

# Analysing The Impact Of Price Promotions Versus No-Price Promotions On Brand Image

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## ABSTRACT

*Companies are increasingly designing more promotional actions to obtain better sales rates in the short term. However, the indiscriminate use of this tool has a negative effect for the organisations in the middle and long term. The purpose of this paper is to analyse if the frequent use of promotions has a negative effect on the promoted brand image. More exactly we have studied how different promotional tools may affect the image that consumers have on two brands and also if the category of the promoted product has any influence on that effect. Considering the data obtained in an experiment we have demonstrated that the effect of promotions on brand image depends on the type of promotional tool and the product category.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the last few years we have seen a considerable increase in the investment of companies on sales promotion (Huff, Alden and Tietje, 1999). What is more, when the organisations assign their communication budget to different items, promotion has an increasingly relevance comparing with other concepts such as publicity. The main reason which explains the increasing importance of this marketing variable is its immediate effect on the company's sales. At present many executives feel the pressure to obtain good short-term results and promotion is a tool which allows to obtain those results when it is well-designed.

Nevertheless, although the attraction of promotional marketing is obvious in the short term, we also find that these actions may have a differed effect in the middle and long term. For example, although with a promotion we can increase immediately the sales of a product, it is likely that, once the promotion is retired, the sales come to a standstill or even decreased because consumers have taken advantage of the offer and have stored many units of the product.

But the highest risk of using sales promotion indiscriminately may be the effect it may have on the promoted brand image. Several authors have pointed out that using some types of promotion too frequently may damage that brand image considerably (Dodson, Tybout and Sternthal, 1978; Mela, Gupta and Jedidi, 1998). Other authors have proved that the consequences of promotions on the brand image are not always the same but they may depend on the purchase occasion or the type of product (Vázquez and Trespalacios, 1997; Raghubir and Corfman, 1999).

Companies are concerned about creating an image of their brands in the consumers' mind, so that they must be aware that any action they develop may interfere with the image they want to transmit. Therefore, the managers have to know the effects that different promotional tools may have on the brand image. Moreover, it is important to work more closely with retailers to monitor the use of in-store promotions (Low and Mohr, 2000) and to design those promotions that enable to achieve both companies' objectives (Hardy, 1986; Jørgerson, Taboubi and Zaccour, 2003).

The purpose of the present research is to study the effects of sales promotion on the brand image and analyse if the effects are the same whatever the promotional technique used and the promoted type of product may be. For this

reason we will compare how different monetary and non-monetary promotions may affect the brand image and also what happens when the promoted item is a functional product or a hedonic one.

Our paper is structured in the following way: first, we will reflect on the concepts of sales promotion and brand image. Then, we will gather the hypotheses to study based on previous research. Afterwards, we will expose the methodology used to contrast the hypotheses. Next, we will present the results and, finally, we will comment on the paper's conclusions.

## **SALES PROMOTION AND BRAND IMAGE**

According to Kotler (2002), sales promotion consists of a set of incentive instruments, generally in the short term, designed to stimulate immediately, in a certain degree, the purchase of certain products or services by consumers or sellers. According to this definition, companies which use sales promotion usually design these actions setting objectives in the very short term (Huff *et al.*, 1999; Sáez, Sánchez and Iniesta, 1999), since these techniques are highly effective to generate an immediate response in the market and also to face the competitors' actions.

Although the tools of sales promotion are becoming more and more frequent and companies give them more relevance in their communication programmes due to the variety of objectives that they allow them to reach, the literature also shows the risks of its use. Among those risks we should point out the reduction of sales in the period following the promotion due to stockpiling by the consumer (Helsen and Schmittlein, 1992) or that the consumer has become used to purchasing the product only when it is on promotion (Mela, Jedidi and Bowman, 1998).

Another negative effect of frequent promotions is that they may deteriorate the promoted brand image (Dodson *et al.*, 1978; Mela, Gupta and Jedidi, 1998). The pressure which executives experiment leads them to use sales promotion frequently and this interferes with the efforts to build up a brand (Aaker, 1996a).

The present research will study this aspect deeply, the effect of promotions on brand image. In order to know the definition of brand image we have to define first the concept of brand equity.

According to Aaker (1996a) brand equity is made of the set of assets and liabilities which, linked to the name and logo of the brand, increase or decrease the value of a product or service for the company or its consumers. This author points out that brand equity is multidimensional construct formed by five dimensions: loyalty, perceived quality, association/differentiation, awareness and market behaviour.

The third dimension proposed, association/differentiation, corresponds to a precise concept, brand image. Keller (1993) defines this term as the perceptions on a brand reflected as existing associations in the consumer's memory. These associations have their origin in direct experience, communicated information and also in interference from existing associations on the company, origin, etc. When the associations are positive, they become evident through the consumer's preference for a brand, which cannot be explained through the objective assessment of the product's attributes (Farquhar, 1989).

Keller (1993) proposes that the associations generated by brands on the consumer may divide into attributes, benefits and attitudes. He claims that the types of association will be more or less strong in the individual's memory according to the amount of information provided and how that information is mentally processed. This way, the favourable tendency to that brand will depend on the degree that attributes and benefits satisfy its objective public.

Hence, the management of the image is a critical part of the marketing programme. If we manage to transmit a perfectly defined image, this will enable the consumers to identify the needs that brand may satisfy (Roth, 1995). Besides, a brand with a high equity will provide the company with long-term advantages, competitive advantages (Aaker, 1996a). Companies are increasingly investing on creating a brand image and they need a theoretical basis which systematises and defines the dimensions which have a more relevant influence on the brand equity.

## **HYPOTHESES**

As we have explained above, the objective of this paper is to analyse the repercussion that sales promotion has on brand image and to prove the differences according to the type of promotion and the type of product. For this reason, we are going to establish the hypotheses in two different parts. In the first place, we will focus on studying if the effects of sales promotion on brand image depend on the type of promotional tool used. Secondly, we will try to check how brand image may be affected by the fact that the promotion chosen be coherent with the benefit the consumer looks for in the promoted product.

### **Effect Of Promotions On Brand Image: Moderating Role Of The Type Of Promotion**

Except for Davis, Inman and McAlister (1992) and Raghurir and Corfman (1999), the effect of sales promotion on brand image has been studied in an indirect way. Most studies have concentrated on the impact of sales promotions on just one of the dimensions suggested by Aaker (1996a). Next, we expose the papers that have analysed this effect in one way or another.<sup>1</sup>

Dodson *et al.* (1978) suggested that the use of promotions used to lead to worse assessment of brands by the market. If we consider that certain consumers do inferences on the product's quality from its price (Zeithmal, 1981), we could expect that those promotions which reduce the selling price of products affect the perceived quality of the promoted item and diminish the product differentiation (Papatla and Krishnamurthi, 1996; Mela, Gupta and Lehmann, 1997). Besides, the frequent use of price promotions makes consumers more sensitive to prices, makes reference prices fall and even leads them to refuse the product if the discount is too high (Campbell and Diamond, 1990). According to Aaker (1996a), quality, price and differentiation are elements which condition the equity and image of brands and so the use of monetary promotions may affect negatively to brand images.

However, Diamond and Campbell (1989) prove that promotions which include prizes or extra quantities of product do not modify the usual reference prices of the product. This type of promotions may even improve the image in the long term generating a differentiation (Papatla and Krishnamurthi, 1996).

Other authors prove that promotions have no negative effect on the image of promoted brands, they justify the result with the low implication in this type of purchases (Neslin and Shoemaker, 1989; Davis *et al.*, 1992). These results agree with Dickson and Sawyer (1990), who proved that buyers were not able to remember the price they paid for the product after the purchase; if the price is not remembered, it is very unlikely that reference prices may be affected. Nevertheless, we should consider the different theories on the formation of reference prices since they are not always based on actual prices (Álvarez, 2002).

Taking into account the considerations made here, we establish the following hypotheses:

- H1:** Monetary promotions affect brand image negatively.
- H2:** Non-monetary promotions do not affect brand image negatively.

### **Effect Of Promotions On Brand Image: Moderating Role Of The Type Of Promotion And Benefit Congruence**

Most models of consumer behaviour claim that buyers assess goods on the basis of benefits they obtain and they value them according to the type of product and the purchase occasion. Thus, it seems logical that sales promotions increase the benefit obtained by the consumer in the purchase of the product.

Although traditionally it has been considered that promotional actions only produced functional benefits for the consumers, recent studies have agreed to consider a wider range of benefits which sales promotions may generate and which could contribute to a better understanding of the market response to them (Chandon, Wansink and Laurent,

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<sup>1</sup> The products used in these research are quite different (p.e.: washing powder, margarine, flour, toothbrushes, aspirin, cameras, hamburgers, dentists...)

2000; Ailawadi, Neslin and Gedenk, 2001). Chandon *et al.*(2000) develop a multibenefit frame of sales promotion which includes six different types of benefits: monetary savings, higher quality, convenience, value-expression, exploration and entertainment (table 1). From their view, consumers respond to sales promotions according to the positive experience they provide.

Chandon *et al.* (2000) prove that sales promotions will be more effective if there is congruence between the benefits the good provides and the benefits the promotion generates. For example, it is expected that the utilitarian benefits of a specific purchase alternative to be more relevant if we are buying a utilitarian product rather than a hedonic one. The analysis these authors propose refers to a short-term effectiveness, sales increase. But if we consider that sales promotions have a long-term effect on brand image, it may seem interesting to analyse if the benefit congruence may have a moderating role on that long-term effect.

According to Aaker (1996a) brand image must help to establish links between brand and customer by generating a value proposition which involves functional, emotional or self-expressing benefits. This value proposition should lead the customer to a purchase decision.

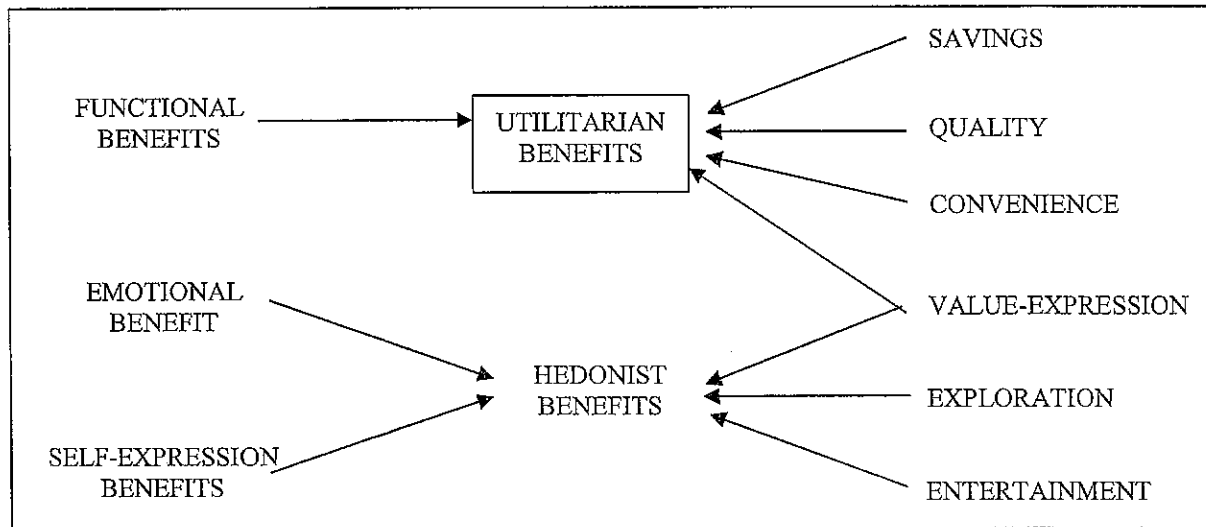
According Chandon *et al.* (2000) benefits may be classified, in a more parsimonious way, into utilitarian benefits and hedonic benefits. For these authors, utilitarian benefits are basically instrumental, functional and cognitive; they provide value for the consumer because they are a means to reach a goal. On the other hand, hedonic benefits are non-instrumental, experiencing and affective; they are appreciated by themselves, not for practical aspects (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). This classification allows us to integrate the benefits of promotions and products as shown in figure 1. Chandon *et al.* (2000) confirmed that non-monetary promotions provide stronger hedonic benefits and weaker utilitarian benefits than monetary promotions. Moreover, non-monetary promotions are valued for their hedonic benefits and monetary promotions are valued for their utilitarian benefits.

Table 1: Sales Promotion's Benefits

Sales Promotion's Benefits	Some Prior Research
<i>Monetary Savings:</i> Sales promotions can provide perceptions of monetary savings by lowering the unit prices of the promoted product, by offering more of the same product for free, or by providing refunds or rebates on subsequent purchases of the same or other products and reduce the pain of paying. Sales promotions can reduce the pain of paying.	Blattberg and Neslin (1990)
<i>Quality:</i> Sales promotions enable consumers to upgrade to a better product that couldn't be bought at normal prices.	Holbrook (1994)
<i>Convenience:</i> Sales promotions can improve shopping efficiency by reducing search costs and by helping to plan shopping.	Dickson and Sawyer (1990) Inman, McAlister and Hoyer (1990) Raghubir (1998) Raghubir and Corfinan (1999) Simonson, Carmon and O'Curry (1994) Wansink, Kent and Hoch (1998)
<i>Value-expression:</i> Some consumers respond to sales promotions to express and enhance their sense of themselves as smart shoppers and earn social recognition or affiliation.	Bagozzi, Baumgartner and Yi (1992) Holbrook (1994) Mittal (1994) Schindler (1992)
<i>Exploration:</i> Sales promotions can fulfill intrinsic needs for exploration, variety and information.	Babin, Darden and Griffin (1994) Baumgartner and Steenkamp (1996) Kahn (1995) Kahn and Louie (1990) Kahn and Raju (1991)
<i>Entertainment:</i> Some consumers enjoy themselves planning and shopping. Some promotions can be amusing	Holbrook (1994) Lichtenstein, Netemeyer and Burton (1990)

Adapted from Chandon *et al.*(2000)

Figure 1: Benefit Congruence



Considering this frame of benefit congruence and considering that the effectiveness of different promotions depends on the type of product, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H3:** The effect of monetary promotions on brand image differs depending on whether the promotions are used on utilitarian or on they are used in hedonic products
- H4:** The effect of non-monetary promotions on brand image differs depending on whether the promotions are used on utilitarian or on they are used in hedonic products

## METHOD

In order to contrast the proposed hypotheses we have carried out an experiment, explained below, with students of the Economy and Business Studies faculty of the University of Zaragoza.

### Pretest

The main objective of this research is to measure the effect of promotions on brand image and determine how far that effect can be influenced by the product category and/or the type of promotional tool used. To reach that objective, first we had to choose the categories of the product to analyse: one hedonic and another one utilitarian. Two weeks before carrying out the experiment we developed a pretest by giving a group of 137 undergraduate students a short questionnaire where they were asked to assess in a 1-to-7 scale if they considered a series of categories of product as utilitarian or hedonic (being 1 the most utilitarian and 7 the most hedonic). Previously both terms had been clarified. Considering the results of the pre-test and like Strahilevitz and Myers (1998), we selected as a hedonic product a bottle of whisky (87 % considered it hedonic) and as an utilitarian product a tube of toothpaste (91 % considered it utilitarian).

After selecting the products we chose two popular brands in the market, one for each product category: *Colgate* for the toothpaste and *Jack Daniels* for the whisky. The reason to choose two well-known brands is that we wanted to study the effect of promotions on brand image.

**Subjects**

The experiment was carried out with two groups of students on the same day. The first group (GR 1) was made of 50 students and the second one (GR 2) was made of 59 students. In both groups, they were given an identical questionnaire which had two parts. The students were asked to answer the first part, whose aim was to measure the initial image they had on both selected brands. After finishing, they were asked to return it and they kept the second part<sup>2</sup>. Afterwards, and before answering the second part of the questionnaire, each group had a different treatment<sup>3</sup>.

**Treatments**

The stimulus used as a treatment consisted of showing a series of images of the chosen products where they could see the regular selling price and, in each case, the promotional incentive offered for eight weeks. To show the promotions two *PowerPoint* presentations were performed in the classrooms. In the first group (GR 1) we decided to design the promotions from the perspective of no benefit congruence, that is to say, the utilitarian product by means of non-monetary incentive (direct presents and draws) and the hedonic one by means of monetary incentive (direct discounts). However, in the second group (GR 2) the benefits of the promotions were congruent with those the consumers expect in the product.

**Measurements**

We needed a measurement of the brand image to contrast the hypotheses. We have based on the scale proposed by Aaker (1996b). The present study is exploratory and its main aim is not to measure the image of the selected brands but to analyse if the promotions generate any change in it. Therefore, following Aaker (1996b) and Aaker and Álvarez del Blanco (1995), we are going to analyse the effect of promotions on brand image considering the dimension association/differentiation of the brand equity. In table 2 we show the items used to assess the brand image; the participants in the survey were asked to express their degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements in a scale from 1 (totally agree) to 7 (totally disagree), before and after the treatment. We have used all the items of the scale proposed by this author unless those which made a reference to the business globally. The reason is that this study tries to consider exclusively the effects of promotions on the brand promoted and not on the organisation which manufactures or markets it.

**Table 2: Items Used To Measure Brand Image**

This brand provides good value for the money
There are reasons to buy this brand over competitors
This brand has a personality
This brand is interesting
I have a clear image of the people who would use the brand
The brand has a rich history
This brand is different from competing brands
This brand is basically the same as competing brands
It's a brand that I trust

<sup>2</sup> As the objective of the study is to check if the use of promotions may generate a change of the brand image and so we had to compare both the initial and final images, each sheet of the questionnaire has a code which will allow us to identify the answers from the same individual after the experiment.

<sup>3</sup> The initial measurement took place at the beginning of the lesson and the treatment and final measurement took place fifty minutes later. The treatment last for five minutes.

## RESULTS

Once the data have been obtained we have carried out an analysis to check the normality of these variables as well as to detect outliers which may distort the results. After this exploratory analysis of the data and after discarding the outliers, we proceeded to analyse the hypotheses through contrast of means. In the cases where the variables met the requirements of normality we have developed parametric contrasts of means and if they did not meet the requirements of normality the tests used have been non-parametric<sup>4</sup>.

The hypotheses exposed consider the concept of brand image. It has been created a measurement of the brand image from Aaker (1996b); that measurement of the brand image is obtained through the arithmetic mean of the responses from consumers to the items of table 2<sup>5</sup>. In the results we present below that arithmetic mean is given the name of "Image".

The first hypothesis proposed that monetary promotions affect brand image negatively. Table 3 shows the means of the variable image before and after the promotions in prices; we present the means corresponding to the brand *Colgate* for group 2 and *Jack Daniels* for group 1. We also present the contrasts of means before and after the treatment.

Table 3: Effect Of Price Promotions On Brand Image

	Initial Image	Final Image	T
GR1 ( <i>Jack Daniels</i> )	4.45	4.5	0.642
GR2 ( <i>Colgate</i> )	4.3	4	2.370*

\*  $p \leq 0,05$

We can see that when analysing the first hypothesis we reach an apparently contradictory result. In the group which has received monetary promotions on the brand *Jack Daniels* there are no significant differences in the assessment of the brands, while in the other group (the one with monetary promotions on *Colgate*) there are significant differences, and we may conclude that the image of that brand is worse after applying the treatment. An explanation for the different results in both products might be in the congruence between the benefits provided by the products and those provided by the monetary promotion.

The second hypothesis maintained that non-monetary promotions do not damage the brand image of the products. Table 4 shows the results of the contrast of means. Again we can see two different effects, for the brand *Colgate* price promotions do not generate a change in the brand image whereas in the case of *Jack Daniels*, hedonic product, presents improve the brand image. In spite of the differences in the products, we can say that the results corroborate H2, since non-monetary promotions do not affect the brand image of both products negatively.

Table 4: Effect Of Non-Monetary Promotions On Brand Image

	Initial Image	Final Image	T
GR 1 ( <i>Colgate</i> )	4.21	4.23	-0.348
GR2 ( <i>Jack Daniels</i> )	4.23	4.55	3.881*

\*  $p \leq 0,01$

Hypotheses 3 and 4 tried to check the effect of benefit congruence on brand image; according to the results of the previous hypotheses we can discern an effect between those variables. To contrast those hypotheses we have proceeded to create a new variable which is the difference between the initial image and the final image of each brand.

<sup>4</sup> In the results the contrast point will be called "t" for parametric tests and "z" for non-parametric.

<sup>5</sup> The  $\alpha$  of Cronbach measurement of reliability of the scale is above 0,7 in all cases.

The third hypothesis maintained that the effect of monetary promotions is more harmful in utilitarian products than in hedonic ones. The procedure to contrast that hypothesis has been to compare the difference of the change in brand image in the product with monetary promotions; that is to say, comparing the difference in the assessment of *Jack Daniels* in group 1 with the difference of *Colgate* in group 2. Through the results of table 5 we check that there are significant differences in the effect of monetary promotions on brand image and, moreover, the damaged brand is the utilitarian product. Therefore, we accept H3 and according to the advice of several authors, companies should carefully design their promotional programs based in prices because this type of promotions can damage the brand equity of some products.

**Table 5: Importance Of Congruence Benefit In The Effect Of Price Promotions On Brand Image**

	Initial Image	Final Image	Difference	Z
GR 1 ( <i>Jack Daniels</i> )	4.45	4.5	0.05	1.936*
GR2 ( <i>Colgate</i> )	4.3	4.07	-0.22	

\*  $p \leq 0.1$

The fourth hypothesis shows the benefit congruence from a different perspective, providing a non-monetary incentive improves more the image of hedonic products than the image of utilitarian ones. In the third hypothesis, we want to check if the degree of impact of non-monetary promotions depends on the product where they are used. Now, we have compared the difference in the assessment of *Colgate* in group 1 with the difference of *Jack Daniels* in group 2. Table 6 shows the results of the contrast and we can see that there are no significant differences in the effect of non-monetary promotions on brand image when the promoted product is a hedonic one (benefit congruence) or when the promoted good is functional (no benefit congruence). Therefore, we can not corroborate hypothesis 4.

**Table 6: Importance Of Congruence Benefit In The Effect Of Non-Monetary Promotions On Brand Image**

	Initial Image	Final Image	Difference	Z
GR 1 ( <i>Colgate</i> )	4.20	4.24	0.04	-1.595
GR2 ( <i>Jack Daniels</i> )	4.23	4.55	0.32	

These results suggest that there should be more research in order to understand the effect of sales promotions on brand image. It has been proven that monetary promotions can damage the brand image of certain products but do not alter the perceptions of another products; the congruence of benefit can explain these effects. Nevertheless, the congruence of benefit has not been able to explain the different impact of no-monetary promotions on brand image.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper has intended to go into greater depth with the influence that sales promotion may have on brand image. To do so, we have carried out an experiment where we have considered brand image as a multidimensional concept.

The results obtained have an interest for those people responsible for the companies' commercial programmes. As we expected, we have confirmed that monetary promotions may have a negative effect on brand image. Above all, when they are used to promote a product from which the consumer expects to obtain a utilitarian benefit. Therefore, when a company with these characteristics focuses its strategies on commercialising a brand with a high value, it would be advisable not to use monetary promotions to obtain better results in a short term, since it would generate a differed negative effect on the image of the promoted brand.

On the other hand, when a company commercialises a hedonic good, offering the consumer a monetary incentive will not affect significantly the image that the consumer has of that brand.



Nevertheless, the use of non monetary promotions do not seem to be inconsistent with building a brand image because they do not affect in a negative way to image. Moreover, in certain cases this type of promotions can help to achieve brand objectives but the congruence of benefits does not help to understand the effect.

Meanwhile, it is known that distributors use promotions of brands with a high value to attract consumers to their establishments and these actions may interfere with the objectives of the manufacturer. If a company wants to give a higher value to its brand they should care for the relations with the channel, proposing and collaborating in those promotions which may be more interesting or less harmful for the product they commercialise.

Obviously, the conclusions obtained here must be considered cautiously since it is a first experiment. Besides, it would be convenient to revise other measurement scales for brand image which better fit the objectives of the research.

This research can be extended to include more specific issues. For example, in this study, we analyse the impact of promotions on two well known brands. In further research it would be useful to analyse the impact of promotions on low image brands.

Another issue which may be object of study in further research is to analyse the number and frequency of promotional impacts from which brand image is affected negatively. On the other hand, it could be checked if the effects change according to the type of promotional incentive, since, for example, in monetary promotions we find immediate discounts, coupons, refunds, etc.

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