

## KEY WORDS AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE 2020 PRE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN ON FACEBOOK

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**Abstract:** The research paper analyses key words found in pre-election communication of electorally successful political parties, based on which the main communication differences among those parties and the specifics of pre-election communication, as well as the pre-election discourse as a whole, are identified. Research material consists of political parties' microblogs published on individual political parties' Facebook profiles in the period from January 1, 2020 to February 28, 2020, with a reference corpus formed by the total of these microblogs. The analysis showed professionalization of political communication, the use of new, but also traditional ways of interaction with the electorate, pre-election communication based on the presentation of candidates, offensive and combative tone of the most successful parties, self-presentation, hints of persuasive and manipulative techniques, topic points of electoral programmes, but also thematic neutrality and non-specificity that suggest smaller electoral success.

**Keywords:** key words analysis, Facebook, microblog, pre-election communication

### 1 INTRODUCTION

This research paper focuses on key words in a pre-election campaign and is the part of a broader-based research, the aim of which is to map linguistic and communication specificities of the respective types of discourse. Although an interest in political and media communication has been noted in the Slovak linguistic environment (see more: [1], [2]), a more systematic focus on pre-election communication through social media is yet to emerge. The situation may be surprising, as social media offer relatively accessible research material, and with further analysis a more comprehensive picture of this specific communication sphere could be obtained. Today, this specific communication sphere falls under the field of political marketing [3], which also suggests further application possibilities for such research.

### 2 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

#### 2.1 Social media in pre-election campaigns

The importance of social media in the pre-election campaign is often mentioned in connection with the victories of U.S. presidents B. Obama (YouTube) and

D. Trump (Twitter). In the Slovak geopolitical space, the importance of such media is associated with the presidential election campaign of I. Radičová in 2009 (Facebook) and with the unexpected electoral success of the political party Sloboda a Solidarita ('Freedom and Solidarity') in 2010 (Facebook). The natural incorporation of social media into the pre-election campaign is determined by its specifics, as this type of media differs from the traditional electronic types such as radio and television.<sup>1</sup> Taking into account the topic of this research paper, what matters the most is that although anyone, even a political party, can be an author of any content, whether it is socially relevant or trivial and highly individualized, the basic technical and currently more lax legislative rules must be adhered to nonetheless. The communication model of disseminating the message through a network of participants strengthens the balance between the author and the recipient. This enables the voter to get an impression of active participation in political activities through being in virtual contact with a political party. The topics, which political parties covered in their microblogs or statuses in the pre-election period, therefore became a stimulating study subject. The aim is to identify thematic areas of individual political parties and, subsequently, to compare them while characterizing the main thematic areas of pre-election discourse. Topics of the specific political parties that can be perceived as prominent are the basis for the research.

## 2.2 Key words, target texts and reference corpus

A key words analysis (see more: [7], [8]) served as a functional and methodological support in meeting the objectives. A key word can be characterized as a unit "whose frequency within the text is significantly higher than it would be expected based on the frequency of this unit in the reference corpus" [9]. Key words based on using statistical tests (chi-square test or log-likelihood test) are corpus-based and they should represent general usage. The DIN (difference index) is calculated if units show a statistically significant difference. The range for this value is  $\langle -100, 100 \rangle$ . A value of  $-100$  means that the given word form is not present in the target text, but can be found in the reference corpus, and a value of  $100$  means that the element is present in the target text, but is absent from the reference corpus.

The KWords application [10] was used for key words identification. However, this application does not identify lemmas, but word forms. Using a stop-list, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and numbers were excluded from the corpora, and both statistical tests were selected, setting the minimum occurrence frequency to 5. The main focus was on key words with a DIN range of  $\langle 80, 100 \rangle$ , as the main interest is on prominent political party topics, although other aspects were taken into account in the analysis as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Specialised literature offers a number of approaches to social media and their specificities (see more: [4], [5], [6]).

The research material consists of communications obtained from the social network Facebook, posted on the profile pages of each electorally successful political party in the period before the Slovak parliamentary elections of 2020 (January 1, 2020 – February 28, 2020). This covered a total of 1,102 microblogs which consist of 66,517 tokens and 17,214 word forms, and together with the communication of the three selected political subjects (ranked by their electoral success: PS/SPOLU, KDĽ, SNS), they form the reference corpus (1,847 microblogs, 142,144 tokens and 23,293 word forms). The reference corpus was selected in accordance with the goal of this paper, which was to show the differences between the topics addressed by the individual political parties in the context of general social media pre-election standards applicable during the period under investigation. The next step could be to expand the material, i.e., to use larger (balanced) contemporary Slovak corpora to research social media communication. Table 1 shows the extent to which each political party participated in this number, as also the scope of the target texts is recorded for each political party. Microblogs were not analysed separately but as an integral part of text produced by each political party.

### 3 KEY WORDS ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 Relevant data

Relevant data regarding the communication of individual political parties are presented before the actual key words analysis in Table 1. Outputs from the KWord application, together with statistical test values, as well as DIN values, are available on the GitHub platform due to space-saving efforts – <https://github.com/NataliaKolencikova/Key-words-and-political-parties-in-the-2020-pre-election-campaign-on-Facebook>. The examples used in other parts of the research paper are presented in an authentic form, without any corrections. Since the application was set to ignore case sensitivity, also proper names, if not quoted, are written with a lower-case initial letter.

Political party	Election result	Number of microblogs	Number of tokens	Number of word forms	Key words DIN = <80, 100>
<b>OEANO</b> (‘Ordinary People and Independent Personalities’)	25.02 %	280	12,791	3,174	<i>kresťanská</i> ‘christian’, <i>nova</i> ‘new majority’, <i>kú</i> ‘chu’, <i>zámocká</i> ‘castle’, <i>zdola</i> ‘from below’, <i>sopko</i> , <i>bystriansky</i> , <i>moderuje</i> ‘hosted by’, <i>jožo</i> , <i>pročko</i> , <i>kristián</i> , <i>historickú</i> ‘historical’, <i>rozhodni</i> ‘decide’, <i>čekovský</i> , <i>jara</i> , <i>krajčí</i> , <i>rozprávať</i> ‘talk’, <i>peťo</i> , <i>nada</i> , <i>spravodajstva</i> ‘intelligence’, <i>oborník</i> , <i>obyčajní</i> ‘ordinary’, <i>nezávislé</i> ‘independent’, <i>osobnosti</i> ‘personalities’, <i>posielajte</i> ‘send’, <i>debatovať</i> ‘debating’, <i>tieňový</i> ‘shadow’, <i>jara</i> , <i>únia</i> ‘union’, <i>kandidátom</i> ‘candidates’, <i>súhlasíte</i> ‘agree’, <i>heger</i> , <i>dole</i> ‘down’

Political party	Election result	Number of microblogs	Number of tokens	Number of word forms	Key words DIN = <80, 100>
Smer – SD (‘Direction – Social Democracy’)	18.29 %	119	5,064	1,808	<i>imigrantov</i> ‘immigrants’, <i>sd</i> , <i>zodpovedne</i> ‘responsibly’, <i>blanár</i> , <i>beseda</i> ‘conference’, <i>matovičovci</i> , <i>tlačová</i> ‘press’, <i>opozícia</i> ‘opposition’, <i>zodpovedná</i> ‘responsible’, <i>opatrenia</i> ‘measures’, <i>premier</i> ‘prime minister’
Sme rodina – Boris Kollár (‘We Are Family – Boris Kollár’)	8.24 %	223	12,560	3,223	<i>holý</i> , <i>adriana</i> , <i>pčolinská</i> , <i>borisa</i> , <i>nachádzame</i> ‘to be in’, <i>miletička</i> , <i>krajiak</i> , <i>doplatkov</i> ‘copayments’, <i>lukáč</i> , <i>senica</i> , <i>pčolinský</i> , <i>boris</i> , <i>nájomných</i> ‘rental’, <i>poslankyňa</i> ‘female parliamentarian’, <i>rodina</i> ‘family’, <i>hnutie</i> ‘movement’, <i>bytov</i> ‘apartments’, <i>kollár</i> , <i>lieky</i> ‘medicines’, <i>odpovedať</i> ‘answer’, <i>ekonomický</i> ‘economic’, <i>vysielaní</i> ‘broadcasting’)
ESNS (‘People’s Party – Our Slovakia’)	7.97 %	19	237	159	<i>kotleba</i>
Sloboda a solidarita (‘Freedom and Solidarity’)	6.22 %	252	13,455	3,933	<i>ideamedia</i> , <i>majerniková</i> , <i>priemyselná</i> ‘industrial’, <i>návod</i> ‘guide’, <i>zemanová</i> , <i>klus</i> , <i>oks</i> , <i>zelená</i> ‘green’, <i>ďuriš</i> , <i>nicholsonová</i> , <i>sas</i> ‘fs’, <i>sloboda</i> ‘freedom’, <i>solidarita</i> ‘solidarity’, <i>podnikať</i> ‘run a business’)
Za ľudí (‘For people’)	5.77 %	209	22,410	4,917	–

Tab. 1. Relevant data of key word analysis

### 3.2 OĽANO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, OPIP)

The results of the most successful political party, both the key words and their concordances, show that the entity frequently uses paid advertising for communication, about which the public must be informed if used in the pre-election campaign as it is a legislative obligation to do so. This is done through a short, usually formal addition to the microblog, which also has a given form: *Objednávateľ: OBYČAJNÍ ĽUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti (OĽANO), NOVA, Kresťanská únia (KÚ), ZMENA ZDOLA, Zámocká 14, Bratislava IČO:42287511 Dodávateľ: Facebook Ireland Limited, 4 Grand Canal Square, Írsko, IČO:462962* ‘Client: **Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OPIP), New Majority, Christian Union (CHU), Change from Below**, 14 **Zámocká** street, Bratislava CRN: 42287511 Supplier: Facebook Ireland Limited, 4 Grand Canal Square, Ireland, CRN: 462962’. However, the relevant words that form this part of the microblog need to be taken relatively in connection to the parties’ thematic pre-election campaign, as its competitors have no reason to use words such as the party’s address, which justifies the statistical difference between these elements in target texts and the reference corpus. However, it can be noticed that the words

*objednávateľ* ‘client’ and *dodávateľ* ‘supplier’ are not key words nor words of statistically significant difference compared to the reference corpus of any political party, and, therefore, it can be stated that it is a common part of the examined discourse and that these administrative elements demonstrate the professionalization of political communication and are, in fact, common in pre-election microblogs.

The model and repetitiveness have an impact on some other key words that are related to wider technological possibilities of social media, such as live broadcasting, which serves as a tool to strengthen interaction with the voter – *CHCEME SA S VAMI ROZPRÁVAŤ* ‘WE WOULD LIKE TO TALK TO YOU’; *Predstavujeme vám našich kandidátov do volieb 2020. Dnes sledujte naživo rozhovor s Erikom Ňarjašom, naším kandidátom č. 14. Svoje otázky na Erika posielajte do komentárov* ‘We present you our candidates for the 2020 elections. Do not miss today’s live interview with Erik Ňarjaš, our **candidate** no. 14. **Send** your questions for Erik to the comment section’; *Sledujte dnešnú diskusiu s (...) Moderuje Matúš Bystriansky.* ‘Watch today’s discussion with (...) **hosted** by Matúš **Bystriansky**.’ These examples show that the aforementioned activities could be connected to a relatively large number of anthroponyms that refer to specific candidates (*sopko, pročko, čekovský, krajčí, nad, oborník, heger*). Taking into account that this political party was in the opposition in the pre-election period and those are politically rather unknown personalities. Their presentation by domestic subject has a significant impact on differences that occur when anthroponymic elements are compared to the general usage and what is more, colloquialisation discourse tendencies are indicated (*jožo, jaro/jara, peťo*). When specific candidates are presented, also specific terms appear among the key words. Even though their connection to political discourse is connotatively accurate, their full extent is only shown in specific collocations – *tieňový minister* ‘the **shadow** minister’ and *bývalý riaditeľ Vojenského spravodajstva* ‘former director of Military **Intelligence**’. According to pre-election polls, this political party’s leader name appears commonly in general usage, thus is absent from the group of strongest key words. Nevertheless, regarding the communication of his political party, the word *matovič* has a fairly high DIN (75). Moreover, it is collocatively associated with another key word – *Už dnes bude Igor Matovič debatovať s Richardom Rašim v relácii Na Hrane* ‘Today, Igor Matovič will be **debating** Richard Raši on the Na Hrane show’.

Although the strongest key words do not include the word *volby* ‘elections’, it is present in the OPIP communication by emphasizing the importance and uniqueness of Slovakia’s situation, which should be the means of activating the electorate as it is based on criticism and attacks made against the currently ruling party; thanks to the elections, we will have *historickú možnosť zrušiť vládu mafianov* ‘a **historic** opportunity to abolish the mafia government’ and *mafiu dáme vo voľbách spoločne dole* ‘we will put the mafia **down** together in the elections’. *Rozhodni* ‘decide’ and *súhlasíte* ‘agree’ are the key words of the unique survey, in which people had the opportunity to vote on the points of the next government of the Slovak Republic mission statement.

### 3.3 Smer – SD (Direction – SD)

In the political communication of Direction – SD, the key word *imigrantov* ‘immigrants’ reaches the highest DIN and based on its occurrence in mainly negative contexts, it is safe to imply the use of emotionally based persuasive techniques. This creates a sense of threat and reinforces the fear coming from an idea that political elites may shift the attention from ordinary citizens to immigrants – *Zodpovedný plán lídra strany SMER – SD Petra Pellegriniho je o spokojnosti našich občanov, nie imigrantov* ‘The responsible plan of the Direction – SD leader Peter Pellegrini is to secure well-being for our citizens, not immigrants’. The solution to this situation is responsibility, both on the voters’ side (*Volte zodpovedne!* ‘Vote responsibly!’), as well as on the side of the state officials (*Migračná kríza je najväčšia výzva pre EÚ a preto je dôležité, aby sa aj budúca vláda správala zodpovedne a chránila naše hranice.* ‘The migration crisis is the biggest challenge for the EU and it is, therefore, important that the future government behaves responsibly and protects our borders.’). In contrast to the disunited and unstable opposition (*opozícia je rozhádaná* ‘the opposition quarrels among themselves’; *opozícia vytvára chaos* ‘the opposition creates chaos’; *opozícia bojuje medzi sebou* ‘the opposition is full of infighting’), the political party itself should represent the desired responsibility (*zodpovedná zmena* ‘responsible change’ as an electoral slogan).

The key word *sd*, i.e., an acronym for social democracy, expresses the party’s political orientation and is semantically related to the key word (*sociálne*) *opatrenia*, (social) **measures**. This key word indicates that the abbreviated form of the name is common within general usage and also that this political party perceives social and media communication as public and formal. The dominant genre of the pre-election campaign is *tlačová beseda* ‘press conference’, while the usage of extended technological possibilities of social media is outside their main focus. This is surely related to the main focus being on the electorate, whose main information source is still traditional electronic media.

The formal nature of communication is also supported by the fact that unlike political communication of OPIP, informal forms of politicians’ names were not found in the Direction – SD communication. As this political party was the ruling party in the pre-election period, criticism from other entities is expected and, therefore, elements referring to its main representatives were not found among the strongest key words (*fico*, without statistically relevant difference; *pellegrini*, DIN = 76). As it is an already well-known political party, elements whose statistical significance would refer to activities aimed at the presentation of its members are excluded from the subject’s communication. The only proper-name element that contradicts this statement is the key word *blanár*. However, the political party presents its leaders through their functions – *premier (Peter Pellegrini)* ‘Prime Minister (Peter Pellegrini)’ (*predseda* ‘chairman’, DIN = 72). Emotional and expressive expressions are used in the communication of then ruling party in order

to express a markedly offensive, critical and hostile attitude towards the leader of a competing political party – *Matovičovi sa nedá veriť ako premiérovi. Ohavná pravda o Matovičovi!* ‘Matovič cannot be trusted as a prime minister. The disgusting truth about Matovič!’. The overlapping of emotionality with the aforementioned formality does not necessarily suggest erroneous interpretation, as by using key words analysis, it was possible to point out the already known hybrid nature of Internet texts that is caused by the disruption of the boundaries between stylistic factors that are otherwise clearly defined and objective [11].

### 3.4 Sme Rodina (We Are a Family)

The derived key words from the political party We Are a Family suggests they are using social media along three basic lines. The first is the line of candidates presentation (*holý, adriana, pčolinská, krajniak, lukáč, pčolinský*), including their leader (*boris/borisa, kollár*). As in the case of previous political parties, here, too, the emphasis on the candidate position was observed but this time within the party itself – *náš ekonomický expert Štefan Holý* ‘our **economic** expert Štefan Holý’. The We Are a Family is the only political party that has a feminine word form that refers to a candidate among its key words – *poslankyňa* ‘female parliamentarian’, which points to a higher number of women in the leading positions, however the issue of gender-balanced language usage deserves much deeper attention.

The second thematic line is related to the use of social media opportunities as a means to communicate with the electorate and is based on a strong interactive “meet and greet” campaign. When the political party representatives met with the citizens during the campaign, they informed about it promptly and flexibly via social networks – *Momentálne sa nachádzame v meste Košice, a tešíme sa na každé jedno stretnutie, podanie ruky, či rozhovor* ‘**We are** currently **in** the city of Košice, and we are excited to meet, handshake and interview any of you’. The *miletička* market and the *senica town* are specific places that this political party visited more often than their political competitors. However, We Are a Family also draws on the new technological possibilities of social media and the inherent two-way communication chain on which it is based – *Boris bude odpovedať na vaše otázky už dnes o 20:00 v živom vysielaní tu, na našom Facebooku!* ‘Boris will **answer** your questions today at 8PM in a live **broadcast** here, on our Facebook page!’.

The third thematic line is linked to the specific points of the election programme as it concerns topics of *doplatkov za lieky* ‘**copayments for medicines**’ and *nájomných bytov* ‘**rental apartments**’, which make evident populist orientation, but populism in this context is not understood as a persuasive or manipulative technique, but as a political approach based on connecting to the average person who may feel overlooked by the political elites [12]. The key word *rodina* ‘family’, which could intuitively also be one of the main points of the election programme, is contextually linked to the party presentation itself (*Ak by sa voľby konali v prvej*

*polovici januára, tak by naše **hnutie** SME **RODINA** podľa agentúry Focus volilo 7.1% voličov* ‘If the elections took place in the first half of January, our **movement** WE ARE A **FAMILY** would receive 7.1% of the votes according to FOCUS agency’) and to the administrative nature concluded in the OPIP key words analysis.

### 3.5 ESNS (People’s Party – Our Slovakia, PPOS)

In the case of the political party of PPOS, only one anthroponym key word referring to its leader was identified. This may be due to lower number of communications published in the pre-election period as in 2017, Facebook suspended the main page of this political party with more than 80,000 followers for spreading inappropriate content. Although the party has re-created its official website, its communication with supporters is currently taking place mainly through dozens of fan pages and sites of regional organizations. Unfortunately, it is therefore not possible to draw more general conclusions about this party’s thematic orientation. It is an unfortunate situation as these findings could be very interesting given the party’s specific position on the Slovak political spectrum. Since the party repeatedly publishes mainly quotations of its leader, it can only be stated that his personality represents all party’s opinions, as well as its current and future attitudes – *Marian Kotleba: Vybuchnutý panelák v Prešove ukazuje neschopnosť politikov KDH* ‘**Marian Kotleba**: An exploded apartment building in Prešov shows the incompetence of the Christian Democratic Movement’.

### 3.6 Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS (Freedom and Solidarity, FS)

Paid advertisement is also frequently used by the FS political party as five of the fourteen key words falls under the aforementioned administrative side of microblogs – *ideamedia, majerníková, priemyselná* ‘industrial (street)’, *sloboda* ‘freedom’, *solidarita* ‘solidarity’. In self-presentation, this party mostly uses the FS acronym, and the key words show a significant inclination towards *Občianska konzervatívna strana* (‘Civic Conservative Party’) (*PODCAST SaS: Kandidáti OKS sa ocitli na kandidátke SaS už v roku 2016, neskôr aj v eurovoľbách*. ‘PODCAST FS: **OKS** candidates found themselves on the **FS** list of political candidates in 2016 and later in the European election.’). The FS party uses social networks to present its candidates to a limited extent (*klus, duriš, nicholsonová*) and the name of its leader is absent among the strongest key words. Although the key word *sulík* is thematised in the general usage, its DIN is 73. Using all technological possibilities of social media leads to one element appearing among the key words that refers exclusively to one candidate, *Anna Zemaníková*, who posts regularly on her profile page *Anna Zemaníková – Zelená pre naše deti* ‘**Anna Zemaníková – Green** for our children’, in which the party also claims to have environmental experts among its members. The FS is also characterized by drawing attention to their precisely described election programme, from which the economic area especially comes to the fore as it



is also included in the party's election slogan – *Náš Návod na lepšie Slovensko. 1144 konkrétnych riešení aby sa tu oplátilo pracovať, podnikat' a žiť* 'Our **guide** to a better Slovakia. 1,144 specific solutions for making Slovakia a great place for work, **business**, and living'.

### 3.7 Za ľudí (For People)

There were no key words detected in the communication of the political party For People under the set criteria. However, this is not a matter of limited quantity of research material as in the case of the PPOS political party. This political party in its election campaign simply does not thematise any problem to an extent where it would significantly differ from the general usage. However, claiming that the analysis did not reveal any key words would be incorrect, as the strongest key words have a DIN of 72. Although a few of these key words suggest that the party's prioritised pre-election strategy was presenting its candidates (such as *remišová, valášek, šeliga*) or using new electronic genres (such as *spotify, audiomapa* 'audiomap', *epizóde* 'episode'), nothing provides more information about its programme orientation. Based on these findings, it can be assumed that this thematic neutrality contributed to the low election result of the party. However, confirming this hypothesis would require further key words analysis of political parties that did not fare well in the parliamentary elections, as it is not examined here due the limited length of this research paper.

## 4 CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of key words obtained from the parliamentary parties pre-election communication on Facebook, general characteristics of Slovak pre-election communication and pre-election discourse can be drawn. The key words that were obtained through the aforementioned coherent and logical schemes confirm frequent use of paid advertisements, which suggest professionalization of political communication [4] that is, paradoxically, closely linked to administrative elements that can be found at the superficial and deep level of microblogging. The thematisation of political parties' specific areas in comparison with the general usage may be largely influenced by the model and repetition that can be observed in electoral slogans or in the use of fixed text schemes that are only changed in specific situations. This concerns mainly texts that are usually associated with the technological possibilities of social media and how they can be used, which is characteristic especially of political parties oriented towards a younger electorate (especially OPIS, We Are a Family, sometimes FS). However, the use of traditional election campaign strategies was detected as well (thematization of press conferences and "meet and greet" campaigns). Political parties take into account the principles of the Slovak electoral system and accordingly present their candidates on social

networks while emphasizing their specific function or position. The form of their names, especially in the case of the most successful political party, indicates colloquialization tendencies. As for the leaders of political parties, their names can be found in the group of strong key words, but not the strongest, which indicates their partial thematisation in the general usage. However, this statement does not apply to the main representatives of We Are a Family and PPOS. Regarding the two electorally most successful political parties (OPIP, Direction – SD), an aggressive and combative tone of communication was detected whereas self-presentation is characteristic for the political parties We Are a Family and FS. The election programme main topics and strategies can be seen in the key words as well (survey – OPIP; immigrants – Direction – SD; copayments for medicines and rental apartments – We Are a Family; business – FS), however, according to this research, thematic neutrality and non-specificity implies lower electoral success. The thematisation of what might be considered a higher, noble, and more abstract idea can only be observed within the two most successful political parties' communication (elections as a historical chance – OPIP; responsibility – Direction – SD).

The key word analysis undertaken provided a more detailed insight into the complex picture of this unique communication sphere and helped to point out the differences related to thematic orientation of electorally successful political parties' pre-election activities, which may suggest its application possibilities within the field of political marketing. The discourse analysis outlined other possibilities for further research. What seems to be valuable and helpful is comparing results from this research with the results obtained from the key words analysis of electorally unsuccessful political parties, but also comparing key words with thematic words. A future focus on persuasive and manipulative strategies, especially on emotionally based techniques, *ad personam* attacks or populism, could also be pragmatically interesting.

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