient, as in large companies that have many resources and cash liquidity (Ganaie et al., 2020; Rahi et al., 2023). These damages, which reached small and medium companies, are due to several reasons, represented by the lack of employment of technology in the business, which generated interruption in business for small and medium companies, in addition to the difficulty in obtaining the required raw materials in addition to the high price (Mazzarol, 2015).

Based on the above, to meet these challenges in the small and medium-sized companies sector, it was necessary to rely on government decisions only. Diversifying business and strengthening distribution and marketing channels of a digital nature enhances business performance in small and medium companies in facing challenges and recovering from the pandemic (Dilham et al., 2018). Marketing through social media platforms enhances business performance and develops the channels of communication that are always available with customers (F. Alnaser et al., 2023; Voramontri & Klieb, 2019). Social media marketing has completely changed how companies interact with their target market, interact with prospective clients, and eventually improve their entire performance (J. Al-Gasawneh et al., 2020). The explosive rise of social media platforms in recent years has produced a dynamic and constantly changing digital landscape that offers businesses previously unheard-of chances to connect with a worldwide audience (J. A. Al-Gasawneh et al., 2022). A new era of marketing that transcends conventional advertising techniques has been brought about by this transition (Alsmadi et al., 2022). Social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and TikTok have developed into effective resources for companies of all kinds looking to increase website traffic, establish meaningful connections with their clientele, and develop brand awareness (Al-Okaily et al., 2023). Social media marketing

offers a flexible and affordable way to highlight goods, services, and content, thus its advantages are not exclusive to just one sector (Aljabari et al., 2023). In order to survive and grow in this digital age, businesses need to adapt and take use of social media platforms' enormous potential (Daoud et al., 2023). This essay will examine the ways in which social media marketing can improve business performance through raising brand awareness, encouraging customer interaction, generating leads, and offering insightful data and analytics to improve marketing tactics. We will explore the different ways that social media marketing may be used to drive success and expansion in today's corporate environment (Tahat et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). As a result, in order to promote this industry, it is vital to investigate how social media platforms might improve corporate performance. In order to better understand this link, this study looked at how simple social networking sites were to use and how much of a benefit users believed they were getting for their time.

### **Literature review**

Social media has emerged as a revolutionary force for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in terms of enhancing their business performance (Halim et al., 2023; Ziółkowska, 2021). The crucial role that social media plays in raising brand recognition and visibility among target consumers has been repeatedly highlighted by research. SMEs with a strong online presence on sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn are more likely to have their products and services recognized and remembered by consumers (Habes, Alghizzawi, Elareshi, et al., 2023). This enhanced visibility frequently results in raised consumer interest, which enhances the effectiveness of the company as a whole (Mehdi & Kalim, 2023). The discussion of social media's effects on SMEs has focused heavily on customer interaction and relationship building. There is a wealth of material that emphasizes how engaging in social media platforms enables face-to-face contact with clients (Fraccastoro et al., 2021; Habes et al., 2021). As SMEs reply to questions, resolve problems, and provide individualized interactions, this involvement promotes a sense of community and loyalty among customers. Such relationship-building techniques lead to stronger ties, repeat business, and favorable word-of-mouth recommendations, ultimately improving the performance of SMEs (Cartwright et al., 2021). Social media's potency as a tool for marketing and promotion is a key aspect of its impact on SMEs. The effectiveness of targeted advertising and content promotion on social media platforms is widely acknowledged by academics (Al-Shibly et al., 2019; Alghizzawi et al., 2018). Through these initiatives, SMEs can connect with particular clientele groups, increasing customer engagement rates, website traffic, and perhaps conversion rates as well. As a result, the use of social media to support marketing initiatives immediately improves company performance measures (Al-Samirae et al., 2020). There is no doubt in the literature that social media has a substantial impact on SMEs' business performance (Habes, Tahat, Tahat, et al., 2023; Safori et al., 2023; Tawafak et al., 2023). Through direct customer encounters, it increases brand visibility, encourages customer involvement, strengthens marketing initiatives, stimulates sales, and supports innovation. While challenges do exist, SMEs looking to improve

their overall business performance in the digital age can reap significant rewards from a systematic approach to social media management.

### **Perceived Ease-of-Use**

The notion that using a system or piece of technology requires effort is linked to the notion that it is simple to use (Alghizzawi et al., 2019; Kulviwat et al., 2014). These factors are thought to encourage SMEs to use social media (Nuseir & Elrefae, 2022). The concept of "Perceived Ease-of-Use" (PEOU) is included in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and other comparable models that attempt to explain how customers adopt and use technology (Habes et al., 2018). Perceived ease-of-use in the context of social media refers to the subjective evaluation by individuals of how simple and effortless they consider the use of social media platforms to be. Users' attitudes and intentions toward using social media are influenced by this perception, which has an impact on how these platforms are actually adopted and used by users (Rahi, Mansour, et al., 2019). Perceived Ease-of-Use is a key element in determining how SMEs feel, intend to use, and behave in relation to social media platforms. Perceived as being simple to use, platforms can help lower barriers, promote adoption, increase user pleasure, and possibly even improve corporate performance. Understanding and addressing perceptions of ease-of-use are critical for successful social media integration into operations as SMEs continue to traverse the digital terrain (Moslehpour et al., 2018). On the basis of these findings, the following theory is put forth:

**H1:** (PEOU) has a positive impact on the use of SM for SMEs

### **Perceived Usefulness**

The relationship between "Perceived Usefulness" (PU) and the use of social media to enhance the performance of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) is a key issue in literature on technology adoption and business (Nuseir & Elrefae, 2022; Salloum et al., 2021). The subjective expectation of SME owners and staff that using social media platforms will enhance and help their company's operations is known as perceived usefulness (Rahi, Othman Mansour, et al., 2019; Uğur & Turan, 2019). This conviction is a critical element in the attitudes, intents, and actions of SMEs when integrating social media into their plans (S. A. Raza et al., 2017). The relationship between social media uptake and perceived usefulness is complex. SMEs adopt social media with positive attitudes and intents when they see it as a valuable tool (Kang & Namkung, 2019). This impression creates the framework for further investigation of and interaction with these sites. The idea that social media may help businesses achieve particular objectives, including raising brand awareness, growing their clientele, or improving consumer engagement, motivates SMEs to actively devote time and resources to using these platforms (Kuo et al., 2019). The association between social media usage in SMEs and perceived utility is a key factor in driving technology adoption and engagement. SME attitudes, intentions, and behaviors regarding utilizing and adopting these platforms are shaped when they believe social media can improve their company performance (Ahamat et al., 2017; Habes et al., 2019) This correlation between perceived value and actual

results acts as a cornerstone for incorporating social media initiatives into SMEs' larger business operations. On the basis of these findings, the following theory is put forth:

**H2:** (PU) has a positive impact on the use of SM for SMEs

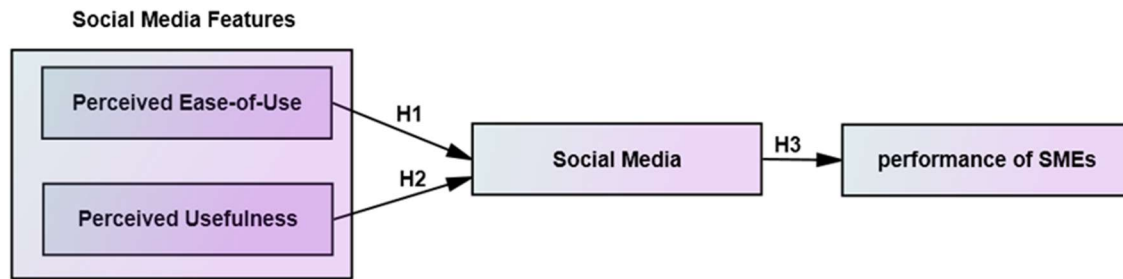
### **Social Media**

The connection between social media marketing and the rise in small and medium-sized enterprises' (SMEs) performance captures the confluence of digital communication, brand exposure, and consumer involvement. Social media marketing has developed into a powerful instrument in the present business climate that could have a significant impact on the growth and success of SMEs (Rugova & Prenaj, 2016; Salloum et al., 2019). The opportunity for SMEs to use social media platforms to increase their brand visibility and reach is at the heart of this connection. SMEs may display their goods, services, and distinctive value propositions to a large internet audience by strategically creating content. Social media platforms give SMEs an unrivaled chance to reach new markets and interact with potential clients outside of their immediate geographic area due to its accessibility and broad use (Karimi & Naghibi, 2015). Additionally, social media marketing gives SMEs the chance to develop a unique and engaging connection with their target market. The platforms provide direct engagement, allowing SMEs to quickly reply to enquiries from customers, address issues, and gather feedback. In addition to improving customer happiness, this two-way communication enables SMEs to customize their offerings based on real-time insights, helping to develop products or services in line with client preferences (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Rahi et al., 2020). Social media marketing and the improvement of SMEs' performance are related in a variety of ways that affect brand recognition, consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and quantitative indicators. Effective social media marketing gives SMEs the ability to expand their audience, build meaningful relationships with them, and promote a culture of constant improvement. SMEs are better positioned to unleash growth and prosper in a business environment that is becoming more and more digital as they effectively navigate the social media marketing space. On the basis of these findings, the following theory is put forth:

**H3.** SM has a positive impact on the performance of SMEs

### **Research model**

This study will examine the impact of social media platforms for digital marketing on the performance of small and medium-sized businesses, particularly in light of the major negative effects the Corona pandemic has had on this industry. The proposed conceptual model in Figure 1 illustrates how the features of social media platforms are reflected in their usability and perceived value to small- and medium-sized business performance.



Model conceptualized in Figure 1

## Research method

The current study is quantitative in nature and uses a targeted, developed survey to gather data from users of social media platforms (such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) with the goal of obtaining their feedback aiming to improve the performance of SMEs in the Jordanian setting. The self-administrated questionnaire items were identified and developed grounding on relevant investigations in scope of digital marketing and business performance of SEMs. *First*, the exogenous variable is the social media feature, consisting of TAM dimensions (Perceived ease-of-use and Perceived usefulness). The Perceived ease-of-use was adopted and measured with (4 items) from (H. Alhanatleh & Akkaya, 2020; H. M. Alhanatleh, 2021) and the Perceived usefulness was adopted and evaluated with (4 items) from (Syaifullah et al., 2021). In addition to, the mediation construct is social media variable adopting and evaluating with (3 items) based on (Shareef et al., 2019). Lastly, the endogenous variable is performance of SMEs developing and estimating with (5 items) based on (Syaifullah et al., 2021).

To check the validity and reliability of the survey items, the pilot study was confirmed by asking 20 digital platforms user in Jordan. The result of this procedure was to reduce the potential mistakes in developing survey items stage. Later on, the questionnaire was deployed using electronic method rely on Google drive form tool. In terms of deciding the sample size, the target population of the recent study is the consumers who use the social media applications, while the population cannot be counted. Thus, an unknown technique was approached to statically calculate in determining the sample size of this study. (Limna et al., 2022) confirmed that 385 of digital tool users are sufficient to embark of collecting data. Five-Likert measure was scaled, encoding from 1 representing “*strongly disagree*” to 5 representing “*strongly agree*”. Depending on social media tools, the electronic questionnaires were distributed to access the target sample (480) depending on convenience approach. The returned respondents was (443). In accordance with (Hair et al., 2019), the valid respondents that were used in the analysis processes were (417) due to several procedures of data preparation like cleaning, missing value, outlier, etc. The data collection process was performed in the period from March 12 and April 28, 2023.

## Research Findings

For providing reliable findings, SPSS and AMOS 22 packages have been chosen as an analysis tools for evaluating the conceptualized hypotheses of the recent study as supported by (Sarstedt et

al., 2020). Two popular techniques have been applied for estimating the model validity and returning the hypotheses results: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Model.

### Evaluating CFA

To ensure the measurements of CFA regarding the recent study, three criteria of validity are imposed: convergent validity, composite reliability, and discriminant validity as emphasized by (Z. Awang, 2014). As the first step in evaluating the model validity, the items' constructs have been undergone to CFA stage. The CFA processes confirm two primary issues that are items' factor loading (accepted value:  $\geq 0.60$ ) and covariance correlation values between all constructs (the accepted value:  $\leq 0.85$ ) as noted by (I. Raza & Awang, 2021). Depending on previous CFA processes, the model fit indices can be evaluated in accordance with their satisfied values: CMIN/DF indicator  $< 5$  or  $< 3$ , GFI, NFI, CFI, AGFI, and TLI indicators  $\geq 85$ , RMSEA  $< 0.08$  as suggested by (P. Awang, 2018). As a results, the model of the current research provided a proper fit (CMIN/DF= 2.602, GFI= 0.931, NFI= 0.944, CFI= 0.965, AGFI= 0.902, TLI= 0.956, and RMSEA =0.062). Moreover, composite reliability and convergent validity can statistically be estimated through calculating the values of CRs and AVEs of all model factors in terms of their threshold values (CR greater than or equal 0.60 and AVE greater than or equal 0.50) as recommended by (I. Raza & Awang, 2021). Table 1 provides robust evidences in assessing composite reliability and convergent validity.

**Table1:** Evaluation of composite reliability and convergent validity

<b>Construct items/ Factor loading</b>		<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std</b>
<b>Perceived ease-of-use</b>		0.902	0.697	3.928	0.960
ES1	0.831				
ES2	0.891				
ES3	0.756				
ES4	0.856				
<b>Perceived usefulness</b>		0.870	0.626	3.398	0.804
US1	0.770				
US2	0.822				
US3	0.794				
US4	0.778				
<b>Social Media</b>		0.853	0.659	3.259	0.795
SM1	0.796				
SM2	0.821				
SM3	0.819				

Performance of SMEs		0.866	0.564	3.342	0.817
PE1	0.782				
PE2	0.675				
PE3	0.719				
PE4	0.795				
PE5	0.780				

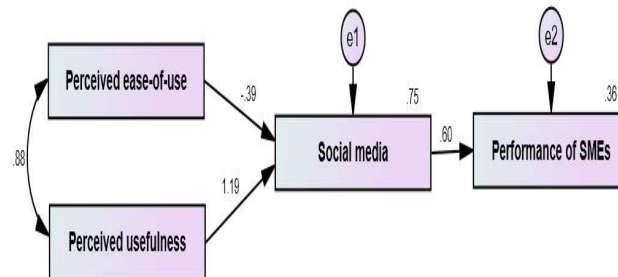
When the square root of the AVEs for perceived ease-of-use, perceived usefulness, social Media, and performance of SMEs marketing is higher than the absolute value of the correlations with inner AVEs, discriminant validity is accomplished. As stated in Table 2, discriminant validity has been ensured for the study model under consideration, providing us with yet another avenue for doing the SEM.

**Table 2:** discriminant validity measurement

	Social Media	Perceived ease-of-use	Perceived usefulness	Performance of SMEs
Social Media	<b>0.812</b>			
Perceived ease-of-use	0.594	<b>0.835</b>		
Perceived usefulness	0.777	0.783	<b>0.791</b>	
Performance of SMEs	0.536	0.454	0.466	<b>0.751</b>

### - Estimating the results of SEM

SEM approach have been fulfilled in terms of providing the outcomes of the hypotheses regarding the recent study. The squared multiple correlations ( $R^2$ ) is also computed for endogenous factors. The outcomes show that  $R^2$  value of social media is equal to 0.754, indicating that the exogenous variables (perceived ease-of-use and perceived usefulness) explain around 75.4% of variance on social media variable. Moreover, the findings confirm that  $R^2$  value of performance of SMEs variable is equal to 0.361, indicating that exogenous variable (social media) explains around 36.1% of variance on performance of SMEs variable. As shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2:** Estimation of SEM of the study model.



Moreover, Table 3 and Figure 2 clarify the outcomes of the current study hypotheses, confirming that all hypotheses successfully supported. The findings of the current study uncovered that perceived ease-of-use has a direct and significant direct influence on social media ( $\beta = -0.325$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that H1 is statistically affirmed. Moreover, the findings asserted that perceived usefulness is positively influence social media ( $\beta = 1.181$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating that H2 is significantly proven. Finally, the results proved that social media is positively and directly influence performance of SMEs ( $\beta = 0.618$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), meaning that H3 is statistically emphasized.

**Table 3:** Findings of recent research hypotheses.

Hypothesis direction	$\beta$	S.E.	C.R.	P
perceived ease-of-use $\rightarrow$ social media	-0.325	0.042	-7.658	***
perceived usefulness $\rightarrow$ social media	1.181	0.051	23.265	***
social media $\rightarrow$ performance of SMEs	0.618	0.04	15.351	***

## Discussions

The complex interplay between digital marketing initiatives, particularly those made through social media platforms, and the business success of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) during the trying Corona era was the subject of the study. The assessment of two crucial variables—perceived usefulness and ease of use—was the focus of this investigation. The conversations that followed made clear the complex interactions between these factors and their ensuing effects on the performance trajectories of (Chatterjee & Kar, 2020; Rugova & Prenaj, 2016; Salloum et al., 2019). Digital marketing tool usability emerged as a driving force behind quick adoption and integration inside SME operations. SMEs who found these technologies easy to use were better able to realize their potential. The perception of usefulness served as a driver, encouraging SMEs to investigate and invest in digital marketing channels since they saw them as workable solutions to deal with the pandemic's disruptions. The conversations make clear how important a connection exists between perceived utility, convenience of use, and company performance in SMEs throughout the Corona period. The benefits of increased engagement and resilient company performance were realized by SMEs that adopted digital marketing with recognition of its worth and found it simple to integrate into their operations, confirming the revolutionary power of digital marketing through social media platforms.

## Conclusions

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) were forced to quickly adjust to previously unheard-of obstacles as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought about a seismic upheaval in the corporate environment. In this setting, integrating digital marketing techniques has become essential for SMEs to manage risks and maintain business operations. This study aimed to

investigate the relationship between SME performance during the pandemic and digital marketing initiatives, particularly through social media platforms. The perceived utility and convenience of use were the main factors studied. The results of this study highlight how crucial perceived utility and usability are in encouraging SMEs to implement digital marketing tactics, particularly on social media platforms. These factors played a crucial role as essential determinants in SMEs' decision-making processes as they dealt with disruptions to traditional business models. The perceived value of digital marketing tools encouraged SMEs to embrace social media platforms to increase market reach, customer engagement, and brand visibility. These tools' simplicity of use made it possible for them to be adopted quickly and integrated into current corporate procedures. During the Corona period, the perceived usefulness and usability of digital marketing tools became crucial determinants in determining the performance trajectory of SMEs. The way in which SMEs managed obstacles and maintained their business operations depended heavily on social media platforms as vehicles for digital marketing. Understanding how these factors affect the business landscape in the digital-first era is essential for SMEs looking to survive in a dynamic and competitive environment. The conclusions drawn from this study are important for policymakers, business support organizations, and researchers who want to understand the complex relationship between the use of digital marketing and the performance of SMEs in times of crisis.

### **Future research & limitation**

This study addressed the field of small and medium-sized companies during the Corona period, which made there some determinants that could be addressed with customers to provide a broader picture, so that it was possible to include demographic factors that could make broader contributions to customers' purchasing decisions. It is also necessary to In the near future, more studies will be conducted in this field. This is due to the fact that the purchasing behavior of customers has become very volatile, and because the Corona period has now ended, there will be higher challenges in the future. Our knowledge of the effects of social media platform marketing could be advanced in a number of ways. Analyzing how new social media platforms and technologies affect marketing strategy is one way to do this. Researchers can investigate how companies might use these innovations to improve their marketing efforts as new platforms and technology emerge on a regular basis. These innovations may include virtual reality, augmented reality, or other cutting-edge tools. In order to stay at the forefront of digital marketing, it is imperative to comprehend the efficacy of marketing on these platforms. The creation of cross-platform marketing strategies is another topic that is ready for more research. Nowadays, a lot of companies use various social media channels to connect with different types of people. In order to determine the best ways to integrate platforms for marketing success, research can examine the intricacies of different platforms' synergies and evaluate how cross-platform strategies can be optimized to increase reach and engagement. Personalization of content is another promising subject for future research. Knowing how to properly personalize information while adhering to privacy concerns and regulations could be revolutionary given the abundance of data at our disposal. Subsequent investigations may explore the potential of utilizing data-driven insights to

customize content based on user preferences and behavior. Further study is necessary to address the challenges of accurately constructing attribution models and measuring return on investment (ROI) in social media marketing. Businesses must comprehend how social media interactions and touchpoints translate into income and customer acquisition due to the multitude of these interactions. Further research can examine sophisticated techniques and resources for calculating return on investment and determining the influence of social media marketing.

Numerous restrictions apply to social media marketing's efficacy. First and foremost, it's critical to recognize that social media marketing initiatives depend on certain platforms. The visibility and reach of marketing content can be impacted by frequent changes to social media platforms' algorithms and standards. Scholars ought to take into account that their findings are platform-specific and that ongoing adaptation is necessary. Another restriction is ethical, especially with regard to privacy and data usage. There are ethical concerns with the gathering and usage of user data for marketing campaigns. Future studies should address privacy issues and concentrate on using personal data responsibly. Environmental sustainability is an additional constraint that is imperative to acknowledge. Digital marketing strategies and data centers have an effect on the environment. Future studies should look on how to improve the sustainability and environmental friendliness of social media marketing. Changes in user behavior on social media sites present more difficulties. Future studies should take into account variables like ad weariness, the growth of ad-blockers, or changes in the way people consume content. Businesses must change to keep up with these changing user behaviors.

Finally, it's important to take into account how social media marketing success varies by culture and location. It can be necessary to modify strategies to accommodate varying geographical and cultural preferences. Future studies can look at how companies can modify their strategies to appeal to a variety of global audiences. Conclusively, social media marketing has demonstrated great potential and influence on corporate performance; nonetheless, to guarantee its continuous efficacy, research is important to tackle new obstacles, moral dilemmas, and evolving user habits.

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