



DIGITAL SKILLS OF BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES IN ABIA STATE: IMPLICATION FOR CURRICULUM RE-ORGANIZATION AND DIVERSIFICATION

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Abstract

The need to reduce incidence of unemployment among business education graduates necessitated this study. The study ascertained digital skills of business education graduates: Implications for curriculum re-organization and diversification. The study adopted survey research design while all the employers of labour in Abia State formed the population of the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 61 employers in Abia State. A-23 item questionnaire face validated by three experts in the field of education was used for data collected. The reliability of the instrument was established using pilot-test and data collected analyzed using Cronbach alpha formula which yielded coefficients of .89, .81 and .78 obtained for clusters B1 to B3. Mean, standard deviation and t-test were used for data analysis. Findings showed that employers of labour indicated that business education graduates in Abia State do not possess majority of digital accounting, digital marketing and digital information and data skills. Findings also showed that educational qualification was not a significant factor on the mean ratings of employers of labour regarding digital accounting skills, digital marketing and digital information and data skills possessed by business education graduates. Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that business education graduates in Abia State lack the three digital skills covered in this study. It was recommended among others that, curriculum planners should re-organize and diversify accounting education curriculum to include digital courses that will ensure that students acquire digital skills for global competition.

Key Words: Digital Skills, Business Education Graduate, Re-organization, Diversification



Introduction

Currently, the theoretical delivery model of education has been deemed insufficient for the 21st century labour market preparation. Experts and researchers are worried about the global skill mismatch between graduates and technological-driven workplace. Many employers today, find it increasingly difficult in recruiting graduates with the right skills which has contributed to the global unemployment phenomenon (Akpomi & Ikpesu, 2020). In Nigeria, youth/graduate unemployment has taken a new dimension, and has become the major concern of the government. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020) reported that about 50 million Nigerian youths are unemployed, of which 25 million of them are graduates of various tertiary institutions. NBS noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the unemployment situation.

In Nigeria, the government recognizes the need to empower youths with skills by providing functional and qualitative education to make them job creators and reduce youth/graduate unemployment. Ezeani (2014) stated that many countries consider business education programme relevant preparing the youths for productive living. Business education is a dynamic skill-based education programme designed to prepare students by equipping them with requisite skills for gainful employment or self-employment upon graduation. Olumese and Ediagbonya (2016) stated that business education is vocational-oriented and exposes recipients to a number of specialist areas such as secretarial/OTM studies, business management, distributive education, ICT, marketing studies and accounting education. Akpan and Naboth-Odum (2018) view business education as a programme that prepares students for work life experience. It prepares youth for specific skills such as teaching skills, office skills, business skills and other valuable skills for occupation and for employment generation. Business education includes other elements such as the development of technical and entrepreneurial skills to a required standard. Business education prepares individual to take up their work role in the various profession and occupation. It aims at achieving the required skills for self-reliance which will enhance economic development.

The pace of technological change is transforming many occupations thus increasing the need for digital skills (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), 2020). A few years ago, digitization affected only a handful of occupations, but presently; almost every occupation requires the use of digital technologies. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2018) stated that the rapid growth of internet access and connectivity has paved way for the development of a digital economy globally. In agreement, Berger and Frey (2016) stated that majority of occupations now require application of digital skills as they have become critically important for present and future jobs. Additionally, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2017) pointed out that developed countries now lay great emphasis on the citizens to acquire digital skills that will allow them to fully participate in the knowledge society. Similarly, the mass shift to online business operations by organizations due to the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need for graduates to possess digital skills that will enable them help businesses successfully transition to e-commerce world. Employers realize this, and are prioritizing graduates who can showcase digital skills (Kispeter, 2018). Furthermore, by possessing digital skills, graduates have a chance to contribute to their communities, build their careers, and explore a wide range of occupational opportunities.

Digital skills refer to the ability to find, evaluate, use, share, and create content using digital devices, such as computers and smartphones. UNESCO (2018) defined digital skills as those skills needed by workers to utilize electronic gadgets to access and manage information. Okeji, Nwankwo, Anene and Olorunfemi (2020) viewed digital skills as a set of skills that enables individuals to effectively and efficiently perform tasks using new technologies in the digital environment. Development Economics (2013) saw digital skills as those characteristics that enable an employee and his or her company both to use digital equipment and to access, create



or share digital information through the internet and thereby benefit from opportunities in the digital economy. Digital skills refer not only the acquisition of IT skills, it also include other skills such as social, emotional and interpersonal skills that enhance the use of technologies. Today, digital skills required for employability are many, more advanced, and employers expect every graduate of tertiary institution to possess vast majority of them, not just a selected few. Digital skills include cognitive and physical abilities, content and processing skills, social system and complex problem-solving skills, resource management skills and technical skills (World Economic Forum, 2016). Gui and Argentin (2016) listed types of digital skills as operational data skills, formal skills and information and data skills. Others are digital marketing skills, digital accounting skills, data management skills and digital safety skills. This study covered digital accounting skills, digital marketing skills and information and data skills.

Digital accounting skills include ability to: use spreadsheet software tool to enter, sort, calculate, manipulate, and analyze sets of financial data. It also involves ability to use advanced excel package, quick book, and Peachtree accounting software among others for stock control, financial records or in assisting management with budgetary control or sales analysis. According to Schwartz (2020) listed ability to use Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software to carry out business functions; help shape user experiences that enhance performance; help manage expectations regarding budget, schedule and resources; and manage change and contingency plans.

Today's technology-driven economy demands business education graduates to acquire digital marketing skills required self-reliance. Digital marketing is a career that combines traditional marketing, web design, SEO, social media marketing, and content writing. Digital marketing skills include ability to: utilize functional procedures and modern software to gather and process a wide range of marketing information from different online interactions, get rid of incorrect, duplicated or incomplete data from database, generate online marketing brand that will attract consumers' interest, use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) tools to identify target customers and products visible to targeted customers. Other digital marketing skills are ability to: connect with the customers online on regular basis, spreading impactful marketing messages, establish online trust and business relationships, use videos, and as well as social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, LinkedIn to engage customers. Information and data skills required of accounting education graduates encompass abilities to: browse the internet, search for relevant information on the internet, filter or sort data and content, evaluate and analyze information online, manage data, manage digital contents by organizing and storing them (Vuorikari, Punie, Carretero, amp; & Van den Brande, 2016).

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2016), the educational system has the mandate to develop students' digital skills so as to prepare them for employments today and the future. Jørgensen (2019) agreed that higher education have a key role in the digital transformation of societies, particularly in addressing digital skill gaps. As the digital transformation is forging ahead, the question of digital skills possessed by Nigerian graduates has been raised by employers (OECD 2017). The outbreak of COVID-19 has lead to digital skills crises in Nigeria (African Union (AU), 2020). AU stated that employers of labour are concerned about the digital skill gap among male and female graduates in Nigeria. Employers want graduates with digital skills to assist them overcome the effects of Covid-19 pandemic. However, Sunday (2021) observed that majority of graduate lack digital skills to contribute to the growth of Nigerian economy. Similarly, the revelation of World Economic Forum (2020) that Nigeria ranked 122nd out of 140 countries in digital skills development. Similarly, UNESCO (2018) posited that there are major inequalities in digital skills in developing countries along socio-economic status such as race, gender, geography, age and educational background. UNESCO asserted that gender divides in digital skills are severe in women than



men. UNESCO averred that the gender gap in digital technology usage has widened, and tasked tertiary institutions to play leading role in bridging this gap.

Tertiary institutions remain the main agent of change in Nigeria (Adeoye & Adeoye, 2017), and help its technological development by producing graduates with requisite skills. In view of this, Endouware and Yusuf (2021) stated that it is imperative for graduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria to acquire digital skills for employment generation. Berger and Frey asserted that as new technologies emerge, narrow technical skills become insufficient for many emerging jobs and businesses while the demand for higher digital level skills increases. It is more important than ever for business education from time to time to re-organize and diversify their programme to make it more responsive to current as well as future digital skill needs (Bradshaw, 2017). Bradshaw noted that now is the ideal time, therefore, for planners of business education curriculum to re-organize and diversify it to remain relevant.

Re-organization refers to the process of overhauling existing business strategy, setup, and operations to improve productivity (Blakely-Gray, 2019). It can take place when there are financial challenges; emergence of new skills, or standard/quality of service delivery fall below expectations. In the context of this study, re-organization simply means making necessary changes to business education curriculum to reflect current digital skill needs. O'jules (2020) defined re-organization of business education as the act of going back to the drawing board to re-plan, considering modern changes in the planning process to ensure emerging skills and innovative teaching strategies among others are embedded in the teaching and learning of the programme. Re-organization of business education curriculum involves presenting business problems electronically rather than physically (paper). It also includes teachers delivering business education courses using innovative strategies such as case studies, collaborative group work, work-based and flipped classrooms.

Diversification refers to different and various ways of doing things that are acceptable. Diversification according to Offorma (2015), means to differentiate or to give variety to a product or programme. Teichler (2008) defined it as a deviation or departure from a uniform and rigid method or system of delivering a programme to a flexible system that accommodates varying demands within a society or country. The aim of diversification of business education programme is to increase its variety in terms of service delivery. Diversification of accounting education curriculum also involves offering business education students many different digital courses that will help to equip them with digital skills, adopting varied student-centered teaching strategies delivering business education courses taken into consideration students' needs and capabilities, and applying different modern instructional technologies in teaching the courses taken into consideration their suitability to the respective courses.

Business education graduates from tertiary institutions in Nigeria have high hope that after the completion of their studies, they will possess requisite skills for self-reliance. The view is that the competencies acquired should be able to open employment doors for them and they will be able to help such organization enhance increase productivity. However, the fact that most business education graduates remain unemployed years after graduation means that it has become necessary for them to have a more realistic view. Since business education graduates are expected to work in modern business organizations, the opinions of employers on digital skills of business education graduates are important for these graduates to have a realistic view of digital skills they possess given their limited experiential training. Research in various regions of the world has indicated that many graduates lack the digital skills required by employers (Rasul, Abd Rauf, Mansor and Puvanavar, 2012). In the last few decades, however, the demand for digital skills has increased throughout the world (Baciu & Lazar, 2011). As business organization operations of today is in constant change, business education graduates must be



able to adapt by developing the digital skills that employers demand. As the numbers of business education graduates have rapidly proliferated, competition for jobs that require digital skills has become more intense.

Employers of labour may differ in their views of digital skills possessed by business education graduates for better productivity based on educational qualifications. Educational qualification refers to the official confirmation, usually in the form of a certificate, diploma or degree, certifying the successful completion of an education programme. Employers with M.Sc./M.Ed./MBA degree and more may differ with those with only B.Sc./B.Ed./HND degrees on digital skills probably due to having attended higher education which offer them more opportunities to learning and acquire varied digital skills. However, this assumption has not been empirically ascertained in Abia State. The problem of this study is that, in this COVID-19 era, employers of labour are expecting business education graduates to apply digital skills during school to help them recover their significance losses they suffered. However, the fact that many business education graduates remain unemployed years after graduating means that they may not possess the required digital skills needed to fit into modern workplaces. The researcher is worried that if this situation is not addressed, it could worsen the already high graduate unemployed rates in Nigeria especially in Abia State. Based on this background, this study sought to determine digital skills of business education graduates: Implications for curriculum re-organization and diversification. As a result, unemployment rate of Abia State graduates continues to rise while employability rate continues to decline.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to ascertain digital skills of business education graduates: Implications for curriculum re-organization and diversification. Specifically, the study determined;

1. Digital accounting skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State.
2. Digital marketing skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State.
3. Information and data skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study,

1. What are the digital accounting skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State?
2. What are the digital marketing skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State?
3. What are the Information and data skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State?

Null Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance;

1. Employers of labour do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on digital accounting skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of employers of labour on digital marketing skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification.
3. Employers of labour do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on digital information and data skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification.



Method

This study adopted survey research design. It was carried out in Abia State. The population of the study comprised of all the employers of labour in Abia State. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 61 employers in Abia State. Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire Titled “Digital Skills of Accounting Education Graduates (DSAEG) with two section A an B. Section A was designed to elicit demographic information of the respondents such as educational qualification while section B contains 23 items broken down into three clusters of B1 to B3 according to the research questions. The instrument is structured on a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The face validity of the instrument was established using experts in Accountancy, Business Education and Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was carried out using pilot-test and data collected were calculated with Cronbach Alpha formula to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and correlation coefficients of .89, .81 and .78 obtained for clusters B1 to B3. Data were collected personally by the researchers Out of 61 copies of questionnaire distributed, 56 were correctly filled and returned and used for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the researcher questions while t-test was used to test the null hypothesis. A null hypothesis was rejected where the p-value is less than the significant level; otherwise the null hypothesis was accepted. The analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the digital accounting skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State?

Table 1: Respondents’ mean ratings and standard deviation on digital accounting skills possessed by business education graduates

S/N	Items on Digital Accounting skills	X	SD	Remarks
1	Ability to use spreadsheet package to enter financial data	2.51	.78	Agree
2	Ability to use advance excel package to analyze financial data of an organization	1.41	.67	Strongly Disagree
3	Ability to use QuickBooks software to prepare employees’ payroll	1.39	.81	Strongly Disagree
4	Ability to use Peachtree accounting software to prepare organization’s budget	1.09	.71	Strongly Disagree
5	Ability to use Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software to manage budget	1.29	.69	Strongly Disagree
6	Ability to work in a cloud computing environment to save financial data	2.17	.59	Disagree
7	Ability to use of robots (bots) or digital workers to conduct audits	1.29	.71	Strongly Disagree
8	Ability to use of robots (bots) or digital workers to prepare employee’s payroll	1.08	.80	Strongly Disagree
Cluster Mean		1.52		Disagree



Data in table 1 shows that employers rated item 1 agree with mean score of 2.51, item 6 is rated disagree with mean score of 2.17 while the remaining six items (items 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8) with mean scores ranging from 1.09 to 1.41 are rated strongly disagree. The cluster mean score of 1.52 shows that on the whole employers of labour indicated that business education graduates do not possess majority of digital accounting skills listed. The standard deviation for all the items range from .59 to .81 meaning that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean responses.

Research Question 2

What are the digital marketing skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State?

Table 2: Respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on digital marketing skills possessed by business education graduates

S/N	Items on Digital Marketing skills	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
9	Ability to use software like Agorapulse and Hootsuite for scheduling posts, engaging with followers and developing monthly reports	1.67	.72	Disagree
10	Ability to use keyword research and WordPress for content management and publishing.	2.49	.87	Disagree
11	Ability to generate online marketing brand that will attract consumers' interest	3.24	.81	Agree
12	Ability to use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to identify target customers	2.20	.75	Disagree
13	Ability to use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to visible to targeted customers	2.41	.67	Disagree
14	Ability to use paid search platforms like Facebook and Google ads. in online marketing	2.51	.64	Agree
15	Ability to successfully tracking new market developments and try innovative market methods or strategies	2.19	.77	Disagree
Cluster Mean		2.39		Disagree

Data in Table 2 shows that out of 7 digital marketing skills listed that business education graduates are expected to possess, employers agree that they possess items 11 and 14 with mean scores of 2.51 and 3.24 while they disagree on the remaining five items with mean scores of 1.67 to 2.49. The cluster mean score of 2.39 shows that employers of labour indicated that majority of the digital marketing skills listed are not possessed by business education graduates in Abia State. The standard deviation for all the items is within the same range meaning that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean responses.

Research Question 3

What are the Information and data skills possessed by business education graduates o in Anambra Stat?



Table 3: Respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on digital information and data skills possessed by business education graduates

S/N	Items on Digital Information and Data skills	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
16	Ability to find digital information	2.52	.78	Agree
17	Ability to organize digital information	2.42	.71	Disagree
18	Ability to store digital information	2.75	.65	Agree
19	Ability to create digital messages across a range of digital media e.g. graphics, text, audio, animation	1.57	.89	Disagree
20	Ability to communicate digital messages across a range of digital media e.g. graphics, text, audio, animation	2.12	.77	Disagree
22	Ability to manage financial data created online	2.41	.82	Disagree
23	Ability to understand and act upon appropriate guidelines, protocols and safeguards in the use of differing data	1.87	.83	Disagree
Cluster Mean		2.24		Disagree

Data in Table 3 reveals that items 16 and 18 with mean scores of 2.52 and 2.75 are rated agree by respondents while the remaining five items are rated disagree with mean scores ranging between 1.57 to 2.42. The cluster mean score of 2.24 shows that employers indicated that the majority of digital information and data skills listed are not possessed by business education graduates in Abia State. The standard deviation for all the items is within the same range meaning that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean responses.

Hypothesis 1

Employers of labour do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on digital accounting skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification.

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis of employers of labour on digital accounting skills possessed by business education graduates

Educational Qualification	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
B.Sc./B.Ed/HND	19	1.46	.74	54	.12	.13	Not Significant
M.Sc. and Others	37	1.40	.70				

Table 4 shows a t-value of .12 at 54 degree of freedom with a p-value of .13. Since the p-value of .13 is greater than the criterion value of .05 ($P > .05$), the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that employers of labour do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on digital accounting skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of employers of labour on digital marketing skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification.



Table 5: Summary of t-test analysis of employers of labour on digital marketing skills possessed by business education graduates

Educational Qualification	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
B.Sc./B.Ed/HND	19	2.39	.61	54	.32	.43	Not Significant
M.Sc. and Others	37	2.20	.68				

Table 4 shows a t-value of .32 at 54 degree of freedom with a p-value of .43. Since the p-value of .43 is greater than the criterion value of .05 ($P > .05$), the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of employers of labour on digital marketing skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification.

Hypothesis 3

Employers of labour do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on digital information and data skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification.

Table 6: Summary of t-test analysis of employers of labour on digital information and data skills possessed by business education graduates

Educational Qualification	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
B.Sc./B.Ed/HND	19	2.41	.86	54	.18	.08	Not Significant
M.Sc. and Others	37	2.47	.81				

Table 4 shows a t-value of .18 at 54 degree of freedom with a p-value of .08. Since the p-value of .08 is greater than the criterion value of .05 ($P > .05$), the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that employers of labour do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on digital information and data skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study showed that employers of labour indicated that majority of digital accounting skills such as Abilities to: use advance excel package to analyze financial data of an organization, use QuickBooks software to prepare employees' payroll, use Peachtree accounting software to prepare organization's budget, use Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software to manage budget, work in a cloud computing environment to save financial data, and use of robots (bots) or digital workers to conduct audits and prepare employees' payroll are not possess by business education graduates in Abia State. The findings of this study is not surprising to the researcher considering the high rate of unemployment among business education graduates in Abia State. Perhaps, this exponential unemployment rate could be linked to digital accounting skill gaps among business business graduates. The findings of this study agree with that of Akpomi and Ikpesu (2020) which revealed that employers of labour find it increasingly difficult in recruiting graduates with the right skills which has contributed to the global unemployment phenomenon. Rasul, Abd Rauf, Mansor and Puvanasvaran (2012) revealed that employers indicated that many graduates lack digital skills required for employability. The findings of the study showed that educational qualification did not influence employers' opinion on digital accounting skills possess by business education graduates in Abia State. This implies that employers of labour in Abia State regardless of their academic qualifications have observed the digital accounting skills gap of business education students.



Findings of the study also revealed that employers of labour indicated that majority of digital marketing skills listed such as abilities to: *use software like Agorapulse and Hootsuite for scheduling posts, engaging with followers and developing monthly reports, use keyword research and WordPress for content management and publishing, use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to identify target customers, use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to visible to targeted customers, use paid search platforms like Facebook and Google ads. in online marketing, and successfully tracking new market developments and try innovative market methods or strategies are not possessed by business education graduates. It could be that business education graduates were not adequately prepared while in school which have contributed to digital skill gaps among them. The findings of the study agrees with the report of OECD (2017) that employers of labour are worried that graduates of tertiary institutions in Nigeria lack digital skills required to fit into the modern business organizations.* The findings further showed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of employers of labour on digital marketing skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification. This means that the choice of digital marketing skills employers of labour need from business education graduates has nothing to do with their educational qualification

The findings of the study revealed that employers of labour disagree that business education graduates in Abia State possess digital information and data skills. Employers of labour indicated that abilities to: organize digital information, create digital messages across a range of digital media e.g. graphics, text, audio, animation, communicate digital messages across a range of digital media e.g. graphics, text, audio, animation, manage financial data created online, and understand and act upon appropriate guidelines, protocols and safeguards in the use of differing data are not possessed by these graduates while they agree that the graduates possess ability to find digital information and ability to store digital information. In agreement, Jobberman (2020) revealed that graduates in Nigeria may hardly benefit due to the digital and soft skills gaps., Odu (2018) found lack of digital skills among graduate workers in Nigeria, and attributed it to mismatch between to skills in demand within the digital sector and those that graduates possess. Findings of the study also showed that employers of labour do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on digital information and data skills possessed by business education graduates in Abia State based on educational qualification.

Conclusion

Digital skills are no longer optional for business education graduates of tertiary institutions in Abia State, they have become the new normal, and employers are paying increasing attention to hiring graduates that possess them. The findings of this study revealed that employers of labour indicated that business education graduates in Abia State do not possess digital accounting skills, digital marketing and digital information and data skills. Vased on the findings of this study, the researchers conclude that business education graduates in Abia State lack the three digital skills covered in this study.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers made the following recommendations:

1. Curriculum planers should re-organize and diversify business education curriculum to include digital courses that will ensure that students are equipped with digital skills.
2. Business education lecturers should be re-trained to enable them up-date their digital skill competencies for proper teaching of digital skills.
3. Business education graduates should embark on further digital skill training programmes to acquire digital accounting, digital marketing and digital information and data skills. This will enhance their employability potentials.



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