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Psychological Triggers in Marketing & Impulse Buying

¹ Aman Kumar Prasad, ² Dr. Sameer Kulkarni

¹ Student, Amity Business School Amity University School

² Associate Professor, Amity Business School Amity University School

ABSTRACT :

All humans fall prey to impulsive buying through sudden urges that manipulation techniques used by marketers skilfully trigger. The research explores intense psychological methods marketing uses to influence consumer decisions particularly in unexpected buying moments. This research evaluates the psychological mechanisms behind emotional advertising together with FOMO appeal, scarcity operations, sensory experiences, social verification evidence as well as psychological effects like the anchoring bias and loss aversion. All these elements synchronise to modify our emotional experiences before directing us toward spontaneous choices that we do not recognise while they are happening.

The study uses a combination of focus groups and consumer survey data to gather its research findings. The research demonstrates that humans tend to make spontaneous decisions because of their reactions to excitement and FOMO combined with a perception of emergency. Customers respond strongly to visual marketing elements as well as promotional strategies using time limits and support from influencers which create increased opportunities for impulse buying. Monthly-based advertising strategies that spark emotional responses will guide marketers toward better campaign creation plus enable consumers to acknowledge their purchase actions. The research contributes new knowledge to consumer psychological science and marketing that companies can use to enhance branding strategies and retail design as well as advertising practices.

Introduction

Research shows impulse buying plays a vital role in retail shopping and continuous online purchases since the 1900s while today's fast-paced market values this behaviour highly. Rational purchasing demonstrates logical and rational characteristics compared to impulse buying because impulse buyers demonstrate spontaneous emotional reactions instead of pre-evaluating options. Since marketers identify consumer weak points they utilise psychological triggers which intentionally promote buyers to make irrational decisions and give in to impulse buying behaviour. Marketers use impulse purchases to probe unconscious mental states with strong emotional and cognitive residues that will affect consumer purchasing decisions later on. The techniques appeal to customers' sense of urgency through time-decreased offers and socially branded evidence and sensory-feeling-based marketing.

Deliberate and calculated psychological principles dominate consumer behaviour influences in both marketing and advertising because their purpose is to create biased buying patterns. Businesses use subtle cues present in shops and messages to adjust consumer perception of their observations and choices along with their potential losses and peer interactions and life events. Limited time offers establish both FOMO and the consensus bias within consumers. Their original choice disappears after reading product reviews combined with watching social influencers promote products thereby leading them to just follow what others do.

A consumer's comprehension of psychological marketing strategies will help them make better buying choices while providing valuable insights for successful campaign marketing.

Review of literature

Impulse buying has been widely studied from psychological, marketing, and consumer behaviours perspectives. Rook (1987) first characterised impulse buying as the spontaneous desire to purchase something without much reflection on the decision. Subsequent research identified that impulse buying was associated with specific psychological factors, such as emotional arousal, gratification, and low perceived-self-control (Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001; Baumeister, 2002).

Marketing professionals have learned how to use psychological stimuli such as scarcity, social proof, and emotional appeals, to affect a consumer's purchase decision. Cialdini's (2001) principles of persuasion, especially scarcity with respect to limited time offers (Cialdini, 2001), and reciprocity of offers (Cialdini, 2001) such as buy one get one free, are some of the most used advertising strategies to prompt urgency and impulsivity in consumers. Sensory marketing based on visual stimuli, and olfactory stimuli, has also had much influence in retail settings (Peck & Wiggins, 2006).

Most recent literature has the trend of online shopping with later publications focusing on digital environments. Features such as personalized recommendations and flash sales in e-commerce, contribute to drive impulsive behavior by creating a sense of top exclusivity and temporality (Liu et al., 2013). Furthermore, emotional states like stress and happiness also significantly affect impulse buying (Youn & Faber, 2000).

The existing literature has consistently demonstrated that highly salient psychological triggers are powerfully influence marketing strategies designed to affect impulsive buying behavior offline or online.

Objectives of the Study

1. Research aims to discover the significant emotional factors which control consumer impulsive purchasing habits.
2. Emotions together with mood influence the purchasing decisions people make while shopping spontaneously.
3. The research investigates how targeting personal advertisements alongside flash sales combined with influencer content impacts the buying behaviour of customers.
4. A detailed examination determines which population groups such as age group, gender and occupational group demonstrate impulsive buying behaviour.
5. Research investigates how extensively people understand their impulsive purchasing behaviour together with their personal perception of it.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology for investigating marketing triggers as well as their influence on spontaneous consumer purchases is described throughout this chapter. The study seeks to explore consumer unplanned purchase behaviour by examining real-world perceptions through structured surveys yet focuses on the effect of emotional elements along with cognitive elements and environmental influences. This section explains how the research was designed along with sampling methods and data collection instruments and analytical methods.

Research Design

A quantitative research design used descriptive survey methods for its implementation. The researchers chose this method to collect measurable information from many participants in order to find patterns between psychological triggers and impulse buying behaviours. Research design enables statistical evaluation of collected data because it offers generalised information about the study results.

Type of Research and Data Collection Method

The study utilises non-probability convenience sampling because it effectively collects data quickly from different participants. A digital survey was distributed via WhatsApp combined with Instagram and email to reach urban as well as semi-urban respondents throughout India. The digital distribution method delivers easy access that enables researchers to reach participants irrespective of their geographic areas or social backgrounds. This quick response period enabled participant selection according to their response availability and thereby achieved an extensive range of consumer feedback.

Sample Size and Respondent Profile

The sample was demographically diverse: A diverse number of 140 valid respondents completed the questionnaire. The following outlines the key characteristics of the sample:

1. Most survey participants (75%) belonged to the age group of 18-24 while 15% were 25-34 years old and 5% belonged to both groups aged 35-44 and 45+.
2. Male participants made up 51.4% of the surveyed group which exceeded female participants at 48.6%.
3. Most participants identified as current students with 80% total (18% were working professionals) and 2% made up the rest consisting of homemakers and self-employed individuals. The remaining segment of 2% consisted of people categorized as homemakers along with those maintaining self-employment businesses.
4. Digital shopping trends were evident in 70% of the respondents who consistently purchased online while viewing digital advertisements. The participants proved suitable for evaluating subconscious marketing strategies because of their online shopping behaviors.
5. The participants had experience with traditional and internet shopping therefore offering valuable understanding about psychological activation elements that drive shopping choices especially regarding impulse decisions.

Data Collection Instruments

A structured questionnaire served as the main data collection instrument to study psychological triggers that drive consumers in marketing and impulse buying behavior. The research tool included these features to extract different types of respondent information while obtaining complete data about studied variables.

Survey Design

The survey divided into four main parts.

1. Demographic Profile:

The demographic background of participants included age, gender, income level, education and occupational information which served as the initial section. Such demographic characteristics proved essential to understand what impact they have on buying behaviour along with responses to psychological marketing methods.

2.Shopping Behaviour and Preferences:

The survey sought information about how often people shopped in addition to determining which channels they preferred and how easily they fell victim to impulse buying. Survey participants revealed their standard purchasing behaviour together with their degree of pre-planning before making a purchase.

3.Psychological Triggers in Marketing:

- 1.Hit Response offers statements that measure the effects of psychological triggers within this section.
- 2.Available time-sensitive offers have a strong influence on what I purchase.
- 3.Positive reviews persuade me to purchase products since social proof becomes an effective trigger ("I am more likely to buy a product if I see positive reviews").
- 4.Time pressure is more intense when websites show countdown timers that directly trigger my immediate buying desire.
- 5.Emotional promotions through advertising make my purchasing choices react based on their emotional content (e.g. Emotional advertisements impact my buying decisions).
- 6.The use of personalized advertising generates feelings of product connection in customers.
- 7.A discount that uses original prices to set the price will affect customers' perception of product value.

Participants evaluated their agreement to twenty behavioural marketing triggers on a Likert scale that operated from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

4.Impulse buying tendencies

The section assessed the spontaneous buying habits of individuals by asking questions such as:

- a. The purchase of unplanned items happens frequently without planning in advance.
- b. Unplanned purchases bring me a feeling of enthusiasm.
- c. I feel disappointed about the items I buy without thinking after the fact.

Scope of Study

- 1.The research examines which psychological elements affect consumer impulsive buying decisions specifically during current marketing practices.
- 2.Strategic psychological approaches for marketing can develop from contemporary findings that assist both marketers and brand managers together with advertisers and business students.
- 3.This research examines what psychological variables (such as the combination of fear of missing out with peer influence based on emotional triggers) best activates instant buying impulses.
- 4.The research only analyses impulse buying behaviour through digital and physical store platforms since these represent the primary platforms for observing impulse buying behavior.
- 5.Most respondents between 18 and 45 years old belong to the categories of students along with working professionals and home makers.

Limitations

- 1.The study's participant number remains limited at 140 respondents because this number fails to reflect the larger population accurately.
- 2.The survey method displayed geographical bias because most of the responses came from users of online platforms who mainly reside in urban areas.
- 3.The survey fails to completely measure instinctive purchases because these responses depend on subjective psychological reactions to present emotions or outside elements.
- 4.Participating subjects rely on their personal assessments to reply to survey questions therefore their answers could be compromised by personal bias together with memory lapses or feelings of what others think.
- 5.The unpredictable nature of consumer purchasing behavior forced by changing market directions makes it difficult to predict future buying patterns through general observations.
- 6.Examining psychological triggers required strict limitations due to time and research scope since the authors did not explore personal financial

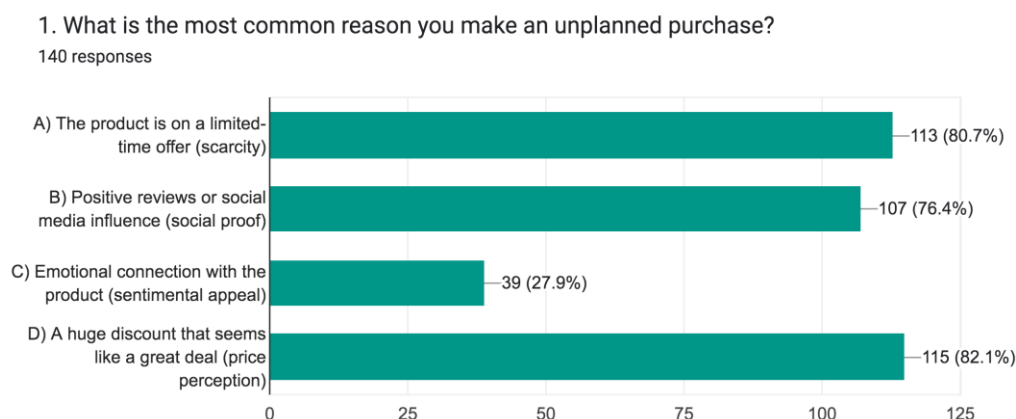
situations or personality traits.

Data analysis and interpretation

The structured questionnaire received responses from 140 participants leading to analysis and interpretation of gathered data. Our study focused on understanding how psychological triggers used in marketing practice shape buying impulsiveness. The information undergoes analysis and interpretation at each survey question to reveal relevant findings about consumer psychology together with marketing performance.

Q1. What is the most common reason you make an unplanned purchase ?

Interpretation:



1. Price perception (82.1%): Among 140 participants huge discounts or deals received the most popular response (115 respondents) as the main cause of unplanned buys. Price sensitivity demonstrates alongside perceived value as major factors which influence consumers to make sudden purchases.

2. Scarcity (80.7%): Freedom of purchase offers placed at the second choice position with 113 respondents choosing this incentive. Urgent and scarce marketing strategies drive consumers toward immediate buying since they create a sense of loss experienced through missing out (FOMO).

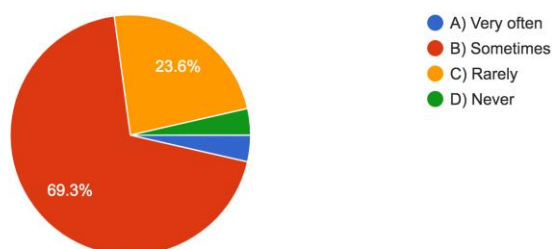
3. Social Proof (76.4%): A total of 107 individuals reported they make unplanned purchases based on their view of positive reviews and influencer opinions. The data confirms that peer recommendations along with social validation create significant force which leads people to make unexpected purchases.

4. Sentimental Appeal (27.9%): A mere 39 people reported that emotional connection began their purchasing chain. The influence of sentimental appeals remains relevant although it is weaker than external triggers consisting of social proof and discounts.

Hence, external psychological triggers which combine discounts with scarcity messages and social influence prove superior to internal emotional responses when it comes to impulse buying.

Q2. How often do you buy something just because it's labeled as "limited stock"?

2. How often do you buy something just because it's labeled as "limited stock"?
140 responses



Interpretation

The display shows that marketing tactics about limited supplies consistently affect consumer buying decisions based on impulse. The results show that 69.3% of people purchased limited stock products at least occasionally which highlights how persuasive marketing really is. Almost one quarter of people display high sensitivity to scarcity cues because they very often purchase items based on limited stock messages.

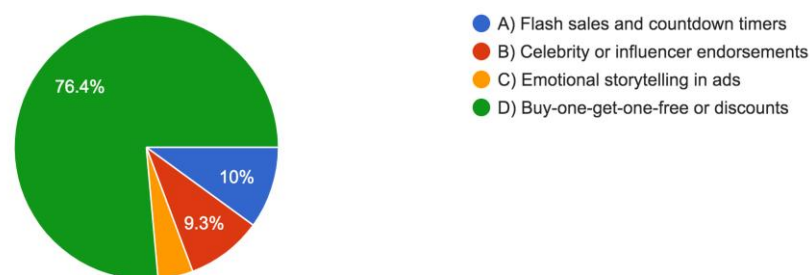
The combined ratio of students who experienced scarcity-based communications comes to more than 92% based on their answers between "very often" and "sometimes." The rest of survey subjects (4.3% + 2.8%) indicated their products are not affected by scarcity triggers which indicates the mental trigger does not reach most participants.

People buy on impulse because FOMO and scarcity-driven urge for getting things quickly are powerful persuasion factors.

Q3. Which of these marketing strategies influences you the most?

4. Which of these marketing strategies influences you the most?

140 responses



Interpretation

1.Dominant Strategy – Discounts (76.4%)

A large majority of respondents, roughly 107 individuals, made Buy-one-get-one-free offers or discounts as their most powerful marketing strategy. Clearly, price-based incentives remain the strongest driver for consumers, the subset is indicating a clear preference for a tangible financial benefit.

2.Moderate Influence – Flash Sales & Timers (10%)

Around 14 individuals stated they were influenced by flash sales and countdown timers; therefore, it can be assumed that the time-based urgency for a limited offer attracts a relatively smaller, influential segment of consumers.

3.Low Influence – Influencer Endorsements (9.3%)

Only 13 of the respondents felt that celebrity or influencer marketing influenced their decision-making to buy, implying they put less stock in their endorsement than value-based offers.

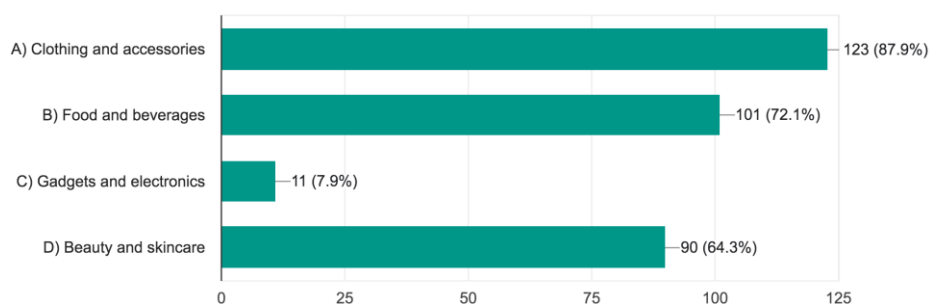
4.Minimal Influence – Emotional Storytelling (4.3%)

Only 6 of individuals found emotional storytelling in advertisement to be compelling enough to lead them to make a purchase, suggesting emotional connection alone isn't likely to convert viewers to buyers.

Q4. Which type of product are you most likely to buy on impulse?

5. Which type of product are you most likely to buy on impulse?

140 responses



Interpretation

1.Top Impulse Category – Clothing & Accessories (87.9%)

With a total of 123 respondents, it is clear that clothing and accessories are the top impulse category for consumers.

Evidence of this is found in the fact that clothing and accessories are marketed utilizing emotional/instant gratification factors, and by urgency, seasonality or appeal.

2.Second Most Common – Food & Beverages (72.1%)

Food and beverage assessments were made by 101 respondents, and it is not a surprise these were also a common impulse buy.

Food and drink impulsivity can be a result of sheer availability, affordability, and packaging. Examples include deals that require purchases, snack foods at checkout, etc.

3.Moderate Impulse – Beauty & Skincare (64.3%)

90 individuals reported making an impulse purchase of beauty and skincare products.

This product category is commonly and successfully marketed with appeals to emotion, influencer marketing, and trial marketing (mini products, testers, shopping samples etc.).

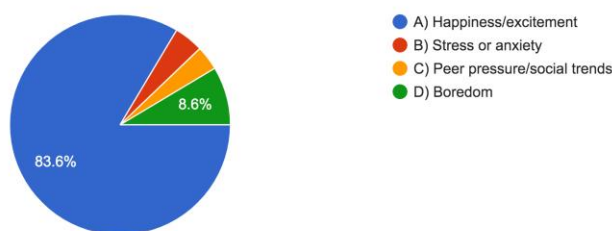
4.Lowest Impulse – Gadgets & Electronics (7.9%)

Only 11 respondents impulsively buy electronics, suggesting that higher cost and technical considerations lead to more rational, planned decisions in this category.

Impulse buying is strongest for low-to-medium priced, emotionally or visually appealing products, while high-investment items like electronics see more deliberate purchase behavior.

Q5 What emotion most often drives your impulse purchases?

6. What emotion most often drives your impulse purchases?
140 responses



Interpretation

The data demonstrates that happiness or excitement is the top emotional trigger for impulse buying. A whopping 83.6% of respondents chose this option. This means that when people feel good, they are more likely to reward themselves, or act on their heightened sensations, with purchases. We see the concept of consumer purchase celebrating events (i.e., celebrating birthdays, holidays, parties, etc.), and the notion of pleasure (i.e., indulgent shopping/purchases), come to life through happiness or excitement.

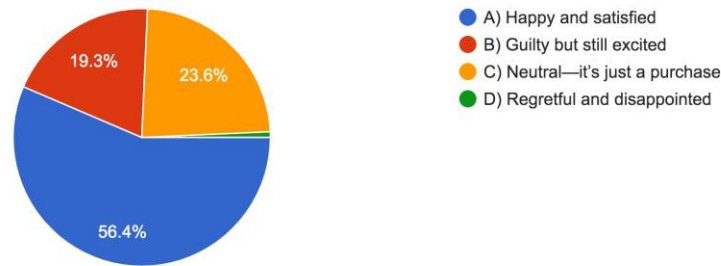
While stress or anxiety was explored as a low motivator (4.3%), this does indicate that negative emotions play a role in impulsive decision-making, just not as influential as rewarding and treating yourself. In our results, social pressure or trends as a motivator was implicating as a driving reason for impulsive purchasing at 3.6% (no-one likes to be left out), not unlike peer pressure. This would tell us that the least motivating force behind impulse purchases is social pressure or external influences compared to internal emotional state of being. Lastly, it should be noted that boredom was indicated by 8.6%, which does tell us that people sometimes impulse buy when there are idle times and not keeping engaged.

Essentially, we are telling ourselves while negative emotions exist, it is positive emotional states, that are significantly driving us to make spontaneous purchases. The emotive forces of happiness and excitement would far spare the negative emotive influence in influencing spontaneous purchases.

Q7. How do you feel after making an impulse purchase?

8. How do you feel after making an impulse purchase?

140 responses



Interpretation

1. Outcomes phrased positively – Happy and Satisfied (56.4 %)

Overall, 79 respondents said they felt genuinely happy and satisfied with their decision to purchase after an impulse purchase.

This indicates that the majority of respondents were happy, suggesting the majority of consumers find value in impulse purchases and experience a positive, emotionally satisfying experience in purchasing impulsively, and this experience encourages further spontaneous consumption in the future.

2. Mixed Outcomes – Guilt but excited (23.6 %)

Approximately 33 respondents said they felt mixed emotions, a sense of guilt and excitement. This indicates that while the subject enjoyed the purchase and the excitement accompanying it, they might be unsure about the necessity of designing to make the purchase or feel a bit unsure about the timing of the decision to make the purchase.

3. Neutral outcome – It is just a purchase. (19.3 %)

27 participants answered a neutral response. A neutral response indicates that impulse purchasing is neither regretful nor exciting, similar to dispossession. Impulse purchasing could have been treated as just what it is, a part of the consumer journey as a consumer without any emotionally-laden thoughts.

4. Negative Feelings – Regret and disappointment (0.7 %)

One individual said they felt feelings of regret/disappointment. In total, 1 individual described post-purchase disappointment or regret. The idea that negative post-purchase emotions are talked about less in the literature and in practical day-to-day realities.

Most individuals who completed an impulse purchase describe a positive or neutral emotion after an impulse purchase which indicates a pathway to continued behavior of impulsive purchases.

FINDINGS

When consumers make unplanned purchases, they are almost always driven to buy by price perception especially discounts and price offers.

- Scarcity strategies (limited time or limited stock) met with consumer evidence shows impulse buying is strongly triggered.
- Social proof behavior (reviews or influencer engagement) has an influence, but not as strong as a monetary benefit.
- Emotion connections matter, but they have relatively less impact on impulse driven purchases.
- Most people sometimes simply buy products because they have been told we have "limited stock", indicating the strength of urgency marketing.
- Both one buy one free or similar strategies are the best marketing strategies, surpassing both emotional and influencer driven strategies to the highest extent.
- We are more likely to see impulse purchase products (clothing, food and beauty) due to aesthetic, lower price, and emotional gratification.
- The primary emotional drivers for impulse purchases are positive emotions, mainly excitement and happiness.
- After a purchase most consumers report feeling happy or neutral, which leads us to believe impulsive buying behavior is sometimes about reward-seeking behavior.

The outcome of impulse buying does not leave consumers with negative emotion feelings such as regret, because it is likely they rationalize or justify the process themselves.

Recommendations:

1. Marketers ought to focus on emotional triggers like happiness, excitement, and thrill from scoring a good deal as they yield the most effect on impulse buying behavior.
2. Use scarcity approaches like limited-time offers and flash sales. Scarcity is often used to invoke urgency, which enhances consumers' decision-making capabilities.
3. Prominence of pricing/value benefits and discounts is important as perception of price plays a large role in developing impulse purchases.
4. Visual merchandising and product placement need to have a bunch of eye candy and touchy/feely values in order to capture immediate attention.
5. Psychological triggers related to personalized marketing messages and targeted promotions based on consumer preference can increase the power of these triggers.

6. Digital platforms need to maximize real-time notifications (e.g., "only 2 left in stock") to enhance the effects of scarcity and urgency.

Limitations:

1. Responses could have bias due to self-reporting, where participants may fail to accurately reflect on their impulsive nature.
2. Emotional states vary widely among individuals, making it difficult and unprincipled to generalize from a representative sample across demographics.
3. The effectiveness of psychological triggers is contingent upon presentation of a product (product type), pricing, and consumer intent.
4. Cultural differences and the relational aspect of personal values was not considered, which could affect emotional triggers.
5. Study did not capture long-term effects or buyers remorse tied to impulse purchasing.

Conclusion

The psychological triggers that affect consumers affect their buying behavior, especially for purchases made on impulse. Marketing practices that trigger feelings of emotion, scarcity, social proof, and purchase price are already shown to be more effective. All purchases made in line with emotions of excitement and happiness are not planned. Oftentimes consumers are more likely to purchase as a result of a promotion/discount/sale, or by purchasing trendy items when feeling excited.

Emotions have a big influence on decision-making when making a purchase. Feelings of excitement tend to be positively linked with spontaneous buying behavior. Marketers show that financial incentives, like buy-one-get-one free or a discount, are the most effective consumer impulse purchasing tactic, indicating value perception is her best motivator. Building social proof and telling stories are also effective but to a lesser degree.

Products that were more personal, affordable, or appearance were more likely to be bought on impulse (clothing, food, cosmetic). In addition, most consumers indicated that they felt satisfied or at least neutral about their purchase, which likely reinforced that behavior the next time they may consider an impulse purchase.

In conclusion, research shows that strategies marketers can use to provoke consumer psychological triggers, and therefore lead them to act impulsively, will help add to their bottom line or to sell more.

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