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LIFESTYLES AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

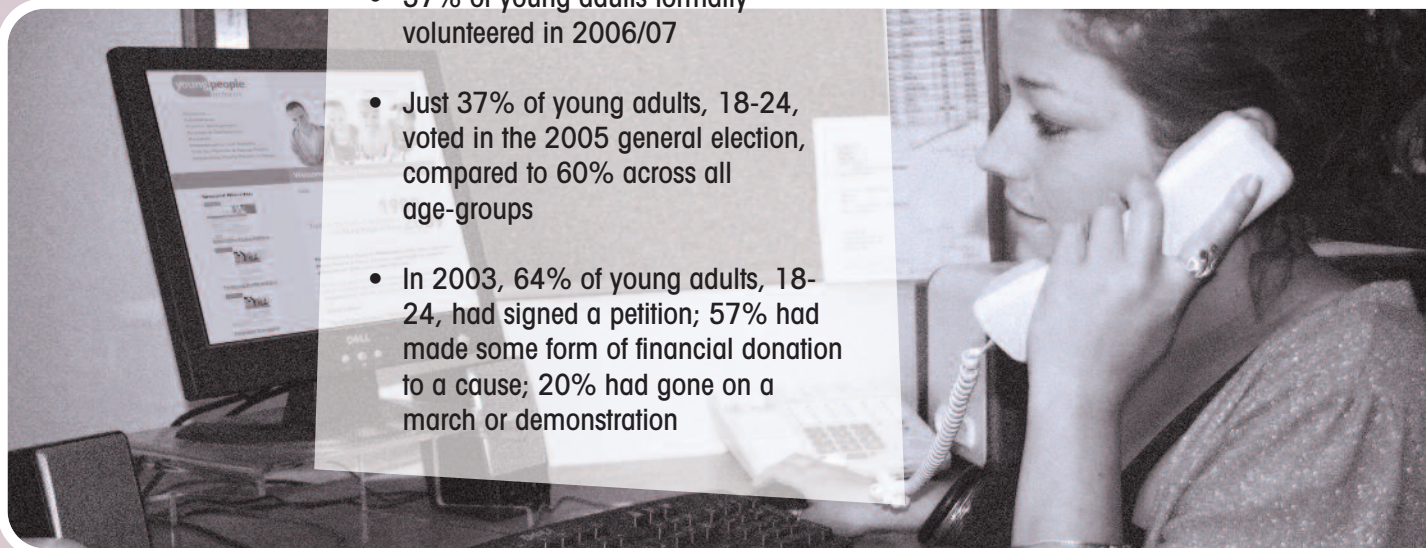


LIFESTYLES AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

This final chapter concentrates on the lifestyles of young adults (16-24), including how they spend their leisure time and the ways they are involved in wider society. This is particularly significant at a time when modern technology is opening up a host of new possibilities.

KEY FACTS

- In 2008, 77% of young adults were using the Internet every day
- Also in 2008, those with the highest level of qualifications were most likely to have the Internet, those with the lowest level of qualifications were least likely to have the Internet
- 32% of young adults, 16-24, participated in sporting activities in 2007/08
- In 2004, it was estimated that between 200,000 and 250,000 young adults, 16-25, took a gap year of some kind
- 57% of young adults formally volunteered in 2006/07
- Just 37% of young adults, 18-24, voted in the 2005 general election, compared to 60% across all age-groups
- In 2003, 64% of young adults, 18-24, had signed a petition; 57% had made some form of financial donation to a cause; 20% had gone on a march or demonstration





TELEVISION AND RADIO

Television is now almost a given in British homes. In 1979 there were around 12 million colour television licenses, last year (2008) there were around 25 million.¹ In 2007, 82 per cent of people indicated television watching as a preferred way to spend their free time². For 16-24 year-olds in 2006/07, television was mainly for watching films (76 per cent), comedy (71 per cent) and soaps (55 per cent). News and sporting events also ranked highly at around 50 per cent. For adults of all ages, the news was the most popular reason to watch television, at 69 per cent.³

Radio entertainment is also a popular pastime, but considerably more so amongst older age-groups. Adults, 55 and over, listen to radio on average around 23 hours a week. Young adults, 15-24, listen for roughly 17 hours per week.⁴

MOBILE PHONE USE

Mobile phones are everywhere, and have revolutionised the way in which young adults communicate. The Media Literacy Audit found that text messaging was the most popular form of communication for this age group (16-24), with 94 per cent having sent texts during 2005, compared to 17 per cent of those aged 65 and above. In addition, 93 per cent of young adults had also made personal phone calls during this particular year, compared to 58 per cent of those aged 65 and above.⁵

Considering this data is somewhat outdated within the context of the fast changing world of mobile phone functionality, it is reasonable to assume that even larger numbers of young adults use mobile phones in 2009 compared with 2005.

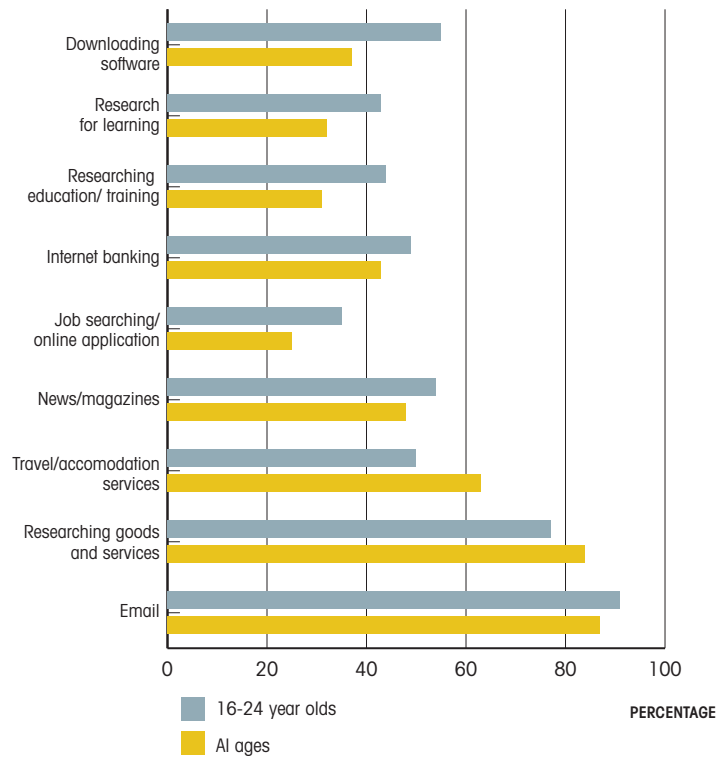
INTERNET

The Internet, like mobile phones, has also revolutionised how young people communicate. Instant messaging, electronic mail, social-networking sites and internet-based video/phone communication services such as Skype, have offered young people multiple ways to keep in touch with each other.

In 2008, 65 per cent of households in the UK had Internet access. For young adults, 16-24, 68 per cent had access to Internet at home, 77 per cent reported using the Internet every day, and 93 per cent had used the Internet during the last three months.⁶

The most common internet based activities for young adults were sending/receiving emails and finding out information about goods and services. Interestingly, using the Internet for learning, for researching education and training courses and for looking into employment opportunities was much higher in this group than in any others. This finding perhaps points to the influence of schools in promoting the use of Internet as an aid to learning. See **Chart 7.1**.

7.1 Most popular uses of the Internet amongst 16-24 year-olds in the UK, 2008



SOURCE: Office for National Statistics. (2008). Internet Access: Households and individuals, 2008.

KEY FACT

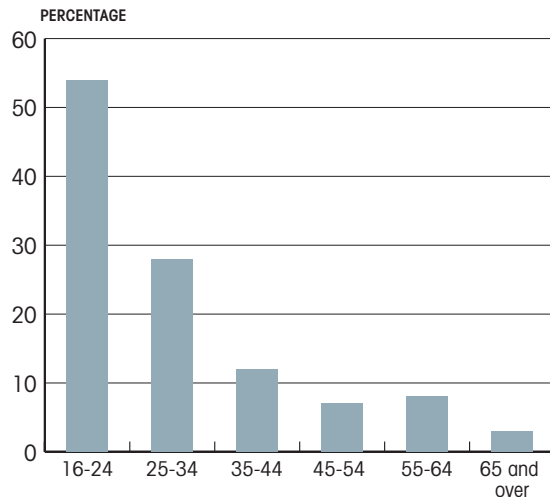
In 2008, those with the highest level of qualifications were most likely to have the Internet, those with the lowest level of qualifications were least likely to have the Internet

The Internet and social-networking sites

Social-networking sites, i.e. Internet-based web pages, created by individual users for the purpose of online communication with others, are particularly popular amongst young adults. They have significantly influenced the way in which young adults make friends, interact with each other, and even form romantic relationships. Bebo, Facebook and MySpace are the top three most commonly used social network sites, and are particularly 'populated' by the under 25s.

Chart 7.2 shows the percentage of adults, 16 and over, who have their own social network profile. A clear age effect can be observed in the data, with 16-24 year-olds being the most common users of such sites by a significant margin (54 per cent).

7.2 Percentage of adults who have their own social network profile in England, by age-group, 2008



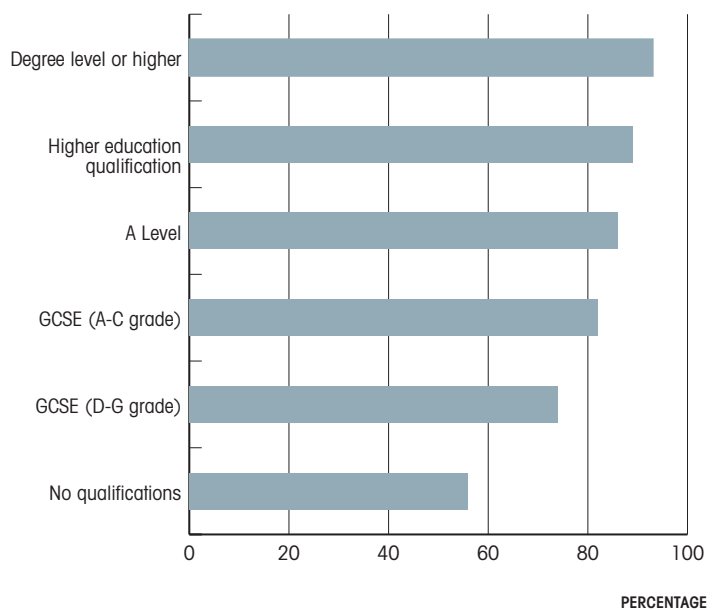
SOURCE: OfCom. (2008). Social Networking: A quantitative and qualitative research report into attitudes, behaviours and use.

Social and economic trends in Internet use

Although the Internet has had such a marked cultural and social impact, it is still far from being an everyday part of all people's lives. Indeed, 15 per cent of people surveyed in England, in 2008, indicated that equipment and set-up costs alone stopped them from getting the Internet at home. This is a rise of one per cent since 2006.⁷

Internet usage also has strong links with education level. Those with the highest level of qualifications were most likely to have the Internet. Those with the least or no qualifications were least likely to have the Internet. See **Chart 7.3**.

7.3 Internet access by household amongst adults under 70 in the UK, 2008



SOURCE: Office for National Statistics. (2008). Internet Access: 2008 Households and individuals.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

In 2007, the most popular leisure activity for young adults was visiting the cinema. Indeed, 42 per cent of 15-24 year-olds reported visiting the cinema at least once a month, significantly more than any other age-group.⁸

As **Chart 7.4** shows, other popular leisure activities for young adults include the theatre, listening to live music, attending carnivals and visiting art exhibitions.

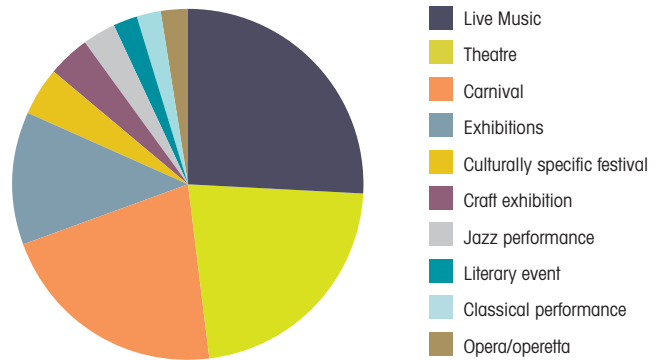
Leisure activities and vulnerable/disadvantaged groups

Not all young adults have the opportunity or means to access these types of leisure activities. For example, in 2007, data shows that adults (all ages) who have never worked, are long term unemployed, or who have no qualifications, have consistently lower levels of participation than those who are in employment and who do have qualifications.⁹

Participation in these types of leisure activities is also lower amongst people who have a disability. For example, in 2007, 54 per cent of people with a limiting disability or illness engaged in arts opportunities compared with 70 per cent of adults without limiting disability or illness¹⁰.

There are also ethnic differences in relation to participation in these types of leisure activities. For example, in 2007, 72 per cent of people with a White ethnic background participated in these types of leisure activities such as visiting a historic environment, or visiting a museum or gallery, compared to 42 per cent of people with a Black ethnic background and 48 per cent of people with an Asian ethnic background. Similarly, while 43 per cent of adults of White ethnicity had visited a museum or gallery (in the 12 months prior to interview), only 32 per cent of both Black and Asian ethnicity had done so¹¹.

7.4 Participation in leisure activities amongst young adults, 16-24, in England, 2005/06

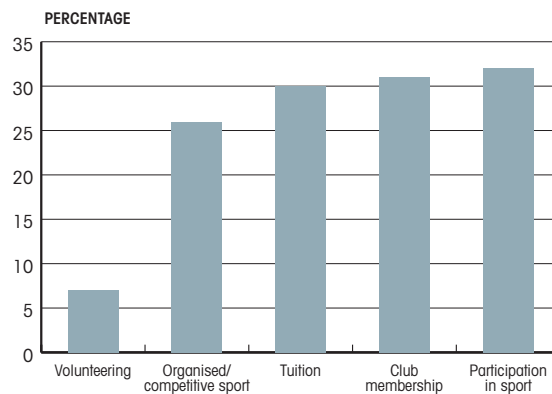


SOURCE: Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2007). Taking Part: The National Survey of Culture, Leisure and Sport.

SPORT PARTICIPATION

As explored in chapter three, young adults, 16-24, have the highest participation rates across all other age-groups in high-level physical activity (at least 30 minutes five or more times a week). **Chart 7.5** details the breakdown of sport activity amongst young adults. As can be observed, 31 per cent of young adults are a member of a sporting club (or gym), 30 per cent are being tutored in a sporting activity, 25 per cent participate competitively, and seven per cent were volunteering to support sport at least once a week.

7.5 Involvement in sport amongst young adults, 16-24, in England, 2007/08



SOURCE: Sport England. (2008). Active People Survey 2: 2007/8.

Further details about physical exercise can be found in Chapter 3.

TRAVELLING AND GAP YEARS

Travelling and taking a gap year have become increasingly more popular amongst young adults, 18-24, in the UK. A gap year is traditionally thought of as a period of time taken out from education or the workplace and involves either travelling for a period of time, participating in voluntary work abroad, or doing paid/ unpaid work experience in the UK. The amount of time can vary from about a month to as long as 15 months¹². Others have defined this period as between three and 24 months.¹³

In 2004, it was estimated that between 200,000 and 250,000 young adults, 16-25, took a gap year of some kind.¹⁴ Gap years are particularly common amongst young adults planning on later entering higher education. In 2007, around 7.3 per cent of students (33,171 out of 456,627) deferred their university place until 2008 in order to take a gap year.¹⁵ Gap years have often been seen as a privilege of the middle-class, but there is some evidence that young adults from a diverse range of backgrounds are now undertaking gap years.¹⁶

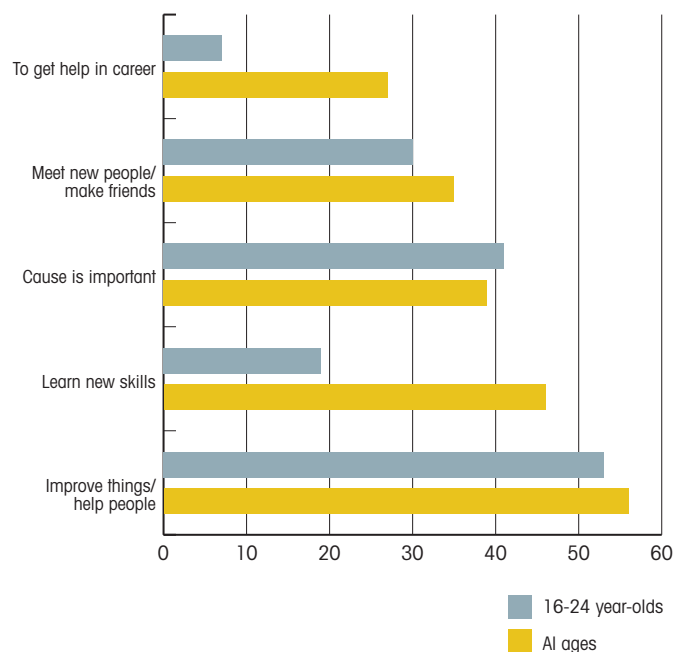
VOLUNTEERING AND CHARITY WORK

According to the 2006/07 survey of volunteering and charitable giving¹⁷, 57 per cent of young adults, 16-24, reported having taken part in some form of formal volunteering in the year prior to the survey. The sectors in which young adults were most likely to volunteer in were education settings, (such as schools, colleges and/or universities), working with children and young people more generally, working in sport and exercise settings, and volunteering to help out with religious activities. Interestingly, overseas/ disaster relief work and human rights work, though not as popular as some other volunteer work areas, were significantly higher in this age group, than in any other.

Also according to the survey, almost three quarters (73 per cent) of young adults started volunteering through word of mouth, 21 per cent reported volunteering because they previously used the services of the organisation and eight per cent went into volunteering through an employer.

As shown in **Chart 7.6**, popular reasons for young adults getting involved with voluntary activities were, to learn new skills, help their career along, meet new people/make new friends, and generally improve things and help people. Of note though, is the specific focus of skill development and career enhancement. Indeed, data strongly suggests that young adults see volunteering as a route towards helping them achieve professional goals.

7.6 Popular reasons for volunteering amongst young adults, 16-24, in the UK, 2006/07



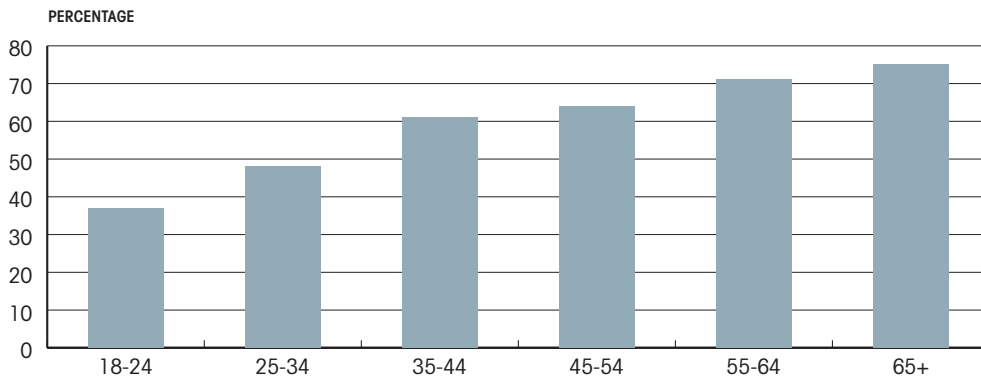
SOURCE: Cabinet Office. (2007). Helping Out: a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving.

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

Young adults are often seen as politically apathetic. This judgement is often based on the fact that they are the least likely group to cast their vote in public elections. As **Chart 7.7** shows, in the last general election 18-24 year-olds were the age group with the lowest percentage turn-out rate for voting. Indeed, the voting rate in 2005 increased significantly and consistently with age.

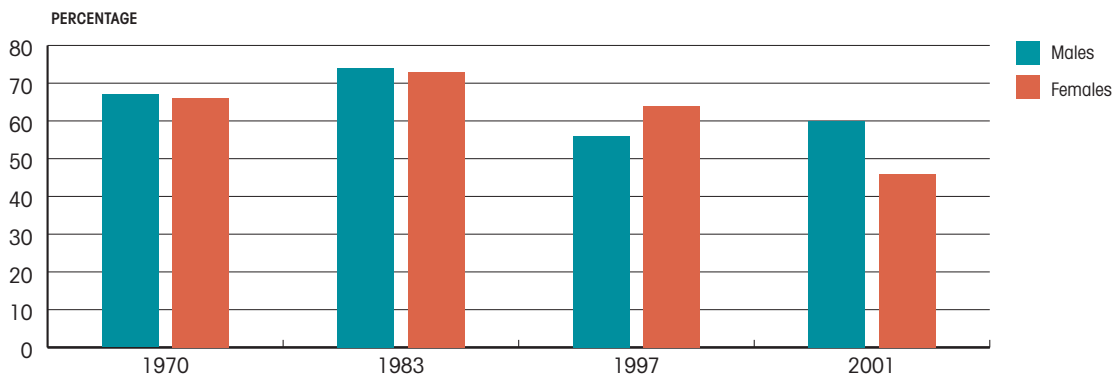
Further, as **Chart 7.8** shows, the number of young adults voting in public elections has fallen significantly over time. In 1983, over 70 per cent of young men and young women voted in the general election. By 2001, this had fallen to 60 per cent for males and 46 per cent for females.

7.7 Voting turn-out in the 2005 UK general election by age-group



SOURCE: The Electoral Commission. (2005). Election 2005: turnout. How many, who and why?

7.8 Voting turn-out in general elections amongst 18-24 year-olds in the UK, 1970-2001



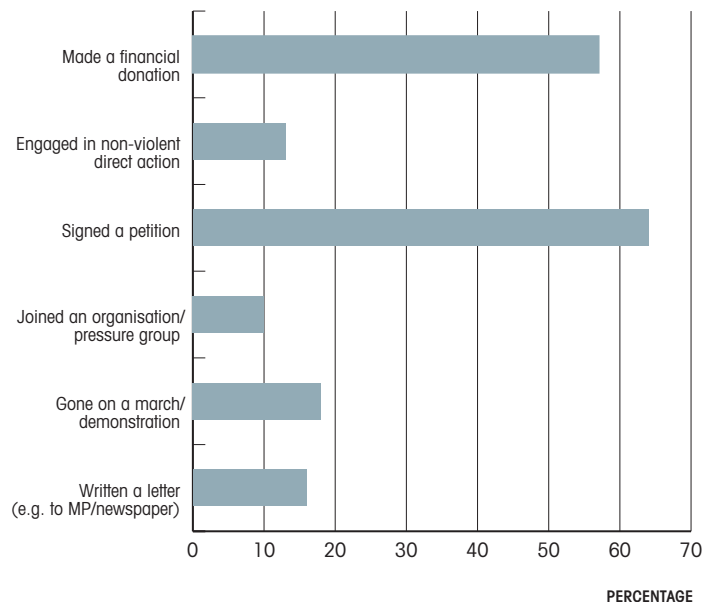
SOURCE: Office for National Statistics. (2002). Social Trends, No.32.

The low voting rates for young adults appears to reflect a lack of confidence in political parties, rather than a lack of concern about the major issues of the day. In 2003, for example, Populus undertook a poll looking at political engagement amongst 505 18-24 year-olds¹⁸. Results showed that although 36 per cent indicated that they would vote if there were a general election held the next day, amongst those who were unsure, 39 per cent felt that the main political parties were so alike it did not matter who got in. 30 per cent felt it was irrelevant to their lives, and nearly half (45 per cent) felt that the main political parties had nothing to say on the really important matters.

These findings echo those of a 2000 study undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research, exploring political interest and participation amongst young people, 14-24¹⁹. The study found that young people saw politics in a 'limited and narrow way', perceiving the subject as 'boring and irrelevant to their lives at present'.

However, political engagement is not necessarily best measured by voting statistics. As **Chart 7.9** shows, in 2003, 64 per cent of young adults polled in the Populus survey indicated that they had at some point signed a petition, 57 per cent had made some form of financial donation to a cause and nearly 20 per cent had gone on a march or demonstration.

7.9 Involvement in political issues or important causes amongst 18-24 year-olds in England, 2003



SOURCE: Populus. (2003). Young Voters Poll. <http://www.populuslimited.com/the-times-1824-yearolds-180903.html>



Footnotes

1. TV Licensing. (2009). About us. <http://www.tvlicensing.co.uk/aboutus/index.jsp>
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