

AN INSIGHT INTO HATRED IN THE INTERNET COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: The issue that the authors address in this article is Internet hatred which seems a phenomenon closely related to the development of Internet communication. Not only is it present in virtual reality, it permeates all spheres of public discourse, nowadays. In broad terms, hatred finds its sources in different aspects of human communication. One of the aspects which seems to have contributed to the rapid expansion of this threatening global trend is the rise of the New Media, which in turn, has lead directly or indirectly to the establishment of such a socio-cultural structure as a Network society. Experts in the area of media research as well as psychologists, linguists, and many others cannot remain indifferent to the situation. They persistently emphasise the necessity for governmental institutions to take firm and far-reaching actions to curb aggressive behaviour. The aim of the article is to shed some light into the aforementioned issues.

Key words: hatred, New Media, Internet society, language behaviour

Introduction

Hatred in Internet communication is a very broad and multifaceted notion, and as such, it has a great variety of definitions depending on the vantage point of the researcher and his/her contextual background. Marta Juza [1] defines it “as a form of deviational behaviour in public Internet discussions characterized by the use of abusive language, derogatory assessment of different ideas and affronting not only the interlocutors of the discussion but also other subjects by expressing aggression and hatred towards them”¹. According to the author, the phenomenon of hating on the Net is as old as the Internet itself, but it is only recently that it has acquired this particular definition in public discourse. Aggression and hatred have been the subject of scrutiny of researchers of various areas and fields since the 1970s. At the beginning, the problem of hatred referred to and affected specific Internet communities whose participants established the rules of behaviour for a particular community, so-called *netiquette*, which served as a deterrent to any incidents of their aggressive or abusive behaviour mainly represented by speech. Over time the phenomenon has lost its local character and developed into a serious social problem.

Factors contributing to Internet hatred

Two reasons for the increase of hatred were the growing general availability of the Internet and the loss of its exceptional quality for society. Besides, the level of anonymity in the early times of Internet development used to be more li-

imited. Since more and more users could afford the Internet irrespective of their “technical and cultural competences” and the range of anonymity they had; they became more unrestricted as well as their willingness to break the once established social forms.² Juza [1] states that the practice of making regulations for a particular group of Internet users was, in fact, their own responsibility: “e.g. codification of the rules of conduct in particular Internet forums.”³ Currently, however, these regulations remain in the hands of the objects who provide the tools for the interactions on the Net, e.g. a particular social network. This scholar also claims, that due to the fact that the power to establish the rules has been overtaken by the owners of Internet communication platforms, often being commercial structures; it is possible to admit that so-called “polycentric order has been established in the Internet ruled by different decision – making units which control uncoordinated activities of individuals.”⁴

These units decide on social sanctions which can vary from a reprimand to a ban that can be taken against the uncontrollable or disorderly users. This, in turn, may result in a total deletion of a user’s account on a forum. According to Juza [1], the efficiency of such punishing methods can be quite doubtful if a user is either not interested in participating in a particular forum any longer or the user can find acceptance and understanding somewhere else on the Internet.

The author notices that both those who assert control on the users and those who break the social norms and

¹translation – Natalia Malenko (further N.M.)

²Juza [1], translation N.M.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

codes of conduct can actually be the machines generating information automatically. It is a common practice to automatically delete expressions which are considered improper from posts. Another example of impropriety on the Net is spamming, which is the sending of unwanted information and advertisements by automatic devices. Therefore, as Juza [1] states, it might seem “the functioning of the normative system is to a greater extent dependent on machines and their interaction with people.”⁵

Internet communication is a part of people’s social lives. It is supposed to be subject to the normative system of a particular society. Practices of hatred can be condemned, which in Juza’s perception is of relatively very little importance, bearing in mind that the users are mostly anonymous. In Poland, she claims haters can be brought to court for urging someone to commit a crime, propagating totalitarian ideologies or defaming and insulting others. Unfortunately, the legal procedure is not as efficient in combatting these evils as it should be as there is no clearly defined borderline between an intentional insult and acceptable dose of criticism. Besides, the author underlines that prosecuting for expressing thoughts or for statements might sound like censorship. She also adds that it is virtually impossible to delete the incriminating statements from the Internet; hence, the harmful effects of those statements will always remain in the Internet archives.

The Language of Hatred and Violence

Interestingly, with the appearance of the phenomenon of hatred in the Polish public domain, the publicists who were involved in the communication research tried to define it with the help of some linguistic means in Polish although the English borrowing of “hate” and its derivatives have totally overtaken their Polish counterparts.

Trevor Butt [2] concludes that the word hatred is polysemous, and due to this it is overused. He believes that people either experience hatred or not. If they do not, they do not hate. “What I mean by hatred is a wish to see harm come to others, or at least, pleasure in harm to others.” He also refers to Orwell, who mentions vengeance, which seems to be motivated by hatred and may mean “committing the harm.” The author calls it our “ethical duty not to act on hatred, even if we can’t help feeling it.” Bogdan Walczak [3] analyses the foundations of violence in speech and states that people have always believed in the power of words, and that words can “captivate, hurt or even kill”.⁶ Certain words were or still are taboo in different cultures just because they are thought to have magic powers. In ancient times the use of some words or names was limited in the language as people were appalled by their sound. Such

a tendency has been retained in many languages because of the presence of taboo words in them. Obviously, the ban on their use is not motivated by fear any longer but by certain societal norms or rules of politeness. To substantiate his line of reasoning on the appearance of violence in speech, the scholar refers to the theories of Speech Acts propounded by John Austin (1962) and John Searl (1975), who classified among illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, so-called directives, whose aim was to put pressure on the addressee or express the addresser’s intentions as to inveigh, abuse or humiliate etc. the addressee. Professor Walczak [3] states that violence in language has reached its climax, nowadays. The Polish language abounds in vulgarisms, insults, imprecations and invectives which can continually be heard in public places. The people who use them also force others to be exposed to linguistic boorishness in everyday life. The scholar claims that the reasons for aggressive language use do not lie in the low linguistic culture of the society. The language reflects the tendencies of social life such as anxiety, nervousness and tiredness caused by, generally speaking, a low quality of life. This, in turn, does not alleviate the social consequences of stress and strain but on the contrary deepens social depression. It can be concluded that reasons for this state of things are of mainly psychological origins. The processes feed on themselves and permeate all the spheres of public life and discourse.

The New Media and its Characteristics

Recently, the notion of the new media has been used quite widely. Its understanding is relatively intuitive, but when it comes to defining it, it becomes really problematic. Bauer [4] explains it by the lack of precise criteria to be used in order to differentiate the so-called “old media” from the new one. He also considers the term “medium” intricate in itself. He underlines that every definition of the media will remain one-sided and will definitely require improvement or a more detailed definition if used in a description of a particular medium in a particular historical context. This historic perspective, in his mind, is necessary for a mere possibility to see something new in comparison to its earlier forms. Therefore, there is undoubtedly a variety of forms of old and new media which can be exemplified. At the same time, it is easier to give examples of both rather than to state clear-cut criteria of the divide between them. Modern technologies have significantly changed the appearance of the media such as the press, radio or television for thirty years or so. During this time terms like new or electronic media have been used interchangeably with television playing the main role due to its intensive development. Computer and digital technologies which have traditionally been juxtaposed to analog technologies were considered tools for complex calculations and were never thought of in terms of

⁵translation – N.M.

⁶translation – N.M.

the media in a broad sense of the word. Some thirty years ago a computer was not considered a hyper-medium combining the traditional media: text, visual and audio-visual into rich multi-media. The terms new media and multimedia or rich multimedia are synonymous, especially in case of connection of many computers on the Net, e. g. the Internet when the content is created via interactive co-operation of many users. Bauer [4] claims that the new media is the result of technological changes, on the one hand, and changes in the social and political spheres in the global scale, on the other. He asserts that computer technologies, and first and foremost, computer mediated communication – CMC have become the factors of these changes. Nowadays, computer networks represent a metaphor of a new type of society whose development is dependent on the access to digital technologies or the lack of such access. After Bolter (1990), Bauer [4] calls computer technologies “defining technologies of our époque.”⁷

The researcher [4] suggests one of the definitions for the new media; in his understanding these are: “techniques, technologies alongside with institutions which provide communication and use digital methods to register, record and store data, as well as create and transmit them.” The author ascribes to the new media such characteristics as “hyper textual structure of transmission and reception, a possibility of being programmed (asynchrony between transmission and reception), interactivity, a possibility of being stored (accumulation), global range and individuality of an access.” Also, Livingstone [5] considers interactivity “most radical change of all” in the characteristics of the new media. She specifies the importance of interactivity in reference to the Internet in combination with the innovative features attributed to mass communication. Here she emphasizes “the unlimited range of content, the scope of the audience reach, [and] the global nature of communication.”

McQuail [6] suggests a categorization of the new media, identifying its five main categories and acknowledging that it shares some similarities which can be differentiated by “types of use, content and context”:

“Interpersonal communication media” – telephone, mobile telephone and e-mail. They are characterized by privacy and the perishability of the content and the lessening in importance of the relationship between the participants of the communicative act.

“Interactive play media” – computer-based and video games, and virtual reality devices, provide interaction; their dominant feature specified as ‘process’ over ‘use gratifications’ (see McQuail, [6]).

“Information search media” – the Internet/WWW, and mobile telephone are perceived as a data bank, cha-

racterized by unlimited size, access and information retrieval possibilities.

“Collective participatory media” – the Internet/Social networking is a source “for sharing and exchanging information, ideas and experience and developing active (computer-mediated) personal relationships.”

“Substitution of broadcast media” – refers to reception and downloading content (music, films) instead of listening to the radio or watching TV.

Additionally, McQuail [6] enumerates a few essential features of the new media, which from the user’s vantage point elucidate their difference from the old media. These are:

- interactivity:** the ratio of reaction of a user to an offer of a sender;
- social presence (or sociability):** mediated interpersonal contact;
- media richness:** the blending of reference frames and ambiguity reduction, the provision of cues and the engagement of senses and greater scope of personality;
- autonomy:** the degree of user’s control over “content and use, independent of the source”;
- playfulness:** “entertainment and enjoyment,” not “utility”;
- privacy:** private use or choice of a medium and its content;
- personalization:** the degree of uniqueness and personalization of the content; (see Szpunar, [7].)

Magdalena Szpunar [7] attempts to conceptualize the New Media. After McQuail (2007), she refers to their specific features such as:

- their interrelation;
- the access of individual users, who can be senders and receivers (sencievers) at the same time;
- their interactive character, the multiplicity of ways to be used;
- and their openness, ubiquity, spatial underspecification and delocalization.

According to Skrzypczak [8], “the new media introduce new qualities to culture, among others, intertextuality and unification of forms and television genres”⁸. His Popular Encyclopaedia of Mass Media defines the new media as all media techniques and technologies which have commonly been used since the mid nineteen-eighties. The Internet is most often used as a main exemplification of the new media due to its specific communicative features. Szpunar [7] underlines that scholars whose scientific interests are placed within the media theory do not have a clear-cut standpoint in reference to what the new media is. On one hand, television is considered to be an indicator of the appearance

⁷translation – N.M.

⁸translation – N.M.

of the new media. On the other hand, the new media is said to be defined as the criteria of the medium and interactivity, additionally stating that the new media requires active participation of a receiver and the use of electronic equipment. Manovich [9] asserts that the new media is the analog media converted into digital form. He singles out five characteristics or basic principles of the new media:

the numerical coding of the media: “[a] new media object can be described formally (mathematically); [a] new media object is subject to algorithmic manipulation; objects created on computers originate in a numerical form; many new media forms are converted from various forms of old media; this process assumes that data is continuous; converting the continuous data into numerical representation is called ‘digitization’; when converted the objects consist of discrete, non-continuous elements.

modularity: in other words it is ‘fractal structure of new media’; the elements are stored independently and can be modified independently without a necessity to interfere into the structure of the whole.”

automation: “the numerical coding of media [...] and the modular structure of a media object [...] allow for the automation of many operations involved in media creation, manipulation and access. [...] human intentionality can be removed from the creative process, [...]”

variability: “[a] new media object is not something fixed once and for all but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions ... instead of identical copies [as in the case of the old media] a new media object typically gives rise to many different versions ... these versions are often in part automatically assembled by a computer.”

transcoding: “new media ... can be thought of as consisting of two layers – the ‘cultural layer’ and the ‘computer layer’; these layers are being composited together; [t]he result of this composite is a new computer culture – a blend of human and computer meanings of traditional ways in which human culture modeled the world and the computers own means of representing it.”

According to McQuail, 2007 (cf Szpunar [7]), the Internet, which is most often associated with the new media, does not only serve to produce and spread information, but it also provides for its processing, exchange and storage. Alongside other forms of new media, it is an institution of public and private communication whose functioning is not organized in a bureaucratic way when compared to the mass media. It is often stressed that the Internet is almost a single really autonomous and free medium which allows

for the open expression of one’s needs and, if necessary, opposition.

Undoubtedly, as Szpunar [7] suggests, the distinct characteristics of the new media, to which Manovich and other authors pay attention (cf Krzysztofek, 2006) are the following ones: digitization of all their elements, convergence of different media, difference in communication: from mass communication towards network communication, fragmentation and further obliteration of media institution, and the weakening of social control. Here, the convergence should be especially emphasized. Jenkins [10] defines convergence as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences [...] Convergence is the word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural and social changes depending on who’s speaking and what they think they are talking about.”

According to McQuail [6] convergence of the media is connected with their digitalization. He calls it “the most widely noted potential consequence for the media institution ... in terms of their organization, distribution, reception and regulation.” In the same edition of his book the researcher ascribes “much more revolutionary consequences” to convergence and digitalization and names the Internet a medium which combines the features of radio, film and television. He also claims after Poster (1999) that distribution channels are much more efficient in comparison to print and radio. Moreover, they make possible conversations in the mode many-to-many, enable real-time, synchronous reception, modification and “redistribution of cultural objects”. These technologies operate on a global scale and enclose a user into a networked computer which provides an instant contact with the World Wide Web.

Network Society

Information, which does not constitute any material dimension, is the foundation of present day economy. As Filiciak [11] asserts it has become a key element of all the spheres of people’s activities from cultural to political. Therefore, the notion of the “information society” coined by Tadao Umesao, a Japanese publicist, appeared in the Japanese press more than half a century ago. Its emergence resulted from the fact that new communication technologies started playing a more salient role in the principles of social organization of the post-industrial society and production. In the economic sphere it was manifested by a shift in investment and research priorities, and this novel definition was supposed to reflect the changes the new technology brought into this process. The scientific minds of Western Europe and the USA stated then that production was dominated by the sector of services alongside the expansion of consumption and the development of leisure culture. The character

of work also changed, and a lot of workers had to change their specialization areas in order to ensure a place in the job market. Flexibility became a key-word, which caused the lowering of the status of work and brought individual passions and hobbies into focus. Values and norms once established in societies were questioned by their members. The shift in the old paradigm of thinking was evident, especially in well-developed countries which had new computer technologies at their disposal. The borderline between consumption and production blurred. The changes climaxed in the appearance of the Internet and “the network society.”

According to sociologists, the direction of changes goes from society to technology not the other way round; nevertheless, the economy always creates either a favourable or unfavourable background for the development of other spheres of human activity. Castells [12] emphasizes that “[s]ociety shapes technology according to the needs, values, and interests of people who use the technology. Furthermore, information and communication technologies are particularly sensitive to the effects of social uses on technology itself.” The author conceptualizes the network society as a social structure based on the interaction between the society and new technologies in a broad sense of these notions. A network, which is a complex structure, is a more adequate definition for the contemporary society. Castells [12] in his incisive analysis into the development of societies from a global perspective propounds that the perception of the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century is characterized by the recognition of two types of societies which are either in the leading group in terms of their participation in global economy, culture and politics or the ones that are in their transitional phases from traditional models of societies to the network societies. New technologies and media also undergo serious transformations alongside the societies adjusting and adapting to their needs. Filiaciak [11] argues that despite the fact that these changes are uprooted in technologies, they influence the media first and foremost in the forms of reception practices. The types of participation in culture change as much as in other spheres. A range of new phenomena connected with bidirectionality of information exchange have emerged. The relations between the senders and the receivers of information have transformed due to the opening of the media to the Internet users’ participation. The Internet is a more powerful social medium in comparison to its predecessors. More and more people express their opinions in Internet forums, actively write blogs, exchange video files in Torrents or create and remix music. Castells [13] calls this phenomenon “self-directed mass communication.” Subsequently, he warns that the rise of the so-called surveillance society, where information on ordinary individuals is gathered and stored. However, unlike other researchers on the phenomenon, he argues that society should be less concerned with

“big brother” and more worried about “little sister” [13]. In other words, the power of the social network lies in hands of individual users. Castells believes that the authority of information and the globality of network society will constantly increase and gain power, and the process of its development is unavoidable. Following his ideas, the parallel between “gaining power” by individual users and the increase of the internet hatred seem to be of extreme importance.

The Reasons for Internet Hatred

Both the impact of new technologies on society and culture and its negative consequences have been highly debated issues. The emancipatory nature of the Internet created various possibilities for its users. Subsequently, the phenomenon is echoed in works by authors such as George Gilder (1990), Nicholas Negroponte (1995) and Neil Postman (1993). While Gilder and Negroponte highlight the positive effect of new media on the society, Postman [14] points towards its negative aspects. He creates a theory that the contemporary society can be seen as “Technopoly”; that is to say, a society controlled entirely by new technological forms. Such a society is devoted to and dominated by a blind faith in science and technology yet without any purpose or meaning. It produces vast quantities of information without any possible means of evaluating it. As he underlines “technopoly is a state of culture. It is also a state of mind. It consists in the deification [becoming a god] of technology” [14]. Undoubtedly, the theory developed by Postman contributes to the investigation of possible reasons for hatred on the Internet. The lack of limits and possible control gives haters a false feeling of freedom. In other words, the absence of immediate reaction to inappropriate, uncontrolled behaviour develops abnormalities and social dysfunctions that undoubtedly disrupt internet communication. Chaciński (2011) in Juza [1] claims, that aggressive behaviour towards another person on the Internet is not without purpose. It is created intentionally in order to evoke certain emotions and to put pressure on people. It requires a lot of involvement to slight others. Everybody may become a target for internet haters, but there is no evidence that haters may constitute a homogeneous social group with an established code of behaviour. However, haters tend to disrupt communities in quite similar and predictable ways. In one of the articles published in *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, John Suler, a psychologist from Rider University in Lawrenceville describes some reasons for the phenomenon known as the *online disinhibition effect* [15]. The term refers to common patterns of behaviour of people in cyberspace. While online people tend to loosen up, feel more uninhibited, express themselves more openly and say things they would not ordinarily say or do in the face-to-face world. Suler tries to characterize the psychological

aspects of such behaviour by distinguishing two main types of disinhibition effects: benign disinhibition and toxic disinhibition. Subsequently, Suler tries to explain the split character of internet users. Sharing some personal data with others via social networking sites e.g. Facebook or Twitter, showing unusual acts of generosity or extreme emotions that tend to be rather harmless are generally classified as benign disinhibition. On the other hand, the excessive use of vulgarisms or harsh criticism that turns into unlimited outburst of anger and hatred are described as toxic inhibition. What is more, benign inhibition is an attempt at self-exploration, whereas toxic inhibition is an unsavoury and quite often pointless act without any particular reason or benefit for the hater [15].

The theory of inhibition seems to have an enormous impact on understanding the reasons and mechanisms of internet hatred. One of the factors that benefits both forms of inhibition mentioned above is anonymity. Due to that people have the opportunity to separate their virtual world from reality. It gives them a feeling of impunity. What is more, they feel more encouraged to open up and dissociate from all negative actions by rejecting personal responsibility for them.

People who insult others via the Internet seem to think that they are invisible (superficial invisibility). Invisibility quite often encourages people to go places or see things they would not go or see in reality. It allows someone to insult an opponent without looking him in his face. In other words, being invisible creates a kind of psychological comfort of not seeing things. It is a lot easier to attack people and remain both anonymous and unseen. Patricia Wallace [16] redevelops the idea of virtual invisibility claiming that the lack of direct contact consequently redoubles the feeling of impunity among internet haters. In such conditions there is no place for empathy towards other human being or a feeling of guilt. Walrave and Heirman [17] refer to the phenomenon above as to the *cockpit effect*, claiming that internet haters do not see the victims of their attacks just like pilots who bombard people's houses. From their perspective nothing actually happens. They do not witness directly the harmful outcomes they cause. A common belief that "in the Internet one can always do more" strengthens the idea that it is a space of less restrictive social rules and norms. It is worth mentioning that in this case not only the users are to blame. Various online market contributors allow people to publish and comment on their pages. They treat an online user as a potential client who buys online and consequently drives commercial practices. Moreover, active users are a highly desired group as they generate the spread of popularity of a portal. Aggressive comments lure them with ease mainly because aggression has the power to generate active discussion. Subsequently, it is obvious that the restriction

of hate practices is not profitable for marketing middlemen on the Internet.

In the context of various research, Batorski [18] states that a factor that undoubtedly supports the spread on-line hate is the age of active internet users. Along with the popularization of the Internet, the groups of users have become diversified. Subsequently, the age and social status of online users have significantly lowered. It means that a number of young users has increased, and the Internet has become a mass medium. In reference to that more offensive and aggressive comments appeared. Nowadays, the Internet is a basic tool of communication between teenagers. Experiences on the Internet have become an indispensable part of their real life. With the new age group, a new face of internet hatred appeared. It is popularly classified as cyberbullying [18]. The phenomenon is defined as "a bullying that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites. Examples of cyberbullying include mean text messages or emails, rumors sent by email or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profile [19]." In specific less controlled conditions, young people do not have any particular motivation to obey rules and norms which they would obey in reality. Moreover, it is a natural reaction for them to cross the borders and check exactly where the line of acceptable behaviour is. Quite often they make rude remarks instinctively without worrying about the possible consequences. As Jaroszyńska [20] states, Polish youngsters tend to be more aggressive in their comments than teenagers in France or Germany. Perhaps the system is to blame. Polish teenagers have three times easier access to the Internet than any other teenager in Europe. Moreover, the social background, family environment or a natural proclivity of Poles to complain are additional reasons that influence the phenomenon of internet bullying among Polish teenagers. The reasons may be quite different, and their behaviour is exceptionally unpredictable.

Finally, as Maria Cywińska [21] asserts hate is not only about aggression. As the term remains quite ambiguous and diversified, it may also refer to a specific sense of humour based on crossing of accepted social borders. An example may be a Facebook fan page titled "Hate, cause I like it" or "Hate Warsaw", where citizens of a particular city can release their emotions connected with dissatisfaction related to local policy, economy etc. Cywińska [21] points out the phenomenon of hate on the Internet to be shockingly mechanical. Sometimes a hater is a person who despite giving some constructive criticism is immediately perceived as bad.

Conclusion

The culture of new information communication technologies and network society gave birth to the phenomenon of Internet hatred. One of the popular slogans, "Haters gonna hate" that appeared shortly after, reflects the true nature of this highly detrimental appearance. The escalation of anger in addition to the feeling of anonymity and impunity creates a false sense of existence in a world where no law is executed or simply needed at all. The Internet is a reality where norms and rules are created only for those, who believe laws are important. People got used to the idea of hate, and they often take it as an indispensable rule of their lives. Still, the question where it leads humanity remains unanswered. Despite a dearth of research and various publications on the problem of hatred on the Internet, there are no clear reasons for it. Subsequently, no golden rule how to cope with it exists. It is still expanding as one of the social "dirty pleasures". Undoubtedly, a disconcerting cause may be the problem of young people having unlimited access to the Internet and its content. Bearing in mind the fact that the phenomenon of hatred is serious in Poland, various counteractions and precaution policies have been taken. The need for legal actions against hate on the Internet seems to be one solution to the problem. Moreover, young people should be more aware of their actions towards other peers especially while being online. That is why, educational programmes on prevention of the internet hatred and cyberbullying as a related phenomenon should be implemented into the curriculum. A collective action of the government, entrepreneurs, media representatives, charities and scholars is highly desirable. Finally, people need to change their attitudes towards others. Only the mutual understanding and a deep feeling of respect may neutralize the negative aspect of the Internet hatred.

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