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JOINT EFFORTS OF THE MEDIA, CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE TO COUNTER RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the problems of institutional support of information security in the context of the full-scale war between Russia and Ukraine. The strategies and tools used by the Ukrainian state and civil society in the field of information policy to counter disinformation have been studied.

Global awareness of the need to counter the hostile narratives used by Russia against Ukraine and the West is a real way out of the threatening situation caused by massive Russian disinformation campaigns.

Disinformation cannot be defeated solely by closing channels or social media pages. Success requires the joint efforts of the media, public organizations, and the state.

The authors of the article conclude that the most effective strategy for countering disinformation should be based on a combination of technological techniques for removing unwanted content and ensuring the dominance of the dominant mainstream narratives of the state in its own information space and in the information space of foreign countries. The authors have carried out the research on the resistance of the young generation of Ukrainians to disinformation and determined Ukraine's goals in the information war.

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Introduction.

The problem of disinformation has been a major global challenge for many years. The World Economic Forum included the spread of digital disinformation in its list of key global challenges in 2013. This challenge has been called the "digital fire in the hyperconnected world." The concept of disinformation is not new to modern society, which functions in the conditions of high rates of

development of information and communication technologies. These technologies have a positive and negative impact, and they have led to the emergence of new problems for humanity. Disinformation and the fight against it have become a daily phenomenon and a factor that must be constantly taken into account when working with information, regardless of its source, in order to prevent it from becoming a cause of a well-planned information attack.

Disinformation, according to the definition of the European Union, is "a false or misleading information that is created, presented, and disseminated for the purpose of obtaining economic benefits or deliberately deceiving citizens and may cause public harm" (Balan, 2022, p. 6).

The main criteria of disinformation are the systematic and regular creation and dissemination of false information. That is, its dissemination is a repetitive activity with a direct intention with the aim of desired consequences. Extraterritoriality is one of the defining features of disinformation: the development of Internet technologies has provided the opportunity for the rapid and cross-media dissemination of uncontrolled transmission of false information. It has become an objective attribute of time, which in turn leads to the need to counteract propaganda by uniting the efforts of all states that are on the path of respecting democratic values and whose information space is subjected to numerous external interventions in order to spread disinformation. [2]

The relevance of the article lies in the need to analyze the existing mechanisms for countering information operations of the country aggressor in the context of the current full-scale war in Ukraine, part of which are disinformation campaigns.

Analysis of recent studies and publications. The features of Russian disinformation and the means of countering it from the Ukrainian government and the international community were first summarized by experts from the Institute of Information Security in the Green Book on Countering Disinformation in 2022.

Purpose: to analyze Russian disinformation as a global challenge for the world and Ukraine and methods of combating it; to show that the spread of disinformation by the Russian Federation, as well as the actions taken in response by the Ukrainian government, the governments of allies and international organizations, are an important lesson and acquired experience of how to counter false and misleading information.

To achieve the above-mentioned goal, the following tasks were set:

1. Analyze the current state and features of the spread of disinformation;
2. Study the sources of Russian propaganda and hostile narratives in the media space;
3. Identify the main directions of the information policy strategy and tools for countering disinformation in Ukraine;
4. Develop a list of institutions for ensuring information security and analyze their activities in the context of countering Russian fakes.
5. Conduct a study on the resilience of the Ukrainian youth generation to disinformation.
6. Identify Ukraine's prospects in the information war.

Research methodology.

The article used the following methods: analysis and synthesis of normative and legal acts, information sources, existing theoretical thesis, scientific research, and statistical data.

The authors of the article analyzed the professional research and indexes of civil society organizations, such as the Institute of Mass Information, which is a Ukrainian partner of Reporters Without Borders, Media Detector, and others. It is also worth noting that organizations, editorial offices of publications, and individual journalists have had numerous special projects on the spread of fakes and their impact on citizens of Ukraine and the world (Balan, 2022).

To conduct an author's study on the vulnerability of young people to disinformation, the target group survey method was used.

Presentation of the basic content.

The scale of the danger from disinformation campaigns for the world's democratic order became clear with the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, which was accompanied by numerous attacks on the spread of fake news in the Ukrainian and international media space. The head of European diplomacy, Josep Borrell, notes that in the context of the full-scale war in Ukraine, Russia "mobilized all of its tools" to carry out disinformation campaigns and "systematically distort reality." [3] Given the

high level of dissemination of Russian propaganda and the number of risks it poses, the EU and NATO were forced to recognize Russia as the world leader in disinformation in 2022, although until then the international community defended the positions of freedom of speech and insisted that hostile narratives should be fought only by creating their own quality content. [3] The ineffectiveness of such an information strategy and the need to introduce new radical methods of combating it were only realized by the member countries of these organizations after the start of the full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine.

On February 24, 2022, due to the military invasion and massive information attacks of the Russian Federation, Ukraine faced a real threat not only to lose its constitutionally assigned territories, but also to lose the legitimacy of its government. The situation was complicated by the intervention of Russian media in our media space on the eve of the war in order to destabilize society and create a negative international image of Ukraine in the world. The enemy's disinformation campaigns were aimed at discrediting the president and the government, making Ukrainians believe that our state could not fight and withstand Russian aggression, and presenting Ukraine to the world as the one to blame for the war. According to the data of the international organization "Reporters Without Borders", in the first days of the full-scale invasion, analysts of the Ukrainian public organization "Detector Media" daily recorded more than 30 unique information leaks from Russia into the Ukrainian media space (Balan, 2022, p.10).

The most popular and topical narratives of Russian propaganda that accompanied the attack on Ukraine and continue to appear in the information space from time to time are as follows.[4]

1. "Ukraine does not exist." "We are one nation." This narrative was used by Putin to justify the start of the full-scale aggression. "On the adjacent to us, I emphasize, our territories, a hostile anti-Russia is being created," he said in his address on February 24.
2. "NATO forced us," "We had no other way to defend ourselves." This is a basic narrative of Russian propaganda that has a long history, but it has become particularly important after more than a year of full-scale aggression against Ukraine.
3. "Everything is going according to the plan": Russians are winning, Ukrainians are losing. The Russian authorities called the goals of the full-scale invasion "denazification" and "demilitarization" of Ukraine, as well as the annexation of Donbas, which Moscow declared "liberation." With this narrative, Russia tried to artificially cover up its losses and defeats in the eyes of Russians, Ukrainians and the international community. However, the high-quality and operational resistance of Ukraine on all the fronts made it impossible to spread this message.
4. "Sanctions do not work, and Europe is weaker because of them." This is a narrative that is actively promoted by Russian propaganda in the domestic media space, but its main target is the West. Propagandists want to prove the harm of anti-Russian sanctions to the countries that imposed them.
5. "Ukrainians are Nazis." Russian propaganda began to actively develop the thesis about the coming to power of Nazis in Ukraine in 2014. "We faced nationalist groups," Putin said on February 25, 2022.
6. "Ukrainian refugees are a burden on their hosts" is one of the main narratives of Russian propaganda that emerged during the full-scale aggression. This thesis has variations in different countries, but it can be called an "umbrella": the Russians convince Europeans that Ukrainian refugees live on their money and enjoy social benefits.
7. "The United States is pressuring Europe." The accusation of the United States of pressuring Europe and of escalating the war by supplying weapons to Kyiv.
8. "Western support to Ukraine only makes the situation worse". Putin has threatened by means of nuclear weapons with "unprecedented consequences" for those who may try to interfere in Russia.
9. "Russia is ready to negotiate, but Ukraine is not" - this narrative is intensifying against the backdrop of military setbacks and the exhaustion of the Russian army. Russian propaganda is increasingly convincing of the need for peace talks on Russia's terms.

For a long time, disinformation in Ukraine has not received the proper awareness and conceptualization, and a sophisticated infrastructure for its counteraction has not been created. Since the beginning of the war, our state, like no other, has been facing this situation face to face on the field of information warfare. From now on, the media, public organizations and the state have to not only theoretically deal with the study of this concept, but develop projects to counter the spread of hostile narratives, etc., and also practically implement all this, protecting the minds of Ukrainians and the

international community from the influence of openly false slander and cynically fabricated fakes against Ukraine.

The difficulty of fighting disinformation is that it is spread through the same channels as reliable information, and also imitates ordinary news messages. As experts reasonably point out, detecting disinformation is only a small part of the fight against it. It is necessary to identify who conducted the disinformation campaign, how it developed, what communication tools were used and how many people were able to access it. [5] It is not possible to overcome disinformation through separate campaigns, it can only be done through joint efforts, accompanied by the large-scale use of different tools, methods, software. This requires close cooperation between partners who share the same values: EU institutions, Member States, civil society, the private sector and online platforms in particular.

In the international context of countering disinformation, the problem of malicious information influence has firmly established itself on the agenda of all global actors and has become very relevant (Balan, 2022, p.150). Today, understanding this global challenge of our time, a large number of states and international organizations are directing their efforts to study the nature of disinformation and develop tools to counter it. Significant resources are being spent on this, which, fortunately, are having some success. [6]

At least in countries that share democratic values, there has been a full understanding of the scale of this phenomenon, the techniques and environments of its dissemination, as well as the gaps in the social structure that contribute to the active dissemination of misinformation and propaganda.

In its 2022 report on disinformation and fact-manipulation in the global information space, the European External Action Service (EEAS) named Russia as the main disinformation country of the year. The report also provided illustrative examples of propaganda from Russian media companies Sputnik and Russia Today (RT). As EU High Representative Josep Borrell noted, "Media for disinformation and propaganda are today a weapon of the Kremlin," and this weapon kills the real picture of events, promoting the narratives that Russia needs. [7] In response to Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, which was accompanied by the spread of fakes through pro-Kremlin media - Sputnik and Russia Today, the EU on March 5, 2022, suspended the broadcasting of these media on the territory of the EU, and also appealed to Google and YouTube to remove accounts that promote the war. [8] Social media platforms regularly update their policies to reduce the spread of misinformation. However, despite these efforts, misinformation continues to find loopholes to spread, and now it is in social media where the biggest battle of narratives is currently focused. (Piskorska Galyna, 2023)

One of the biggest challenges in the context of fighting misinformation is the inability to completely shut down the work of its sources. Misinformation cannot be defeated by simply closing channels or pages on social media. Recognizing this global problem and the widespread threat, the European Commission has stated that fighting misinformation requires political will and joint action, mobilizing all state bodies "including those responsible for countering hybrid threats, cyber security, intelligence, strategic communications, information protection, elections, law and order, mass media" (Balan, 2022).

The Strategy of Information Security of Ukraine, approved on December 28, 2021, identified current challenges and threats to national security of Ukraine in the information sphere, strategic goals and objectives aimed at countering such threats. According to the document, the main directions of ensuring information security of Ukraine are stability and cooperation. To achieve the two above mentioned things, it is necessary to implement seven strategic goals, the first of which is countering disinformation and information operations. [10]

In the context of martial law, the state recognized the need for a unified information policy. Ukrainian media took a consolidated and pro-Ukrainian position, focused on objective coverage of news 24/7, which also became psychological support for the population, used information only from verified official sources, thereby reducing the risks of spreading fakes, and also focused on working with foreign audiences, forming the correct opinion of the international community about the events in Ukraine. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the largest broadcasters (1+1, UA: First, Rada, ICTV, STB and Ukraine 24) have united in a joint television marathon "United News" to show the official position of the state. The most important information about humanitarian corridors, reports from the front, and presidential addresses were broadcast, and it was here that people heard broadcasts debunking enemy disinformation. This allowed citizens not only to receive true information, but also to feel the

support of the government, which is constantly in touch with them. [11] However, the format of a single marathon, which reflects exclusively the pro-government position, no longer satisfies Ukrainians, who need more in-depth content. After all, Ukrainian civil society is accustomed to the competition of opinions and points of view. The Ukrainian government in the field of its information policy cannot act like the Russian Federation, which has completely monopolized its information sector (Sologub, 2022).

The basis for countering disinformation is precisely and exclusively truthful, verified, objective information. In Ukraine in the free zone, journalists have more freedom despite the disorganization of editorial work and the difficulties in the country in a state of war, including restrictions on the coverage of events, which are generally proportional to the situation. Freedom of speech is the most important tool for countering disinformation. Due to this, the World Index of Freedom of Speech in Ukraine in 2023 was able to rise 27 positions. [13]

The institutional governance model of information security implemented in Ukraine is quite complex and includes a number of state authorities, whose competencies often overlap. Among them are central executive authorities, which include the Coordination Council for the Implementation of the Strategy for Communication in the Field of European Integration for 2018-2021, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, the Ministry of Digital Transformation, the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting, and the Administration of the State Special Communications Service and Information Protection. The institutional model architecture also includes government regulators: the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the National Commission for State Regulation in the Spheres of Electronic Communications, Radio Frequency Spectrum and Provision of Postal Services; government centers: the Center for Countering Disinformation, the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security, the State Enterprise "Ukrainian State Center for Radio Frequencies"; as well as news agencies and media: the Ukrainian National News Agency "Ukrinform", the National Public Television and Radio Company of Ukraine (Balan, 2022, pp. 74-111).

In Ukraine, which is on the path to achieving the highest level of democracy, the functioning of civil society and its institutions plays an important role. Since the beginning of the war, civil society organizations were the first to take up the forefront of the information front, which the Russian Federation launched against Ukraine, mobilizing all efforts to protect our media space. Among them, the most famous are "Detector Media", Ukrainian Crisis Media Center, StopFake.org, VoxCheck, Texty.org.ua, InformNapalm, Institute of Mass Information. To counter disinformation, more and more organizations, institutions, programs, and projects are gradually starting to appear. They are aimed at accumulating efforts to identify, analyze, and fight against fakes and manipulations in the media.

Public organization "Detector Media"

Representatives of the NGO "Detector Media" are actively involved in the development of policies to counter disinformation: they work as part of working and expert groups, advisory bodies that deal with counter-propaganda.

"Detector Media" in real time collects and documents the chronicles of Kremlin disinformation around the military offensive against Ukraine, creates online projects aimed at leveling fakes and raising the level of media literacy among Ukrainians. [14]

Ukrainian Crisis Media Center

The Ukrainian Crisis Media Center (UCMC) is a non-profit organization that covers a unique media center, exclusive projects in the field of reforming government communications, media support for major foreign initiatives to help Ukraine, in-depth work with regional journalists, communication of ongoing reforms, events and cultural events, promotion of media literacy among youth, comprehensive analysis of disinformation activities in the media space. [15]

StopFake.org

At the same time as UKMC, the StopFake.org website started its work. It was created on the basis of the public organization "Media Reform Center" by teachers, students and graduates of the Mohyla School of Journalism and editors of Digital Future of Journalism. At the end of 2020, StopFake and the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council of Ukraine signed a Memorandum of Understanding, Cooperation and Information Exchange with the aim of countering the spread of biased, inaccurate and unreliable information (disinformation). Within the framework of the implementation of the Memorandum of the National Council, StopFake conducts analysis of the reliability of the published

information, verifies its veracity. The results of such work become the basis for public refutation of fakes by the National Council. [16]

VoxCheck

VoxCheck is the first project in Ukraine to verify the credibility of recognized politicians who have declared and spoken. In March 2018, VoxCheck joined the Code of Ethics of the Poynter Institute's International Fact Checker Network (IFCN), assuming a number of obligations regarding independence and transparency. VoxCheck is a member of the International Fact-Checking Network, and together with hundreds of other fact-checkers from 90 countries, VoxCheck is a member of #UkraineFacts, a coalition of fact-checking organizations that refute fakes about the war in Ukraine. Also, in cooperation with the educational online platform EdEra, VoxCheck developed and launched an online course on fact-checking. [17]

Texty.org.ua

Texty.org.ua is a combination of an analytical center and an independent publishing house, whose representatives have developed a neural network to combat fake news, which analyzes sites with a dubious reputation and forms a rating based on this. Thanks to the neural network, ordinary Internet users have the opportunity to check the reliability and integrity of information sources. Project staff analyzed almost 25,000 news items from Russian state mass media and manipulative websites that systematically conduct disinformation campaigns against Ukraine. [18]

InformNapalm

InformNapalm is an international volunteer community founded in March 2014 at the very beginning of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine in Crimea. The community is engaged in collecting evidence and informing the world community about the real role of Russia in hybrid conflicts and special operations. They created the largest online database where you can find exposed hidden facts of Russian military aggression. Based on these data, international organizations and Bellingcat researchers have repeatedly created their own information products. [19]

Institute of Mass Information (IMI)

The Institute of Mass Information (IMI) is an independent Ukrainian public organization that conducts the nationwide systemic monitoring of freedom of speech in Ukraine ("Freedom of Speech Barometer"), which is the main indicator of the development of the media sector for audiences inside and outside Ukraine, as well as monitoring leading online media for compliance with professional standards [20].

It is worth noting that, despite significant achievements, the work of domestic NGOs is still focused primarily on specialists and interested persons. The main task to be solved is to inform about the facts of disinformation, identify trends and channels of dissemination, and convince the general public of the conscious dissemination of false information. Fakes are spread through television channels, social media accounts and messenger groups with tens of millions of viewers and users, while the media efforts of fact-checkers and investigators are limited to hundreds of thousands.

The main tool of Ukraine's fight against Russian disinformation during martial law is the truth, which must be conveyed not only to the home audience but also to the Russian one as well. Among the successful information campaigns aimed at countering disinformation was the creation by Ukraine the Internet resource "200rf.com", aimed at the Russian audience, in particular the relatives of soldiers who were sent to war in Ukraine. Hanna Malyar, Deputy Minister of Defense of Ukraine, spoke about this action in her interview to the TV channel 1+1, stating: "In the first days of the war, we broke through the information blockade of Russia and called on the mothers of Russian soldiers who were looking for their sons in Ukraine. And if they were killed here or taken prisoners of war, we promised help: to find where the child or man is, and even to contact them. And thanks to this information campaign, the Russians learned what is really happening here".[21] One of the advantages over the enemy was the skillful use of videos of captured soldiers speaking to their relatives in Russia. Thus, Ukraine was able to convey at least some information about the war, provided that it was heard, to the Russian people.

Another successful information campaign was the truthful coverage of the real losses of the Russian army, which played a demoralizing, demotivating role in the soldiers themselves and the civilians of the aggressor country, which tried to "cover up" in vain its failures [22].

Media education: author's study of youth vulnerability to disinformation.

The fight against disinformation in the civilized world is actively moving towards the use of automated programs and methods, some of which are freely available to all interested parties. Since the

beginning of the war in Ukraine, a number of special chatbots have also been created so that every Ukrainian can quickly and efficiently verify the veracity and reliability of the information, of which there is currently a large amount, at the household level. Among the most popular is "Verification" from Gwara Media. [23] **Similar relevant tools, which are offered to the population by the Ukrainian government, are important components in the fight against disinformation, but they all depend on the key element of a comprehensive policy in this area - raising media literacy and media education of the population.**

Currently, this issue is very relevant in Ukraine for the reasons described above, and in view of this trend, various projects, courses and programs are constantly emerging to raise awareness of disinformation, ways to combat it and acquire the skills and knowledge to identify hostile narratives. There are also numerous studies on this topic. One such project is the "Distortion Test", a test of resilience to disinformation, which launches a large-scale international communication campaign "Nations Against Disinformation", initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine and the public organization BRAND UKRAINE [24]. Within the framework of this campaign, Ukraine unites the efforts of states, businesses and civil society around the world to build resilience and counter disinformation. The purpose of the "Distortion Test" is to visualize how disinformation distorts reality, while remaining invisible and elusive to any of the human senses. It demonstrates the ability of fakes to influence us, covertly affecting our individuality and literally destroying it.

"The Distortion Test" was the basis for the author's study on the vulnerability of youth to disinformation. The study involved third-year students of the Faculty of Journalism, Department of Advertising and Public Relations, who took the test personally to identify the ability of young people in Ukraine to identify fake news. 48 students took part in the experiment, of which:

- 2% scored 49 points, which indicates a tendency to believe in disinformation;
- 2% scored 61 points, which demonstrates the student's relative ability to distinguish between fakes;
- 11% scored 79-80 points, which shows a fairly good ability to identify hostile propaganda;
- 17% scored 86-89 points, which indicates a higher level of resistance to disinformation;
- 69% scored 93-99 points, which are the highest scores among 30 surveyed students, who demonstrated a fairly high level of ability to distinguish between false information (Figure 1).

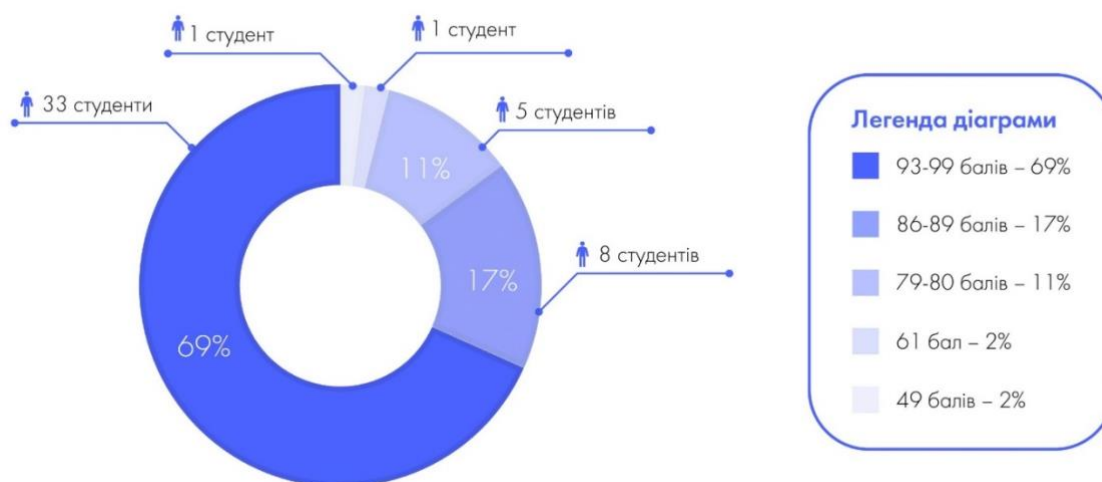


Figure 1 - Results of the media education research among the 3rd year students of the Faculty of Journalism, Department of Advertising and Public Relations.

Unfortunately, none of the 45 students scored a perfect 100%. This suggests that disinformation can be masqueraded as truth, be contradictory, and impact our ability to identify and critically process it. The results of the study show that young people in Ukraine are relatively vulnerable to disinformation. However, a significant number of students have a good ability to identify fake news. This suggests that there is a need for more education and awareness-raising about the dangers of disinformation among young people.

This shows that disinformation can be disguised as true information, be contradictory, and influence our ability to recognize it and critically evaluate it. The study demonstrates the need for further development of media education and media literacy programs among young people and the older population of Ukraine, which develop the skills to identify fakes, which form the basis of the formation of information policy in the context of countering disinformation.

Conclusions.

The war has accelerated the pace of work for professionals in the information sphere and has highlighted the need to develop tools to counter disinformation. The civilized world has recognized the global nature of the threat of disinformation and the need to counter the hostile narratives that Russia is using against Ukraine and the West.

Ukrainian society has been able to unite around political institutions and common goal, has begun to take a more responsible approach to information consumption, and has generally demonstrated national stability that most Western democracies aspire to.

The most effective strategy to combat disinformation is to combine technological methods of removing unwanted content and ensuring the dominant state narratives in the country's own information space and in the information space of foreign countries. The basis for combating disinformation is truth, verified, objective information.

Freedom of speech is the most important tool in the fight against disinformation. Then, freedom of speech should be strengthened by a large-scale media literacy campaign that will allow people to critically perceive information received on the Internet, especially without any indication to the sources of its origin, check the facts and independently detect disinformation. Media literacy and media education being parts of interrelated processes are also designed to reduce the space for possible disinformation campaigns and deprive them of their social base, level of influence and ability to destroy critical thinking that makes it possible to fill the vacuum of trust in the mass media and democratic institutions.

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