

UNPACKING THE LUCRATIVE POTENTIAL OF ONLINE SKIT-MAKING IN NIGERIA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SKIT MAKERS AND THE INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Online skit-making has become a lucrative form of entertainment, resonating with audiences across the globe and providing a platform for addressing societal issues through humour. The proliferation of social media has democratized content creation, enabling many young Nigerians to turn their creativity into viable careers in the skit-making industry. The economic impact of this industry is significant, with a growing number of skit-makers achieving substantial financial success through various revenue streams, including advertisements, sponsorships, and brand partnerships. This study examines the emerging, yet burgeoning online skit-making industry and skit makers in Nigeria, through a case study of Brain Jotter and Mr. Funny. The study utilizes Uses and Gratifications Theory as its theoretical framework, to investigate the motivations behind the increasing involvement of Nigerian youths in the skit-making industry, and unravel the lucrative aspects of online content creation in Nigeria. Incorporating primary and secondary data from interviews and content analysis, this qualitative research maps the industry's landscape, identifies key players, and analyzes their motivations, successes, and challenges. The findings reveal that online skit-making offers a lucrative career path for many young Nigerians, especially in the face of high unemployment rate. This study contributes to an understanding of Nigeria's creative industries, entrepreneurship, and social media ecosystems, informing policy development and interventions supporting youth employment. In the end, it is recommended that skit-making can be leveraged as a viable career option.

Keywords: Online Skit-Making, Nigeria, Creative Industries, Entrepreneurship, Youth Employment, Social Media.

Introduction

Over the last couple of years, Nigeria has witnessed a prominent increase in comic skits within the entertainment space. Arguably, comic skits took a new dimension and exploded during the Covid-19 lockdown, providing a source of laughter and relief to many Nigerians in the comfort of their homes. Beyond the humour comic skits provide, there are also socio-economic benefits of this emerging entertainment sector. Hence, the essence of a study by Africa Polling Institute (API) titled “Skit economy: An assessment of online content creators in Nigeria.” The study examines comic skits and online comic skit content creators in Nigeria.

The proliferation of smartphones, affordable cameras, social media accounts and accessibility to the internet have facilitated the rise of a distinct group of young Nigerians to be engaged in what can be referred to as the social media skit industry. Initially, emerging as a means of economic survival for unemployed youth, the industry has evolved into a significant centre of economic, cultural and political power and influence within the country.

A comic skit can be defined as a short comedy-sketch or amusing writing, particularly a parody created to convey a message that is not always instructive or educational. Through a blend of humorous writings and theatrical presentations, these parodies aim to critique and challenge societal norms, conventions and popular culture. With satire serving as its defining characteristic, comic skits have become a popular

form of entertainment. Skits are quick funny clips that usually run one to four minutes. Longer skits frequently highlight particular instances from Nigerian society that spectators can identify with. Becoming a skit-maker involves creating personal social media accounts on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Tiktok.

To maintain relevance and improve recommendations from social media algorithms, skit-makers typically upload new videos daily. The assumption is that regular content uploads increase the ranking of their social media accounts and enhance the likelihood of their videos being recommended to users. Skit-makers operate in an industry that thrives on building large social media communities and followers. Many of them have millions of followers across different platforms. This substantial following places skit-makers within the attention economy of social media. The attention economy operates based on network effects, implying that when more viewers engage with the views, there is a positive network effect as the platform becomes more valuable for advertisers.

The Nigerian entertainment industry as a whole has been impacted by online comic skits. “About 60 years ago, there was no such thing like the comedy industry in Nigeria; however, it is now the 3rd largest entertainment industry in Nigeria (after Nollywood and Music) worth an estimated N50 billion annually” (Osage-Brown, 2015, as cited in Adegbite, 2019). “Becoming a skit-maker starts by having personal social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter” (Simon, 2022). These social media sites are a useful tool for comic skit creators to showcase their work. A wider audience may view and interact with their material, thanks to these platforms. Additionally, they amass their fan base via these media, which contributes to their notoriety and wealth. And in response to their posts, these fans typically like, comment on, share, and even follow the creators of the skits.

Skit creators frequently generate income through several channels, including monetizing their social media platforms, securing ambassadorial agreements, doing brand advertising, and receiving presents from followers. Asheolge and Afolabi posit that “in 2023, Ali Baba, one of Nigerian's veteran comedians, nearly broke the internet when he shared that popular Nigerian skit-maker, Mark Angel earned over \$300,000 monthly from his YouTube videos” (2024). Skit-making has evolved into a serious enterprise that goes beyond simply making people laugh. Although the primary purpose is to entertain viewers, what is most important is how laughing can generate revenue, thereby establishing it as an enterprise.

Skit-making as an industry requires every skit-maker to put in some work. While making people laugh can be a simple endeavor, the real industry in skit-making is getting people laugh in order to gain money. “At first, the process of creating this content was basic, requiring only a cell phone, editing skills and an internet connection; now, as the industry grows and becomes more global, the skit-making process becomes more complex; requiring larger team, more money to execute, and a more strategic plan” (Asheolge&Afolabi, 2024).

Most skit makers venture into the industry alone, while others operate under agencies. For example, the likes of Broda Shagi, Mr. Macoroni and KieKie, operate under Penzaarville Africa founded by Olufemi Oguntamu, whose company is involved in talent management and serves as media agency. Furthermore, some skit makers recruit staff, while others do not involve the services of anyone. But due to the high demand and popularity of online skits, other departments of this creative industry come in handy such as videographers, scriptwriters, supporting actors, make-up artists, gaffers, production managers and assistants, as well as directors. The Nigerian skit making industry has created an environment for job opportunities for many Nigerian youths, and it is an industry that operates independent of government's control.

This study is thus, a qualitative research that seeks to unpack the lucrative potential of online skit-

making in Nigeria, through an exploratory study of skit makers and the industry, using Mr. Funny and Brain Jotter as case study. Data is gathered through primary and secondary sources, which include interviews with some online skit makers in Nigeria, as well as thematic and content analysis of two skits by Brain Jotter and Mr. Funny namely; *Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo* and *Something Hoodge* respectively.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) is a theory that is used to examine why and how individuals constantly make use of certain media to satisfy their specific need and interests. The Uses and Gratification Theory was propounded by Elihu, Katz, Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in their 1974 paper titled "Utilization of Mass Communication by the Individual." According to Katz et al., "Uses and Gratification theory asserts that people are active users of media and select how they will use it" (1974). Uses and Gratification Theory explains why people use media and what they gain from it. This study intends to use the Uses and Gratification Theory to analyze the rise of online comic skits and skit makers in Nigeria. Uses and Gratification theory helps this study to understand why Nigerian youths are increasingly turning to online comic skits as a form of entertainment and a source of income.

Analysis of *Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo* by Chukwuebuka Emmanuel Amuzie A.K.A Brain Jotter

The *Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo* skit challenge by Brain Jotter is a dance movement that is comic in its style and arouses a sense of laughter in the audience. This challenge makes use of the ninety-three (93) years old legendary Mike Ejeagha folklore music titled *GwoGwoGwoNgwo*. It was done and first posted by Brain Jotter on his Instagram page on 5th July, 2024, and received 967k views and later posted on his TikTok page of 8.2 million followers on 18th July, 2024, and has 40.4 million views and 3.6 million likes as at 22nd September, 2024. This skit challenge was also posted by Brain Jotter on his YouTube page and received 317k views, as well as on his Instagram account the following day with 788k views. The skit showcases a unique dance involving participants facing opposite directions, performing a comical leg walk, and eventually chasing each other, to the chorus "GwoGwoGwoNgwo."



Plate 1: *Gwo Gwo Gwo Ngwo* Dance Skit with 3.6m Likes on Brain Jotter's TikTok Page.

The song used for the skit by Brain Jotter is an enchanting Igbo folklore tune that narrates the story of Enyi (the Elephant) and Mbe (the Tortoise). In this tale, the cunning tortoise outsmarts the powerful elephant and sells him to the king, thereby securing the hand of the princess in marriage. The tortoise is a recurrent figure in Igbo folklore, often depicted as clever and shrewd. The song's catchy chorus, "Enyi na aga, n' esomn'azu, GwoGwoGwoNgwo," reflects the tortoise's triumphant deceit as he leads the elephant to the king.

The folklore music GwoGwoGwoNgwo is an old song that was first released over forty-one years ago, but now experiences a remarkable resurgence on TikTok and other social media platforms. Social media users including content creators, celebrities and even other comedians such as Sabinus partook in this challenge. According to Vanguard Media Limited (2024), “Super Falcons' star and FC Bay footballer, Asisat Oshoala, and some teammates, in an Instagram post, were seen making the dance moves after they touched down in Bordeaux before the opening ceremony of the 2024 Olympics.” Former Big Brother Naija housemate and actor, Tobi Bakare also participated in the challenge with his wife. Nollywood actor Kanayo O. Kanayo, actor Alex Ekubo, actress Chizzy Alich, actor Nosa Rex, actress Etinosa Idemudia, online skit content creator Maryam Akpaokagi (Taaoma), and many others, also joined in the challenge. The skit became so popular that it drew attention to even the music itself and to the composer Mr. Mike Ejeagha, a ninety-three (93) years old man.

Analysis of *Something Hoo* by Emmanuel Chukwuemeka Ejekwu

The skit *Something Hoo* was first posted by Mr. Funny on his Instagram and YouTube pages on 3rd October, 2021. It received a number of 731,320 views, 83.5k likes on Instagram and 388,939 views, 11k likes on YouTube. The skit reveals people queuing up to withdraw money from a P.O.S merchant, as Sabinus enters and stands behind a woman on queue, instead of standing behind the last person on the queue. His action is questioned by everyone, but he feigns ignorant, saying he is an “investor,” and proceeds to talking to the lady at his front, who responds by scolding him for addressing her as “beauriful.” After boasting and claiming to be an investor, he ends up saying he wants to withdraw three hundred naira (N300), but fifty naira (N50) should be deducted for charge. Attempt is made, but his ATM card declines on insufficient balance. He proceeds to request that the P.O.S man tries two hundred naira (N200) and fifty naira (N50) be deducted for charge instead. This again is unsuccessful, and he goes further to appeal that one hundred naira (N100) be deducted for him to receive fifty naira (N50) after charges. Shockingly, this still declines on insufficient funds.

After much is said and done, he pleads that the man gives him five hundred naira (N500) and holds on to his A.T.M card with the pin, because he is expecting “something hoo” (a debased phrase for something huge) the coming week. The P.O.S man, the lady and all other persons on the queue get exasperated and begin to banter him. This makes Sabinus resort to keeping his trademark sad, but funny face, followed by a sad music.



Plate 2: Sabinus talking to a lady in *Something Hoo*.

The phrase “something hoo,” used as a slang for “something huge,” in the skit, became an attribute of Mr. Funny. Celebrities and other content creators began to use the slang in their contents. The slang has also been trademarked and legally reserved as Sabinus intellectual property. This caused a company (*Friesland Foods Wamco Nigeria Plc*) to be sued for making use of the slang (Pulse, 2022). Talented record producer, The Hit Maker aka Altrayd, released a viral music titled *Something Hoo* (2021) which features popular Nigerian comedian, Mr Funny aka Oga Sabinus. Sabinus shared this video on his Instagram page on 22nd October, 2021 and got 707,613 views, with 128k likes.

Contemporary Nature of Online Skit-Making in Nigeria

In recent years, short comic skits have become popular forms of entertainment, especially on social media. Okadigwe & Ebekue (2018) are of the view that while stand-up comedy still thrives in live shows, social media has made comedy more accessible to specific audiences. They also remark that social media is becoming more influential, particularly among younger audiences. The internet's growing popularity and the availability of high-speed broadband and streaming video technology have made it easier to create and share web series. Internet series are less expensive to produce, allowing more people, including ordinary Nigerians, to make their own comic skits and videos online. The internet enables video producers to reach a global audience around the clock, whether they are at home or on the go. The increasing affordability of tablets and smartphones has also led to more people entering the industry. This advantage allows producers to reach wider range of potential viewers, including commuters and travellers.

The lucrative potential of onlineskit-making has drawn the attention of most Nigerian youth in the face of global economic meltdown. The rise of online comic skits and videos in Nigeria can be seen as part and parcel of popular culture. The internet has allowed ordinary Nigerians to participate in shaping their own versions of popular culture by creating and sharing humorous contents that reflect local languages, experiences, and social dynamics. Specifically leveraging on the ability to share skits on social media means that “a skit can be absorbed and deconstructed by thousands of people in a matter of minutes” (Awa-Kalu, 2016). The advent of skits in modern media environments has spawned numerous successful careers.

Sabinus, speaking on his journey in an interview with Channels Television states that:

I started doing skits in 2015. Then I moved to Lagos in 2019, because I see Lagos as the main base for entertainment. When I was in Port Harcourt, they do not see us much like that. That was where the exposure, new knowledge and idea came from. I started with Stand-up comedy, but I had to widen it up a bit, so I had to add up the online comedy into it. Comedy is comedy, but the online comedy picked for me (Channels Television, 2022).

Sabinus transitioned from stand-up comedy to a highly successful online comedy career, illustrating the growing significance of digital platforms in shaping modern entertainment careers. The Uses and Gratification Theory helps explain why skit-makers and their audiences are drawn to this form of entertainment. Skit makers like Sabinus are motivated by fame and fortune. Moving to Lagos, the heart of Nigeria's entertainment industry, gave Sabinus new opportunities and exposure, showing how location can play a role in building careers within the entertainment sector. Furthermore, Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Twitter are the modern vehicles that drive popular culture. Skit makers and comedians like Brain Jotter and Sabinus create contents that resonate with everyday Nigerians.

The Lucrative Aspects of Online Skit-Making in Nigeria

As already stated, according to Dataleum (2024), a global talent accelerator, skit-making ranks the third-largest entertainment industry in Nigeria, with a net worth surpassing ? 50 billion (\$31.2 million). The industry now doubles as a source of amusement and a substantial source of employment. As revealed by the Africa Polling Institute (API); 90% of Nigerians agree that online skits as viable means of employment, highlighting the industry's socio-economic impact (Africa Polling Institute, 2023).

While Instagram is the primary platform for most skitmakers, YouTube also sees significant engagement for online skits. Some Nigerian skit-makers reportedly earn over \$20,000 monthly (Dataleum, 2024). Gbadamasi Bernardin an interview with Channels Television, argues that “if you go by the numbers that our boys are pulling in, from the online content creators to the guys who do it live on stage, you can see that from the days they started doing VHS till now, they are still relevant” (Channels

Television, 2023).

Skit makers leverage on the number of subscribers and viewers on their skits to facilitate their earnings. Therefore, advertisers look for trending skit providers who have high followership to place ads on their channels (Gbadamasi, 2023). The success of skitmakers on Instagram and YouTube also underscores how popular culture is increasingly fueled by technology. The mass appeal of skit-making is not limited to Nigeria alone but reaches global audiences through online platforms. The online skit-making industry in Nigeria has evolved into a highly lucrative industry, offering various revenue-generating opportunities for content creators. One of the primary avenues for financial success comes from social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. With millions of followers, skit makers are able to monetize their content through ads, sponsorships, and partnerships. Platforms like YouTube, for instance, offer direct monetization by paying creators for ads played in their videos. The more the views and engagements, the higher the earnings, and this allows successful creators to generate substantial income by attracting large fan base.

Another major source of revenue in the skit-making industry is from brand endorsements and sponsorship deals. Skit celebrities are often signed by multinational companies looking to market their products to a younger, digitally savvy audience. For instance, Broda Shaggi, one of Nigeria's leading skit comedians, has secured high-profile endorsement deals with companies like Fair Money and Revolution Plus Properties. Similarly, Mr. Macaroni has partnered with Farm Funds Africa and various football betting companies, further demonstrating how lucrative skit-making can be (Ojomo & Sodeinde, 2021). Sabinus shares similar view thus:

Content creation is a career now, it pays very well. The reason many people do not now this is because of the government. If I get to do an advert now, I get paid between 1.5 to 2 million naira per post, and in a month, I get up to 5 adverts. So, on a very good month, I make 10 million from adverts alone. Like YouTube now, there are people YouTube pays roughly 15-20 million naira every month (Channels Television, 2023).

Sabinus' comments show that creating content online could be very profitable for people with large followership. This goes further to show that online contents creation is becoming a big part of contemporary Nigerian popular culture. As Stuart Hall's argues: popular culture is made up of mass-produced content that connects with the everyday lives of regular people (Hall, 1997). Nigerian content creators, especially skitmakers like Sabinus, have entered this cultural space by making videos that



Plate 3: Mr Funny, AKA Sabinus in an interview with Channels television. ©Channels Television, 2023

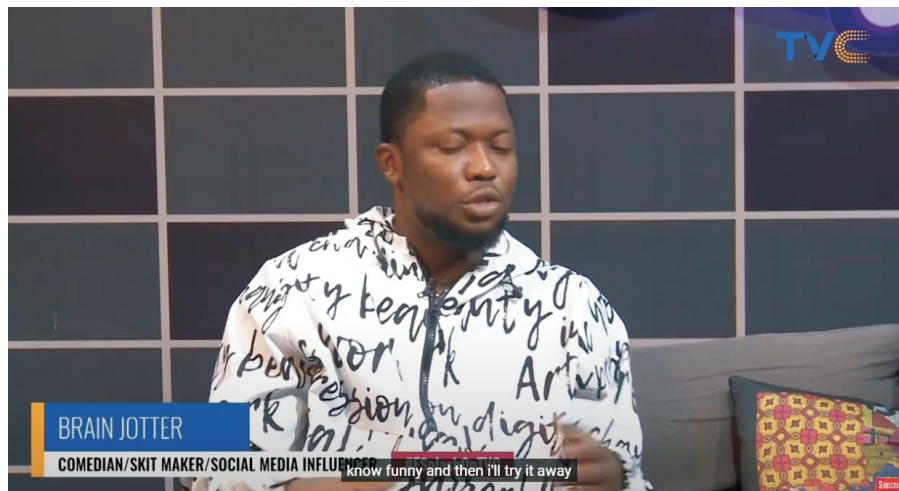


Plate 4: Brain Jotter Interviewed by TVC, 2023.

Prospects and Challenges of Online Skit-Making in Nigeria

The online skit-making industry in Nigeria presents immense prospects, but it also faces notable challenges. The growth of this industry, fuelled by the digital revolution, provides significant opportunities for young creatives, but hurdles such as funding, infrastructure, and regulation remain.

Prospects of Online Skit-Making in Nigeria

One of the major prospects of skit-making in Nigeria is the industry's ability to create job opportunities for the country's youth. With sky rocket in gun employment rates, many young Nigerians are turning to digital content creation as a viable career. Skit-making has become a way for these individuals to monetize their creativity and escape poverty. As highlighted in the *Skit Economy* report, platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook provide a direct path for creators to build large followings and earn money through ads, sponsorships, and product placements? According to Gbadamasi Bernard, a comedian and online skit maker:

When people mention the natural gifts Nigeria has, from the crude oil to the precious stones, they forget sense of humour. That is why you see no matter how bad the economy is, we still find a way to laugh about serious issues. No matter how tragic the issue is, we are able to see comedy from it. That is why sometimes we see words like tragi-comedy, and I think that is where we are currently (Channels Television, 2023).

Another significant prospect of the industry lies in its ability to influence social trends and correct societal ills. Skit comedians often use their platform to raise awareness about pressing social issues, using humour to tackle subjects such as corruption, poverty, and bad governance. This not only engages audiences but also sparks important conversations in society. In this way, skit-making transcends entertainment, becoming a tool for social change.

Moreover, the skit-making industry in Nigeria is poised to grow even further as global demand for African content increases. As Nigerian skit comedians continue to gain international recognition, there is potential for them to attract global audiences and secure international deals. Platforms like Netflix and YouTube have already begun exploring African content, and this creates a huge opportunity for Nigerian skit creators to break into global markets.

Challenges of Online Skit-Making in Nigeria

Despite these prospects, the industry faces several challenges; most significantly, lack of adequate funding. Many skit makers lack the financial resources needed to invest in quality production equipment and post-production tools. This limits the quality of their content, which can affect viewership and engagement. Additionally, without proper funding, many skit comedians struggle to scale their content production to meet the increasing demand. According to Gbadamasi Bernard:

There are a lot of Netflix original Nigerian movies. They bring the money for it, they endorse it themselves, and they throw it on the platform for people to watch and people go there, stream and watch. But we don't have that in Nigeria where Netflix will look at a stand-up comedian and give 10 million dollars to go and do 60 minutes special and say, return it to us, we will promote it ourselves, because the numbers are not there (Channels television, 2023).

He goes on to emphasize that one overriding issue is lack of steady electricity, and that most homes do not have routers to watch Netflix on their television. Instead of watching Netflix skits, a vast majority of Nigerians watch them online. For this reason, Nigerians who create skits are unable to secure funding; as a result, they must support their own endeavors. The growth of the skit production sector is hindered by infrastructure concerns, as the industry mainly depends on online platforms and video editing tools. Brain Jotter in a Podcast *Real Life*, expresses strong aversion to clout chasing, emphasizing that he prefers authentic connections over superficial attention. He highlights that genuine actions should have a meaningful purpose beyond just gaining popularity. And this has been the challenge in skit-making, as many skit makers use this as tactics to gain engagement.

In Nigeria, many individuals encounter resistance when choosing non-traditional careers like comedy or content creation, often clashing with family expectations. Brain Jotter corroborates this thus: “my mother was my biggest fan but my father wasn't really interested. My father didn't outrightly say 'you're fooling yourself,' he just didn't care. I didn't feel bad; I felt he was correct. I did it because I enjoyed it, not to prove him wrong” (Real life, 2023). Sabinus also shares similar experience thus: “I was hiding it at first from my father, but he found out in my final year, and was like; so that's what you are doing in school? I was like yes daddy. I was afraid at first. He was like no problem, just know that you will study law” (Channels Television, 2022). These reflect common challenge where family support may be mixed, leading to internal struggles. However, passion and talent can serve as powerful motivators, helping individuals push through societal and familial pressures. The challenges faced by content creators could also stem from a lack of reliable actors and the pressure of maintaining content quality. Brain Jotter, using the Nigerian Pidgin English, states; “*we dey lack actual actors, we just get a lot of people wey wan blow*” (Real Life, 2023).

This shortage of skilled actors can lead to frustrating production experiences, negatively affecting creativity and the final output. The struggle to find dedicated talent and consistently deliver quality content adds another layer of complexity to an already demanding industry. This can lead to frustrating experiences during production, impacting overall creativity. Content creation, especially for platforms like YouTube, can be highly demanding, requiring constant output to maintain engagement and income. This intense pressure to consistently produce content leaves creators with little room for rest, making it a challenging full-time commitment. Brain Jotter reveals that:

You know, it's YouTube; the more you work the more you earn. People just actually see the post, but we shoot almost 4 videos a day. That is a full-time job. If you have not shot you would not sleep, you can't even help it. I went to Kenya for 4 days, I was restless and I was like, I never work (*Esplash*, 2022).

From the audience's side, there is a constant demand for fresh, engaging content. To satisfy this demand, content creators must keep up the pace, leaving them with little opportunity to take breaks. The audience's desire for continuous entertainment feeds directly into the pressure creators face to avoid downtime, which in turn impacts their work-life balance.

Another key challenge in content creation is distinguishing between inspiration and outright copying. While sharing ideas is common and can foster creativity, true originality and how those ideas are expressed is crucial. The ability to draw from inspiration without merely replicating someone else's work is what sets creators apart and ensures their contents stand out in a crowded space. Maintaining this balance is essential for authenticity and long-term success in the industry.

Conclusion

This study underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of the online skit-making industry in Nigeria. It is evident that online skit-making has become a prominent form of entertainment, resonating with audiences across the nation and providing a platform for addressing societal issues through humour. The proliferation of social media has democratized content creation, enabling many young Nigerians to turn their creativity into viable careers. The economic impact of this industry is significant, with a growing number of skit-makers achieving substantial financial success through various revenue streams, including advertisements, sponsorships, and brand partnerships. This not only highlights the potential for individual economic empowerment but also indicates a shift in the traditional employment landscape, where creative industries are becoming increasingly valued.

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