Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts (ZAJOLA)

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts (ZAJOLA) is a peer-reviewed journal, published bi-annually by the Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. The journal welcomes manuscript of original articles, from scholars around the globe, in the various areas of Liberal Arts. The articles may be product of descriptive or analytical research, field research notes, reviews of publications and printed materials, drawn from, but not limited to Languages and Linguistics; Law; Environmental Sciences, Education; Management Studies; Cultural and Literally Studies; Theatre Arts; Philosophy; Religion; History and Strategic Studies; Archaeology and Heritage Studies; Developmental Studies and Social Sciences.

All manuscripts submitted for publication should adopt APA 8th Edition Style of referencing. The manuscripts should be typed double-spaced with sufficient margins and should count between 4,000 and 6,000 words, including the abstract, references, and appendices. The Manuscripts should not be under consideration for publication in any other research outlet.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

This Edition of *Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts* marks the end of the year 2023. In this Edition, there are twelve well written articles by distinguished schorlars.

The Edition opens with Ibrahim Muhammad Abdullahi's article on the implications of the New Normal on 21st century African novel and the impact of ICT. In a related study, Saleh Ahmad Abdullahi explores a semiotic approach of Emoji characters as used in WhatsApp chat messages. Through Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* and Fosudo's *Another Episode of Trauma*, Oladolapo Ojediran and Olayinka Magbagbeola interrogate enraged voices and social realities in Nigeria.

In linguistics, Hassan Usman Gadaka carries out a morphological analysis of Polar tone in Gudi and Yaya dialects of Ngamo language while Abdulrahman Umar works on the semantic aspects of repudiation in Basa language.

Ezekwesiri Okebugwu Nwosu, Nwaoha Chimaroke Chizoba and Tobechukwu Odunze are concerned about the attack on Igbo indigenous religion. To them, this act can be defined as imperialism while Azuka Felix God'spresence and Emily Oghale God'spresence are concerned with the issues and perspectives in teaching and learning in urban society with the integration of multimedia, developmental and career guidance.

In his article on archaeology, Ogunlade Simeon Oluwole assesses some potential heritage sites in Nigeria. Following this is the article of Eraye Chistopher Michael and Jimoh Buhari Edun. The two scholars examine the implications of forest crime on socio economic development in Boki local government area of Cross River State. Alawode Musa Ajibola, on his own, examines the ideological nexus between Zaria and Ife Art schools.

In French studies, Tajudeen Abodunrin Osunniran and Hannah Kojusola Kuponiyi bring out the linguistic characteristics and discursive functions of filler words in French and Yoruba films. In a related field, Aliyy Abolaji Abdulrazaq carries out a reflection of lexical gaps in some translation works by Yoruba translators.

It is important to note that the view and opinions presented in these articles are solely those of the authors. Happy reading.

Prof. Abubakar Sule Sani
Editor-in-chief
30th November, 2023

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CONTENTS

An Exploration of Emoji Characters as used in WhatsApp Chat Messages: A Semiotic Approach

Saleh Ahmad Abdullahi

Abstract

The overall goal of this study is to describe how emoji has been characterized as a new form of online language by examining its linguistic elements and communicative functions. The first motivation of the research lies in the observation that despite growing significance of emoji as a variable in WhatsApp messaging, there has yet been little attempt by linguists to describe in depth its characters as form of possible online written language. The data was collected through the use of extensive desk research especially on how emojis were being used by people. This desk research involved gathering data (emoji texts) mainly from WhatsApp social media platform. The qualitative data was used to compare responses from different respondents where researcher then set out to objectively collect data and carry out the research. The data was categorizing the emojis as used in code and brevity; facials for words, hands and body parts for words and sentences, container for content, instrument for product, non-verbal prosody, emoji and illocutionary force and expression of redundancy. The findings of the study; Emojis provide sufficient paralinguistic features in written language and Emojis are not grammar adequate where many respondents positively used emoji's in expressing different context of communication WhatsApp messages.

Introduction

The sole concern of this study is to present an exploration of emoji characters as used in WhatsApp chat messages where role of emojis in provision of paralinguistic features in text messaging are identified and as well as establishment of broader linguistic elements of emoji and its communicative functions are also dealt with. At the onset, it must be stated that; gathering emoji characters with their supposed meaning does not occur without problems. The first problem encountered was how to assign meaning to the various emoji characters, and that this meaning would be found valid by all users. It was noted that, the interpretation of emoji is not straight forward; this is due to the fact that they cannot be laid down in a 'dictionary' where upon their users can make a 'referential' or even 'literal 'syntheses of their meaning. Available literature on

the internet seems to provide their 'meaning' in relation to how people use them (Unicode, 2013). Therefore, a problem arises in the classification of these characters. Certain questions that come to the foreground include; what agreements are there with regard to their meaning in different contexts? And is there a universal or standard way of interpreting them that is unanimously agreed upon by users? The simplest answer to these questions is not in the affirmative, for now, there is no laid down structure of meaning derivation and universal interpretation of emoji. In aiming to overcome this problem, the researcher first classified emoji as specimen of linguistics signs. This was arrived at by relying upon certain works of linguistic scholars on semiotics.

Firstly, the notion of affordance, Affordance is a term used in explaining the various dynamics of people's relationship with technologies. It is primarily concerned with the common-sense design and usability in Human Computer Interaction (HCI). Technologies that exhibit affordance are often considered to be more in touch with the everyday concerns of people and therefore considered easy to use (Oneill, 2008). The term is adopted by Norman (1988) in order to describe how users can easily understand what an object is used for by merely perceiving the properties that it portrays. He says that, it is through affordance that people can get clues into the workings and utilities of particular objects. Like we use a knob to turn things and a slot is used for inserting things. He adds that it is easy to simply know the use of a particular thing just by looking at it and without requiring any instructions, directives or picture labels (Norman, 1988). As stated by Gibson (1971), who developed an alternative theory of perception known as 'The Theory of Ecological Perception,' affordances are a direct result of the relationship between the objective physical properties of the environment and the subjective experience of the perceiving actor within that environment (Gibson, 1971). He considers affordances not just as the properties of the environment but, both as subjective and objective element of perception. Norman concludes by stating "I believe that affordances result from the mental interpretation of things, based on our past knowledge and experience applied our perception of things about us" (Norman, 1988).

Another factor that was used in assigning meaning to the emoji is the principal of semiotic relevance. Shaumyan (1987) defines language as a sign system which is characterized by six properties: two semiotic strata, sequencing, use of rules, structure, hierarchal stratification and semiotic relevance. He posits that, because of the limited capacity of the human memory, natural languages are so richly

endowed with a large number of various signs that it would be completely impossible to remember all of them without the need for a diacritic stratum. He then introduces basic concepts that characterise the sign stratum. For the sign stratum two primitive concepts are suggested.

Sign of: X is a sign of Y
Meaning of: Y is a meaning of X
This therefore means that, when we talk of signs, there exists a binary relation 'sign of' this is simplified in the sense that, the sign of X is a sign of Y if X means Y, that is, if X carries the information Y (Shaumyan, 1987). In relation to emoji, a particular sign will carry information that correlates to what it signifies. As noted by Shaumyan, linguistic signs have various degrees of complexities and even language does not offer itself as a set of pre-delimited linguistic signs that can be observed directly. This therefore means that a sign can propose relative meanings. As with the emoji typology used, the signified with regard to Saussure's definition, is the concept that is found within the mind which we ought to communicate. This may include a set of feelings, impressions and experiences that are related to an object (Saussure, 1966). Elsewhere, Hjelmsev (1961) looks at the signifier as the physical entity or material e.g stone, wood, light among others. He adds that for it to be interpreted as a sign there has to be perceptual input from within the environment (Hjelmsev, 1961). In Eco's theory of semiotics, he gives a definition of a sign that considers the myriad, cultural, social and contextual issues that underpin every instance of the use of the sign. (Eco, 1976), He proposes a semiotic theory that looks at the use of the sign as acts of coding and decoding messages with reference to sets of culturally defined convections or codes.

Review of Related Literatures
With the aid of the internet, Computer Mediated Communication henceforth CMC; has seen tremendous changes. Walther J. B. (1994) observe that computer mediated communication has developed from a medium which is related to work to a medium which is playful in nature (Walther J. B., 1994). As is noted by Crystal (2001) 'net-speak' is bound to grow through sociolinguistic and stylistic ladders towards what is known and practiced in traditional speech and writing

(Crystal, 2001). He describes emoticons as 'combinations of keyboard characters which have been designed to show an emotional facial expression' (Crystal, 2001). He observes that whereas Face-to-Face communication ranks as primary in account of the linguistic potentiality of any human kind, this may be not so true in the future. In reality today, Crystal's observations cannot be fully ignored especially with the rise of emojis borne out of emoticons.

Numerous researches have been carried out on traditional emoticons and they heavily focus on the use of emoticon for the provision and portrayal of emotions in CMC. According to Luor, et al, (2010), emoticons can act as a silent way of adding expressions to a text that seems flat due to the fact that their meaning mirrors emotion, 'their actual function hinges on the definition of the word emotion' (Luor, et al, 2010). They also observe that with the use of emoticons, it is easy to observe the mood or mental state of the writer and that this also helps in providing certain cues of the person's personality (Luor.et al, 2010). Their study also aimed to look at how emoticon usage was perceived at place of work. Their finding shows that, the use of emoticons may arouse varied emotional feelings among colleagues depending on how they are interpreted. Lo (2008) carried out a study to investigate the non-verbal communication functions of emoticons in CMC. He concludes that internet users cannot perceive emotions and attitudes of their conversant in text messages without emoticons. (Lo, 2008).

Another study was carried out by Ip (2002) where he undertook an experiment to compare and find out the effects of both emoticons and two grammatical markers (use of punctuation and exclamation mark) in terms of how users will understand text messages either positively or negatively. Results of the study showed that; when emoticons were used, the text messages appeared to be extreme and full of decorations that made them embellished. The findings further revealed that; where there is no exclamation mark, emoticons created a greater impact on the messages. On the other hand, messages with a negative connotation are made more negative with exclamation marks yet in the presence of emoticons, there is no impact. The study concluded that since a positive message will be made more positive with exclamation marks, the inclusion of emoticons also makes a text message emotionally intense (Ip, 2002).

In analyzing emoticons, Dresner & Herring (2010) argue that, there is a deficiency in the conceptions of emoticons purely as emotion icons, as is seen in the use of a smiley to indicate sarcasm. Using speech act theory, they make a

conclusion that emoticons do not always serve the function of being vehicles for expressing emotions, and that sometimes their meaning is closely tied to language than what is allowed for by their assumption as emotion icons (Dresner & Herring, 2010).

Literature research on emoticons show how the main concern for scholars have tended to focus on their use with regard to how they provide emotions in written discourse. The available literature is instrumental to this work for the reason that they provide sufficient information necessary for the analysis of emojis in terms of their paralinguistic features. However, this study gives justification to a linguistic analysis of not just emoticons, but emojis, (which are a significant improvement of emoticons) and makes observations that go beyond provision of emotions in text-based language.

Methodology
The data was collected through the use of extensive desk research especially on how emojis were being used by people. This desk research involved gathering data (emoji texts) mainly from WhatsApp social media platform. The qualitative data was used to compare responses from different respondents where researcher then set out to objectively collect data and carry out the research. The study categories the emojis as used based on the following parameters: code and brevity; facials for words, hands and body parts for words and sentences, container for content, instrument for product, non-verbal prosody, emoji and illocutionary force and expression of redundancy.

Analysis and Discussion
For ease of categorization and analysis, the emoji characters were grouped according to their observable specifications and in line with how people use them in chat messages.

Code and Brevity
Emoji symbols are often used as a system of creating language codes. These codes may be effectively used and understood by a given group of persons who intend to pass across certain messages and information that they may want to

exclude others from accessing or making meaning from. The coding of the messages could be restricted or elaborate.

Facial for words
This is a situation where a facial emoji is used to signify a particular word that denotes a feeling

Chatter A: Today my favorite team lost, I feel like 😢

Chatter B: oops, sorry, I'm all 😶
In example (1) above, chatter "A" intimates that his team lost and that he feels like crying (uses the crying face emoji) while the respondent is lost for words and says that he is speechless (uses the mouth less emoji).
Chatter A: came home late, mum not talking
Chatter B: why so?

Chatter A: she's 😡
Similarly, in example (2) above chatter "A" informs the other that they came home late and for that reason, the mother is angry and not talking to them.
In the above examples the facial emojis presented in the chats are only used to express psychological thought of the information by the chatters. Other examples include the following:

Chatter A: I hear the biology test results are out today, am so 😟😟

Chatter B: No wonder John was so ☹️☹️ this morning, seems he didn't do well.
That the chatter "A" has heard of the results and that he is worried and the chatter "B" had noticed that John was sad could have been for the said reason.
Chatter A: have you heard? Bree is expectant!!!

Chatter B: what! Am 😮😮 , by whom? How? Tell more

Chatter A: not yet, I was told to be 🙊 and 🤐
That chatter "A" asks "B" if they are aware that a certain Bree is pregnant, chatter "B" says they are surprised and asks for more information at which "A" says he was instructed to be silent about it and zip their mouth (shot up their mouth).
The examples given above present a typology of facial emojis where certain facial gestures are used in places of words or as words in themselves.

Hands and body parts for words and sentences

This involves the use of certain hands and body parts to represent certain gestures which when conceptualized presents meaning and intent. As seen in the examples below:

Chatter A: *Were you in church today?*

Chatter B: 👍

Chatter A: *and how was the sermon?*

Chatter B: 👏

In example (5), the chatter asks if the person was in church, the respondent says yes and that the sermon was wonderful.

Chatter A: Hey, James everybody in your group is lazy, you need to start 💪

Chatter B: Nop, how do I flex my muscles on grown up?

👊

In (6) James is informed that his group members are lazy and that he needs to start flexing his muscles on them.

Chatter A: *Sannu, an fara wasan ne?* (Hi, has the game begun?)

Chatter B: 👍 Kana ina? (Where are you?)

Chatter A: *Ina zuwa* 🏃 (I'm coming)

In (7) the chatter asks if the game has begun and the response is a thumps-up emoji signaling the affirmative- yes. Consequently, the chatter indicates that they are on their way coming and emphasizes this by using the running man emoji to signal speed or haste.

Chatter A: *Ka taɓa kallon dramar game of throne?* (Have you ever watched game of thrones?)

Chatter B: ban gani ba, amma ina jin labarin yana da kyau 👍 👌 (I haven't yet they hear that it is real, nice)

In (8) the respondent is asked if at all they have watched the TV series game of thrones to which they say they haven't yet they hear that it is real, nice, fine, interesting by using both the thumps-up emoji as well as the "ok" sign. The use of the thumbs up emoji here is slightly similar to its use in (7) to relay the thought that communication intended is accepted. Interestingly, the "ok" sign has replaced the ok word itself and as such is commonly used.

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The examples presented above shows how hand and body emoji have been used to represent certain words that they denote. The next category shows how different containers are conceptualized and idealized for their content.

Container for content

This category involves emoji characters that are used mentally to access the objects of their referents. There is a kind of mental activation where the concrete image is internalized and activated for what it portrays. The material observed or substance viewed is conceived of as a part that makes up or constitutes things. As seen in the examples

Chatter A: hey Sammy, where are you?

Chatter B: its after hours

Chatter A: so?

Chatter B:

Chatter A: which one?

In (9) the respondent user the beer in a glass mug to answer the question of his location. The Chatter A in this case readily learns that his respondent is in a bar drinking and therefore only asks the specific name of the bar.

Chatter A: hey are you free we chat?

Chatter B:

Chatter A: cool, talk later

This is same as in (10) where the first chatter hopes to engage the respondent in a chatting session, however, the respondent sends the car emoji to directly indicate to the other that they are in a vehicle either driving or just busy travelling and hence busy, unable to chat. This conclusion is driven to by the response of the chatter B that they will chat later. The derivation of meaning here is only solidified by other social and contextual factors such as the awareness of both parties. Where for example chatter A owns a vehicle and often drives it and that chatter B is aware of this factor. Or even that chatter B is cognizant of the notion that when chatter A travels, he does not like or enjoy chatting.

Chatter A: the baby's been crying, the mother is away

Chatter B: try

Chatter A: I have tried the milk, it isn't working

Chatter B:

Chatter A: alright, I'll do the soup, thanks

As with the case of (11), Chatter B informs chatter A to give the baby milk, where A intimates that they have tried doing that to no avail. B then suggests the offer of soup instead. Both the chatters are prior- aware of the relevance of the bottle and the bowl in their conversation.

Chatter A: ✉ ✉

Chatter B: Got the mail, I appreciate

This is also seen in (12) where the envelope is used to say mail/message.

Chatter A: Brace yourself

Chatter B: why is that

Chatter A: The test isn't

Chatter B: Alright. Got me prepare   ☕ ☕

In (13) the emoji used is a cup of coffee to represent the idiom of the same phrase: that the test is not easy.

Chatter A: I want him out of my place

Chatter B: WhatsApp?

Chatter B: 🖼 🖼

Chatter A: What, he's baggage now?

Chatter B: Exactly

Lastly, in (14), uses the emoji to describe the reason why they want the person out of their place, Chatter **B** immediately recognises the intention of Baggage to which the chatter **A** acknowledges. That the container represents its content is aided by certain factors such as context, relationship of participants.

Instrument for product

Some emojis are used to refer to the product of the given instrument it portends as is exemplified in the following chat discourse

Chatter A: Sannu, kin saurari ALAn waka? (hi, have you listened to Alan waka?)

Chatter B: *aa, ban saurare shi ba* (no, not yet)

Chatter A; *ki saurari* 🎹 *yak e bayar wa* (listen to what the piano gives)

In (15) the first conversant asks the other if they have listened to a particular song to which the respondent says no, he then uses the piano to let him now that the kind of music emanated from the song is nice- The piano for music.

Chatter A: didn't sleep well last night
Chatter B: why
Chatter A: we were woken up by
In (16) person insists that they didn't sleep well the previous night after having been woken up by noise from the flutes or horns- Horn for noise.
Chatter A: hey are you coming?
Chatter B: look at the
Chatter A: get an umbrella please
In (17) the respondent uses the clouds to signify that it is about to rain consequently they are asked to carry an umbrella. Clouds -rain.
Chatter A : thanks for your big heart

Chatter B: am my father's son
Chatter A: haha, don't I know
In (18) the person uses the feet emoji to say that they follow in their father's footsteps finally.
Chatter A; what's your plan for next year?
Chatter B: …..

Chatter A: haha hope that day comes, we will
In (19) the respondent **B** says that within the next year they want to study and graduate to the encouragement of the other person who hopes they will celebrate and dance.

The above examples have highlighted situations where emoji characters are used as means of creating brevity and coding in text messages. This brevity is created where and when chatters would want to say a lot in very few words. They do this for a number of reasons such as to save time, avoid the bulkiness of text a text message, and make meaning in the shortest way possible. As coding, the various usages of the emoji characters as seen above may sometimes present ambivalences and this may in turn need some form of deconstruction to decipher the intended meaning. In situations where certain characters are only relevant to the participating parties, there can be some form of restricted code that is meant for the participants only. The next part looks at emojis as paralinguistic features.

As Non-verbal prosody
Written communication is often considered as lacking in the emotiveness of face-to-face communication. In electronic communication, Emojis function to provide

the missing human and emotional touches and feelings. Since written text are considered completely 'removed from facial expressions, gestures, and prosodic features' (Amaghlobeli, 2012). Emoticons have over time become widely known and embraced by Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) users. They are seen as "substituting for the non-verbal cues" (Luor, et al, 2010).

'Conceptual orality' is a term coined by Androustopolous (2006). This is where every quality of the spoken language can be manifested in written language (Androutsopulos, 2006). Baron & Kenny, (1986) viewed CMC as part of a 'general tendency for writing to become a transcription of speech'. Meaning that CMC engineers itself so as to equate for the factors that are available in face-to-face communication yet absent in communication via computers, Baron & Kenny, (1986) by the standardized means of keyboard and typeface. Compensation devices are used to achieve this. These engineering designs include; the use of emoticons and abbreviations that portray laughter, and other expressions of prosody by interaction of letters and punctuation marks. A seen in the examples below:

Chatter A: are you mad

Chatter B: 😠 😡 😠

Chatter A: oh, that much

In (20) the respondent answers to the question of if they are mad by using the 'red faced anger' emoji without having to use any word for it. To signify how grave this is received, chatter "*A*", acknowledges the level of this anger and even asks the intensity of it.

Chatter A: hey you get the joke?

Chatter B: 😅 😅 😅 Chatter A: nice, nice

In (21), chatter "*B*" responds to the question of if they get the joke by using the 'laughing with sweat on head' emoji to show the person that they are actually laughing at the joke to which the person reckons as well. In both cases, to show the intensity of their supposed actions, the respondents use the emojis more than once to emphasize their message.

When communicating online, the words available may not be sufficient in provision of feelings emotions and attitudes. Fussell & Moss (1998). In addition, the lexicon of words might not entirely aid the users of that particular language to sufficiently show all the nuances and dynamics of their emotions. Tossel (2012) observes that, the role played by emoticons in Computer Mediated Communication mirrors non-verbal behavior as is observed in face-to-face communication (Tosell, 2012). He says that, the inclusion of emoticons helps readers 'better understand the level and direction of the emotional context surrounding the message relayed over the internet' In addition, (Lo, 2008) and (Luor & et al, 2010) add that it is not easy to perceive the emotions feelings and intents of users when they send texts that do not have emoticons. That a message which is considered positive and has a smile will be rated more positively as compared to a positive pure message, similarly, a message which is considered negative but has a supporting frown is looked at as more negative than a negative pure message. (Luor et al., 2010). Kappas & et al, (2011) sought to find out how emoticon usage affects participant evaluation of extroversion and agreeableness. Their findings conclude that when people chat online, it is easy to tell who is an extrovert depending on how they use emoticons or not. (Kappas et al., 2011). The study of (Derks et al., 2007) emphasizes how emoticons provide additional social cues that are not normally found in plain text messages, for this reason they serve to heighten the exchange of social information (Derks et al., 2007).

Emoji and illocutionary force
Dresner & Herring (2010) argue that when emoticon is attached to a particular text, then it will serve to indicate the illocutionary force of that particular message. (Dresner & Herring, 2010). Emojis as an illocutionary force is where the emoji character directly presents the intended emotion that its pictorial quality is concomitant with the sentence
Aminatu: I have great news, 'am getting married this December
Aisha: Oh wonderful
In (22) Aisha's response to Aminatu's good news is rather 'flat' and expressionless devoid of any emotional undertone.
Aminatu: I have great news, 'am getting married this December
Aisha: Oh wonderful 😃😃
In (23) Aminatu's news is received with a lot of enthusiasm as this is witnessed by the broad smiling emoji which serves to strengthen the sentence attached to it.
Aminatu: I have great news, 'am getting married this December

Aisha: Oh wonderful 😔 ☹️

Ironically, in the response given (24) is accompanied by two emoji characters, the sad and frowning face. This would act as form of sarcasm considering the opposing statement that it comes with.

The above uses of emoji create an indication of their usage not as emotional vehicles rather as indications of the illocutionary force that accompanies the semantic property of the textual utterances. They aid in conveying the speech act portrayed by the production of the utterance. That is, relaying the intention of the user.

Expressing redundancy

This is where the emoji expresses the direct correspondence between itself and what it signifies as shown below:

Jane has had a baby

I am so happy for her 😄😄

My football team lost to England, 'am distraught ☹️☹️

As shown in both (25) and (26) the emoji used, indicate that the user is happy alongside the news they are projecting as well as distraught as for the loss of the football team the emojis only serve to express the same feelings.

Conclusion

This study investigates the typology of emoji characters based on how users exploit the affordance that they offer graphically. It begun by diving into the term affordance as postulated by scholars and goes further to categories the emojis as used in code and brevity; facials for words, hands and body parts for words and sentences, container for content, instrument for product, non-verbal prosody, emoji and illocutionary force and expression of redundancy. It is finally found that; Emojis provide sufficient paralinguistic features in written language and Emojis are not grammar adequate where many respondents positively used emoji's in expressing different context of communication in WhatsApp messages.

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