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Social Support, Mental Stress Coping Mechanisms, and Learning Engagement of Maritime Students

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Abstract*: Producing globally competitive future merchant marine officers is one of the goals of the maritime academy, which serves as the training ground for students to learn the theories and experience dealing with real-life scenarios onboard ships. However, in studying and staying at a boarding academy, students can experience a variety of transitional phases and issues. Social support, mental stress coping mechanisms, and learning engagement such as attentiveness in class and managing time are some of the important aspects for maritime students. This descriptive-correlational study aimed to determine the maritime students' levels of social support from instructors and peers, mental stress coping mechanisms, and learning engagement in terms of being attentive in class and managing time, and the interlinking relationships. A survey was administered to 228 out of 559 students at MOL Magsaysay Maritime Academy. Stratified random sampling with equal allocation was used. Two strata of 114 marine engineering and 114 marine transportation students from the first to third year levels comprised the sample. The results revealed that the maritime students have high to very high levels of social support from instructors and peers, a high level of mental stress coping mechanisms, and high to very high levels of learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management. Correlation analysis revealed that for the maritime students, the variables have strong positive interlinking relationships. For future research, the findings suggest designing a program that can help the students better cope with mental stress and further improve learning engagement.*

Keywords: *social support, mental stress coping mechanisms, learning engagement, attentiveness in class, time management*

Introduction

Producing globally competitive future merchant marine officers is one of the goals of the maritime academy which serves as the training ground for students to learn the theories and to experience dealing with real-life scenarios onboard ship. However, in studying and staying in a boarding academy, students can experience a variety of transitional phases and issues. These challenges can manifest themselves in a wide variety of ways, such as the requirement that students live away from families, possibly for the first time, where they must learn how to be independent, make new friends, and make sound financial decisions in addition to managing course works and examinations. Such challenges may lead to psychological distress. Marchand et al. (2012, as cited in Matud et al., 2020) suggests that psychological distress may be linked to issues with one's mental health. Life experiences that greatly enhance a person's stress, anxiety, or sadness are one of the most essential and major causes that lead to mental stress.

Social support may assist individuals in coping with challenging aspects in life and improve mental health. The social support that is provided comes from a group of people that includes family, friends, and members of the community. According to Rathakrishnan et al. (2022), students in higher education institutions often suffer from poor social support networks, which can contribute to mental health problems such as depressive symptoms and has a negative impact on the students' quality of life.

The coping mechanisms are "survival skills," or methods that people employ to cope with the difficulties, discomfort, and changes that come with age. Coping strategies are also corrective activities made by individuals whose survival and way of life are jeopardized or threatened. Stress can cause sickness if coping mechanisms are insufficient (Cruzat, 2014). The act of consciously exerting effort and energy to deal with one's own and other people's issues is known as coping (Lucky et al., 2015).

Coping mechanisms aid in controlling, getting rid of or accepting stress and other stressors that are part of daily life. Many people employ helpful coping strategies to lessen or avoid stressors before they occur, even though the term "coping" refers to managing the anxiety that develops after the occurrence of a stressor. Snyder (2015) asserts that most people take for granted the ability to cope with challenges in daily lives. Breathing is akin to coping in since it serves as an automatic reaction to life. However, when faced with hazardous circumstances, people become acutely aware of the coping mechanisms and respond by deliberately using regular coping strategies.

Students are more likely to feel stress in educational institutions when the academic burdens are time-bound. Students' cerebral faculties, emotional states, physical strength, and manner of life are all significantly impacted by stress. The most frequent causes of extreme stress among students in recent years have been academic performance, competing time commitments, and financial issues (Deb et al., 2015; Beiter et al., 2015). Learning can be hampered and suppressed by stress. High levels of stress or

persistent stress interfere with learning, making it difficult for students to do well in school and risking mental, emotional, and physical health.

Additionally, most students today experience stress, which may lead to becoming isolated in the surroundings and lower self-esteem, all of which have an impact on academic performance. These worries are not unheard of among maritime students. According to Amorte et al. (2013, as cited in Saile et al., 2017) on the factors causing stress among second-year marine engineering students, the contributing factors for students' stress are problems with instructors, tuition fees, exam permits, and understanding the subjects.

Since few research has been done on the social support, mental stress coping mechanisms, and learning engagement of maritime students, determining the maritime students' level on each variable and the statistically significant interlinking relationships can be a reference for the maritime educational institutions to better understand the students, and to think of ways to improve the social support, and how students can deal properly with stress and learn while receiving quality education.

Methodology

Research Design

Descriptive correlational research design was used in the study. The level of each variable as well as the statistically significant interlinking relationships were described to have a clear picture of the association of social support from instructors and peers, mental stress coping mechanisms, and learning engagement such as attentiveness in class and time management of maritime students.

Population and Sampling Technique

The study was participated by first to third year marine engineering and marine transportation students enrolled during the third trimester of the academic year 2021 – 2022.

Since the population is five hundred fifty-nine (559), using Raosoft sample size calculator, at 95% confidence level, the sample size is two hundred twenty-eight (228). Through stratified random sampling with equal allocation, there were one hundred fourteen (114) respondents from each program.

Instrumentation

The 5-point rating scale instrument was developed by the researchers and validated by expert. It is composed of five subscales: (a) instructors' support, (b) peers' support, (c) mental stress coping mechanisms, (d) attentiveness in class, and (e) time management, with ten (10) statements each. The Cronbach's alpha scores indicate high internal consistency on all subscales (instructors' support: $\alpha = 0.966$; peers' support: $\alpha = 0.974$; mental stress coping mechanisms: $\alpha = 0.919$; attentiveness in class: $\alpha = 0.955$; and time management: $\alpha = 0.961$) exceeding 0.700.

Each statement of the subscale was rated depending on the respondent's level of disagreement or agreement: 5 for strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for neutral, 2 for disagree, and 1 for strongly disagree.

Data Analysis

The levels of social support from instructors and peers, mental stress coping mechanisms, and learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management were determined by computing the mean together with the corresponding standard deviation to know how dispersed the data are.

The Pearson Product - Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine if there are statistically significant interlinking relationships between variables: social support and mental stress coping mechanisms, mental stress coping mechanisms and learning engagement, and learning engagement and social support. Also, to know how correlated the variables are, the coefficient of determination was calculated by getting the square of the coefficient of correlation.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers asked permission from the Dean of Maritime Education, and the academic heads to conduct the study among MMMA students. Upon approval, an electronic mail containing a link was sent to the students to seek consent to be the respondents, and to inform them that the data will be used for research purposes.

Results

Table 1

The Level of Maritime Students' Social Support from Instructors

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1. My instructors believe in my potentials as a student.	4.16	.898	Agree
2. My instructors treat me and my classmates fairly.	4.15	.888	Agree
3. My instructors are patient in dealing with me.	4.12	.907	Agree
4. My instructors encourage me to share my ideas in class.	4.23	.877	Strongly Agree
5. My instructors appreciate my shared ideas during class discussion.	4.21	.895	Strongly Agree
6. My instructors acknowledge my effort.	4.16	.922	Agree
7. My instructors remind me whenever I have lacking requirements.	4.31	.893	Strongly Agree
8. My instructors motivate me to do my best in class.	4.17	.925	Agree
9. My instructors accommodate my questions whenever I have clarifications regarding the topic.	4.24	.875	Strongly Agree
10. My instructors care for me as a student and as a person.	4.17	.947	Agree
Overall Level of Perceived Social Support (Instructors)	**4.19**	**.790**	**High**

Table 1 presents the mean level of social support from instructors as perceived by the maritime students. The overall mean of 4.19 implies that the students have a high level of social support. The results revealed that the instructors' effort in giving reminders about lacking requirements has the highest mean of 4.31, while being patient in dealing with the students has the lowest mean of 4.12.

Based on the results, the majority of maritime students have a high level of social support from the instructors.

Table 2

The Level of Maritime Students' Social Support from Peers

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1. My peers offer help whenever I am in need.	4.29	.799	Strongly Agree
2. My peers make me feel that I belong.	4.33	.825	Strongly Agree
3. My peers boost my self confidence in class.	4.32	.816	Strongly Agree
4. My peers respect and trust me.	4.37	.811	Strongly Agree
5. My peers encourage me to focus on my goals as a student.	4.37	.795	Strongly Agree
6. My peers cooperate with me in doing group activities.	4.28	.864	Strongly Agree

7. My peers explain the lesson when I didn't understand it well.	4.27	.872	Strongly Agree
8. My peers accommodate my questions regarding the tasks in our subjects.	4.30	.871	Strongly Agree
9. My peers lend extra resources that I can use in class.	4.24	.837	Strongly Agree
10. My peers create an environment that promotes friendship and mutual learning.	4.40	.787	Strongly Agree
Overall Level of Perceived Social Support (Peers)	**4.32**	**.745**	**Very High**

Table 2 presents the mean level of social support from peers as perceived by the maritime students. The overall mean of 4.32 implies that the students have a very high level of social support. The results revealed that the peers' creation of an environment that promotes friendship and mutual learning has the highest mean of 4.40, while lending extra resources that can be used in class has the lowest mean of 4.24.

Based on the results, the majority of maritime students have a very high level of social support from peers.

Table 3

The Level of Maritime Students' Mental Stress Coping Mechanisms

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1. I am always optimistic in every situation.	4.25	.809	Strongly Agree
2. I always mingle with others.	4.11	.884	Agree
3. I openly express my feelings to others when necessary.	4.05	.909	Agree
4. I always join any school activities / programs.	3.96	.916	Agree
5. I always use the recreational facilities in the academy.	3.74	1.241	Agree
6. I am always confident dealing with my instructors, classmates, and others.	4.16	.805	Agree
7. I always exercise my rights to create my own organization or my own league of friends.	4.08	.904	Agree
8. I always face my fears.	4.24	.839	Strongly Agree
9. I always share my experiences to my parents and friends.	4.07	.964	Agree
10. I exercise regularly.	4.22	.869	Strongly Agree
Overall Level of Perceived Mental Stress Coping Mechanisms	**4.09**	**.702**	**High**

Table 3 presents the mean level of mental stress coping mechanisms as perceived by the maritime students. The overall mean of 4.09 implies that the students have a high level of mental stress coping mechanisms. The results revealed that to cope with mental stress, being always optimistic in every situation has the highest mean of 4.25, while using the recreational facilities in the academy has the lowest mean of 3.74.

Based on the results, the majority of maritime students have a high level of mental stress coping mechanism.

Table 4

The Level of Maritime Students' Learning Engagement in terms of Attentiveness in Class

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1. I ask the instructor whenever I need clarifications on any part of the lesson.	4.21	.822	Strongly Agree
2. I am prompt to respond when called during class.	4.29	.740	Strongly Agree
3. I am focused in listening to the discussion.	4.21	.770	Strongly Agree
4. I feel excited to learn when in class.	4.23	.871	Strongly Agree
5. I understand the lessons well.	4.03	.834	Agree
6. I actively participate in class discussion.	4.18	.788	Agree
7. I patiently wait for my turn to recite or ask a question when my instructor or classmate is still speaking.	4.32	.824	Strongly Agree
8. I refrain from doing other things when class is on-going.	4.18	.790	Agree
9. I take down notes to keep a record of the important points in the lesson.	4.07	.855	Agree
10. I carefully listen to the instructor when he/she poses a question.	4.33	.722	Strongly Agree
Overall Level of Perceived Learning Engagement in terms of Attentiveness in Class	**4.20**	**.677**	**High**

Table 4 presents the mean level of learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class as perceived by the maritime students. The overall mean of 4.20 implies that the students have a high level of learning engagement. The results revealed that carefully listening to the instructor when he/she poses a question has the highest mean of 4.33, while understanding the lessons well has the lowest mean of 4.03.

Based on the results, the majority of maritime students have a high level of learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class.

Table 5

The Level of Maritime Students' Learning Engagement in terms of Time Management

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
1. I always attend or join the class at least five (5) minutes before it begins.	4.35	.880	Strongly Agree
2. I always submit my activities before the scheduled deadline.	4.30	.829	Strongly Agree
3. I regularly review the past lessons in my subjects during my free time, for surprised and announced quizzes.	4.08	.859	Agree
4. I always plan on how to best use my time.	4.27	.766	Strongly Agree
5. I always manage to deal with any kind of interruptions.	4.19	.828	Agree
6. I am good at organizing my time for my studies, physical fitness, and leisure.	4.14	.859	Agree
7. I always prioritize my time to meet my goals.	4.30	.757	Strongly Agree
8. I always show a positive attitude towards deadline.	4.36	.769	Strongly Agree
9. I regularly set my priorities.	4.33	.808	Strongly Agree

10. I create a list of to do's every day.	4.04	1.008	Agree
Overall Level of Perceived Learning Engagement in terms of Time Management	**4.24**	**.723**	**Very High**

Table 5 presents the mean level of learning engagement in terms of time management as perceived by the maritime students. The overall mean of 4.24 implies that the students have a very high level of learning engagement. The results revealed that always showing a positive attitude towards deadline has the highest mean of 4.36, while creating a list of to do's every day has the lowest mean of 4.04.

Based on the results, the majority of maritime students have a very high level of learning engagement in terms of time management.

Table 6

The Relationship Between Maritime Students' Social Support and Mental Stress Coping Mechanisms

Social Support	**Mental Stress Coping Mechanisms**			
	Coefficient (r)	**r^2**	**p-value**	**Verbal Interpretation**
Instructors	0.633	0.401	0.000	Strong Positive Correlation
Peers	0.709	0.503	0.000	Strong Positive Correlation

Table 6 shows the relationship between the social support and mental stress coping mechanisms of maritime students. It is shown that there are statistically significant relationships between the social support from instructors and peers with the mental stress coping mechanisms of the students since the correlation coefficients of 0.633 and 0.709 with the coefficients of determination of 0.401 and 0.503, respectively, are significant at 99% confidence interval. The null hypothesis of no statistically significant relationship is rejected. The social support from instructors and peers both have strong positive correlations with mental stress coping mechanisms. This means that there are strong connections between the variables. This implies that as the support from the instructor increases, the mental stress coping mechanisms of the students tend to increase. Also, as the support from peers increases, the mental stress coping mechanisms of the students tend to increase.

Table 7

The Relationship Between Maritime Students' Mental Stress Coping Mechanisms and Learning Engagement

Learning Engagement	**Mental Stress Coping Mechanisms**			
	Coefficient (r)	**r^2**	**p-value**	**Verbal Interpretation**
Attentiveness in Class	0.780	0.608	0.000	Strong Positive Correlation
Time Management	0.769	0.591	0.000	Strong Positive Correlation

Table 7 shows the relationship between mental stress coping mechanisms and learning engagement of maritime students. It is shown that there are statistically significant relationships between the mental stress coping mechanisms and learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management of the students since the correlation coefficients of 0.780 and 0.769 with the coefficients of determination of 0.608 and 0.591, respectively, are significant at 99% confidence interval. The null hypothesis of no statistically significant relationship is rejected. The mental stress coping mechanisms have a strong positive correlation with learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management, respectively. This means that there are strong connections between the variables. This implies that as the mental stress coping mechanisms increase, the learning engagement of the students tends to increase.

Table 8

The Relationship Between Maritime Students' Learning Engagement and Social Support from Instructors

Learning Engagement	**Social Support (Instructors)**			
	Coefficient (r)	**r^2**	**p-value**	**Verbal Interpretation**

Attentiveness in Class	0.773	0.598	0.000	Strong Positive Correlation
Time Management	0.647	0.419	0.000	Strong Positive Correlation

Table 8 shows the relationship between learning engagement and social support from instructors of maritime students. It is shown that there are statistically significant relationships between learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management with the social support from instructors since the correlation coefficients of 0.773 and 0.647 with the coefficients of determination of 0.598 and 0.419, respectively, are significant at 99% confidence interval. The null hypothesis of no statistically significant relationship is rejected. The learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management both have strong positive correlations with social support. This means that there are strong connections between the variables. This implies that as the learning engagement increases, the social support from instructors tends to increase.

Table 9

The Relationship Between Maritime Students' Learning Engagement and Social Support from Peers

Learning Engagement	**Social Support (Peers)**			
	Coefficient (r)	**r^2**	**p-value**	**Verbal Interpretation**
Attentiveness in Class	0.706	0.498	0.000	Strong Positive Correlation
Time Management	0.618	0.381	0.000	Strong Positive Correlation

Table 9 shows the relationship between learning engagement and social support from peers of maritime students. It is shown that there are statistically significant relationships between learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management with the social support from peers since the correlation coefficients of 0.706 and 0.618 with the coefficients of determination of 0.498 and 0.381, respectively, are significant at 99% confidence interval. The null hypothesis of no statistically significant relationship is rejected. The learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management both have strong positive correlations with social support. This means that there are strong connections between the variables. This implies that as learning engagement increases, the social support from peers tends to increase.

Discussion

This research focuses on social support, coping mechanisms for mental stress, and learning engagement among maritime students. In the first step, levels of social support from instructors and peers were determined. The results revealed that the maritime students have high to very high levels of social support from instructors and peers ($\overline{x} = 4.19, 4.32$). The instructors have a high level of support to students by means of caring, believing, and being patient with them, and giving reminders to do academic related tasks. Friends or peers have a high level of support to students by jointly planning to do a project, helping each other to learn, and cooperating in doing group assignments (Peña, 2018). Studies also show that students having high social support instructors and peers have positive outcomes in their life, and the college students' psychological well-being is significantly increased by social support from their families and friends. Instructors play a crucial role in the student support system. By giving students the proper corrective feedback and being actively present, they can assist students in developing accountability, acquiring skills, communicating effectively, and reducing their fear and anxiety. However, instructors' inappropriate responses to students' mistakes and arbitrary evaluations result in student dissatisfaction, a lack of motivation, and stress. However, students are more inclined to take on challenging assignments when they view their teachers as collaborators in the educational process (Alsubaie et al., 2019).

In order to support learners' academic progress and participation in school, instructors might demonstrate a sense of care, respect, and appreciation for their charges. Additionally, peer support satisfies the need for friendship and aids in the development of a sense of school fulfilment. Social support has a significant role in a student's ability to stay in school and have a positive college experience. Academic success is inversely connected with social support in emerging adults and adolescents. On the other hand, first-year undergrads do not value the relationships with or support from close friends for academic work in higher education (Alsubaie et al., 2019).

Also, the results revealed that the maritime students have high level of mental coping mechanisms ($\overline{x} = 4.09$). The value shows a higher level of mental coping mechanisms in students. The abovementioned value fulfils the object of the study and tells that a higher level of social support results in a higher level of coping mechanisms in students, and the statistical results also reveal the strong positive correlations between social support from instructors and mental stress coping mechanisms with coefficient value of 0.633 and between social support from peers and mental stress coping mechanisms with coefficient value of 0.709. This depicts that an increase in social support or solid social support results in strong coping mechanisms and vice versa. These findings are also

supported by previous literature. Studies have shown that social support is linked to a lowered cortisol response to stress and a healthier immune system. The element necessary to lessen the psychological distress that patients, survivors, and their families encounter (Mohammed et al., 2015). As a result, participants in a qualitative study said that the capacity to cope with stress was significantly influenced by social support (Rabelo et al., 2016). Due to the pandemic, this element has taken on a significant amount of significance in communities in China since it influences how stressed and anxious medical staff feel (Xiao et al., 2020). Another study found that college students' levels of anxiety were adversely connected with social support (Cao et al., 2020).

The maritime students' levels of learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management are high to very high ($\overline{x} = 4.20, 4.24$). Considering previous studies, it can be learned that attentiveness and time management have not been studied. However, in terms of classroom environment, an attitude has been studied. It reported that maritime students have a positive attitude towards any teacher regarding how teachers understand young people, as indicated by the total weighted mean score of 4.26, ranking number one (1). Teachers appear never to get tired of teaching and readily provide individualized assistance, as indicated by computed total weighted mean scores of 4.23 and 4.08, respectively, which shows attentiveness in the class (Agena et al., 2015).

For the maritime students' mental stress coping mechanisms and learning engagement, the results revealed that there are strong positive relationships between mental stress coping mechanisms and learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class ($r = 0.780$) and time management ($r = 0.769$). According to Ellis (2015), the number of instances of stress factors during the semester had no significant impact on the students' GPAs at each year level. It can be concluded that none of the stressors that students experience has a significant impact on performance. Although there was little correlation, stress has a negative impact on academic engagement. Students under mild stress worked hard to get acceptable GPAs. Stress and academic success had a strong yet weak and adverse association. The ability to regulate stress, i.e., coping mechanisms, is crucial in maritime students. Stress levels will not matter if students are able to manage them. The key is to develop effective stress management skills (Saile et al., 2017).

Results reported for the learning engagement and social support, the maritime students' engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management have strong positive correlations with the instructor's social support ($r = 0.773$) and ($r = 0.647$). While the students' engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management have strong positive correlations with the peer's social support ($r = 0.706$) and ($r = 0.618$). It means that having higher level of learning engagement both in terms of attentiveness and time management are associated with strong social support, either from the instructors or peers. Studies also reported that it is generally believed that social support raises adolescents' academic achievement. These suppositions are supported by earlier thinking. According to experts, a particular student who recently transferred from secondary to postsecondary education may benefit from social support to help them cope with the stress they experienced as a result of the environment shift. Additionally, scholars have demonstrated the significance of teacher support and peer support for students' progress in higher education (Wang & Eccles, 2012).

Thus, similar to the researcher's findings, an undergraduate academic involvement in Sri Lanka is significantly correlated with perceived social support. The university, rather than the school, offers various tasks to complete in order to be ready to fit in with those students needing to have better interactions. Peer support satisfies young people's demand for friendship and aids in the development of a sense of university satisfaction. In an environment where concepts are tested, and independence is encouraged, peer groups can satisfy the needs for love, empathy, and comprehension of inner thoughts. Support from parents can encourage pre-social conduct in college, especially in the beginning, and boost academic drive. Parents have a tendency to reduce the likelihood of disruptive and antisocial behaviour during a student's first year of higher education. On the other hand, first-year students do not value the relationships with or support from close friends or family members to the academic performance in higher education (Jayarathna, 2014).

Conclusion

The study revealed that majority of the maritime students have high to very high levels of social support from instructors and peers, high level of mental stress coping mechanisms, and high to very high levels of learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management. Also, it was revealed that the variables have statistically significant strong positive interlinking relationships: a) social support from instructors and peers and mental stress coping mechanisms, b) mental stress coping mechanisms and learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and time management, c) learning engagement in terms of attentiveness in class and social support from instructors and peers, and d) learning engagement in terms of time management and social support from instructors and peers.

Recommendation

The findings suggest designing a program that can help the students to better cope with mental stress and that can further improve learning engagement. The program may also include solutions to adjustment concerns while inside the academy. Since the adverse effects of culture shock are so common, the administration may provide pamphlets about etiquette, and social appropriateness. Doing this will aid in students' integration into the academy. Students from different places of a country should be

prepared to make sacrifices from their existing way of life, nutrition, environment, and educational practices. To better improve mental stress coping mechanisms, students need to always join school activities or programs, and use recreational facilities. Also, since previous studies have shown that students detest visiting the counselling office for guidance, they are urged to make good use of the guidance services provided by the academy.

During college years, many students struggle with a range of issues like stress, depression, anxiety, and relationship issues. Talking to a professional about personal, academic, or professional concerns is helpful. Here, one of the guidance office's functions is to keep students' problems from getting out of control. To the instructors, since the students are from various backgrounds and are away from families, exercising more patience while carrying out professional responsibilities of advising, assisting, and imparting it is of the utmost importance. The method of modern pedagogy of student-centered teaching and learning must be continued, and improve the ways of treating fairly, acknowledging, and motivating the students.

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