

PANDA TOURISM: THE ROLE OF DESTINATION IMAGE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TOURISTS' CONSUMPTION VALUES AND BEHAVIOURAL INTENTION

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Abstract

The Malaysian government received two endangered pandas as a diplomatic gift from the government of China to mark 40 years of strong diplomatic ties between the two countries. The Giant Panda Conservation Centre (GPCC) in Zoo Negara was established to show Malaysia's commitment towards China's governmental efforts in increasing the number of the endangered giant panda worldwide and establishing a distinctly new niche tourism attraction called Panda Tourism (PT). The attraction has pulled many local and international visitors from different countries across Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia. However, research on the rationale, benefits, issues, and future of PT initiative remains under-explored. The present study attempts to understand the PT concept by measuring the consumption value dimensions of PT, namely; functional, social, emotional, epistemic and conditional and how these dimensions affect tourists behavioural intention to visit other PTs throughout the world. In addition, the study measured the mediation effect of destination image toward the relationship of consumption values and tourists behavioural intention. The findings of this study are among the early attempts to better understand the rationales, benefits, and potentials of PT as a niche tourism concept in Malaysia. The study employed the survey questionnaire to gather quantitative data. Data were analyzed using the SmartPLS 3.0 software. The results of the analysis identified conditional, functional, and social as the significant determinants of Consumption Value towards tourists' behavioural intention to visit PT. Furthermore, functional value proved to have significant direct as well as indirect influence on the tourists' behavioural intention.

Keywords: Panda Tourism, behavioural intention, destination image, consumption values, Zoo Negara.

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Introduction

Millions of people visited Panda Tourism (PT) attractions each year. The attractions have successfully pulled many tourists from different continents; mostly from Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia. Despite the PT popularity among tourists, research on the benefits, issues and future of PT initiative remains under-explored. Hence, exploration is in a dire need to study this unique and niche tourism concept as well as investigating the mediation effect of destination image (DI) toward the relationship of consumption values and tourists' behavioural intention (TBI).

Shuib et al. (2015) published the very first research article on Giant Panda Conservation Centre (GPCC) in Malaysia. The research evaluated the visitors' willingness to pay (WTP) for giant panda conservation. A year later, other studies emerged that investigated on the GPCC with added of tourism elements: visitor attitudes (Ashaari & Johari, 2016), performance of services and facilities (Bahari & Ling, 2016), memorable tourism experiences (Ing & Kunasekaran, 2016), visitor awareness (Nordin & Ling, 2016), motivation to visit (Ramli & Ramachandran, 2016), wildlife value orientations (Wan & Puvaneswaran (2016); and visitor satisfaction (Yee & Shazali, 2016). Most importantly, the above research highlighted the growing research interest in this adorable giant panda conservation and raises the need for a more in-depth investigation on the topic in many different areas of research such as consumer behaviour and attitudes that could further benefit the conservation of Panda Tourism.

Though categorized as a wildlife, the image of PT can single out its own tourist attraction. The availability of PT within a country, such as Malaysia, can contribute significantly to the tourism sector of the country. Literature on wildlife tourism has documented on the tourist experience; however, limited information is available on the role of a particular species in attracting tourists to specific destinations (Tremblay, 2002). The limitation challenges the role of attraction image in pulling tourists. Previous studies defined destination image as impressions, knowledge, ideas, beliefs, prejudices and expectations of people about a particular destination (Crompton 1979; Hunt 1975). According to Gartner (1994), touristic destination images can be viewed as pull factors which are vital in understanding how images are formed in developing a pull potential of a destination. Consistently, literature--for the last 40 years--have found traces that image is a valuable and important concept in understanding the destination selection process. Tapachai and Waryszak (2000) claimed that most studies have focused on the image attributes of a destination; however little is known about the characteristics of destination images that affect tourists' decisions to visit a particular attraction.

This study focuses on Panda Tourism in Malaysia that is seen essentially into the values based on visitors' experiences at GPCC, Zoo Negara. Since GPCC is a purpose-built structure constructed to house the two giant pandas, it is important to understand the values of GPCC as viewed by visitors and what type of values and dimensions can be created by the Panda Tourism in Malaysia. Tapachai and Waryszak (2000), conceptualized the beneficial image model using the consumption value theory as perceptions or impressions of tourists towards a destination with respect and belief on the expected benefit that may lead to the decision of visitation. There are five dimensions of values under this consumption values theory, namely functional value (FV) which is related to the utilitarian and functional purpose of products, social value (SV); which is related to the image obtained from the society, emotional values (EV); which are related to the arousal of emotions when using the products, epistemic value (EPV); which is related to novelty seeking or curiosity or desire for knowledge, and conditional value (CV); which is derived due to specific situation or circumstances that are encountered by the consumers (Sheth et al., 1991).

Phau et al. (2014) argue the consumption value theory provides a platform to pinpoint exactly which value is significant and readily transformed into marketing strategies and market segmentation for particular destinations. The previous studies confirmed the consumption values are important antecedents of perceived beneficial image and destination choice intention (Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000; Phau et al., 2014). Therefore, the consumption values model of Sheth et al. (1991) was adopted to isolate the different categories of value with respect to the context of PT in GPCC, Zoo Negara. The study was not only an attempt to verify the differences in perceptions of visitors but also to explain those differences by using consumption values theory. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between the consumption values of PT and TBI. In addition, the study looked at how DI mediates the relationship between the consumption values of PT and TBI.

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between consumption values of Panda Tourism and tourists' behavioural intention and to measure the mediation effect of destination image toward the relationship of consumption values and tourists' behavioural intention.

Methods

Data Collection

This study examined the mediating effect of DI towards the relationship of consumption values and DI. The data were collected at GPCC, Zoo Negara by surveying the visitors. The survey targets to gather the tourists' experience after visiting the GPCC. The survey was conducted within two weeks and was only done during the weekends when the tourist traffic is heavier. Besides the face-to-face data collection at GPCC, the questionnaire was also distributed via social media platform. A total of 431 responses were collected and further analyzed.

Data Analysis

Prior to analyzing the data, the descriptive statistics, computed using SPSS, was analysed for

respondents' demographic profiles. Table I presents the background information of the tourists. Partial Least Square Structural Modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the data. PLS-SEM is a family of multivariate statistical techniques; hence, it was used to evaluate the hypotheses linkages among variables as well as to examine the direct and indirect relationships between independent latent variables and dependent latent variables.

In the measurement model, a validity and reliability analysis was needed to measure and further reduce measurement errors. The data obtained tested the reliability in calculating the Cronbach alpha and composite reliability (CR) scores. Following Fornell and Larcker (1981), this study used CR and average variance extracted (AVE) to examine the convergent validity. Then, discriminant validity was measured based on the result in items loading and the square root of AVE to confirm the indicators were fit to be used in estimating parameters in the structural model.

Result and Discussion

Research Demographic Profile

As shown in Table I, 53% of the respondents visiting GPCC, Zoo Negara was male, and the other 47% were female. Among the respondents are young parents, a group of youngsters, student trips, and not to forget an elderly. A majority of the tourists were 18 to 29 years old (51%). Most GPCC visitors were local tourists in which the majority was from Kuala Lumpur. Only 6.5% were international tourists from India, Brunei, Pakistan, Indonesia, Japan, China, Australia, and Taiwan.

Table I Tourists' Demographic Profile			
<i>Measure</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Gender	Male	228	52.9%
	Female	203	47.1%
Age	18 – 29	222	51.5%
	30 – 39	149	34.6%
	40 – 49	31	7.2%
	50 and above	29	6.7%
Nationality	Malaysia :Kuala Lumpur	208	48.3%
	Malaysia: Other State	195	45.2%
	International	28	6.5%

Internal Consistency, Convergent and Discriminant Validity

To determine the internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha values (Cronbach, 1951) were observed. All constructs had high reliability with Cronbach's alpha larger than .700 (see Table II).

Table II Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability Scores			
	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>	<i>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</i>
<i>CV</i>	0.7001	0.8681	0.7671
<i>DI</i>	0.8856	0.9132	0.6377
<i>EPV</i>	0.8458	0.9064	0.7636
<i>EV</i>	0.8974	0.9242	0.7096
<i>FV</i>	0.8072	0.8737	0.6337
<i>SV</i>	0.7735	0.8518	0.5897
<i>TBI</i>	0.8644	0.9076	0.7118

FV = Functional Value; SV = Social Value; EV = Emotional Value; EPV = Epistemic Value; CV = Conditional Value; DI = Destination Image; TBI = Tourists' Behavioural Intention

Following Fornell and Larcker (1981), this study used composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) to examine the convergent validity. Hair et al. (2014) proposed that if CR is greater than the threshold of 0.7, then this construct can be regarded as a good indicator. Table II shows a measurement model has satisfactory reliability because the composite reliability (CR) of each

construct exceeded the threshold of 0.7. Moreover, the AVE must be greater than the threshold of 0.5, which means more than 50% of the variation in this construct can be explained by its indicators (Chin & Newsted, 1999). Each AVE was greater than 0.5 and each CR was greater than 0.7; therefore, the measurement model is reliability and validity accepted.

Table III	Interconstruct Correlation						
	<i>CV</i>	<i>DI</i>	<i>EPV</i>	<i>EV</i>	<i>FV</i>	<i>SV</i>	<i>TBI</i>
<i>CV</i>	0.8758						
<i>DI</i>	0.5150	0.7986					
<i>EPV</i>	0.3810	0.6599	0.8739				
<i>EV</i>	0.4715	0.6590	0.6513	0.8423			
<i>FV</i>	0.4234	0.6942	0.7058	0.7431	0.7961		
<i>SV</i>	0.3940	0.5856	0.6574	0.6513	0.7884	0.7679	
<i>TBI</i>	0.5298	0.5957	0.5312	0.5898	0.6195	0.5791	0.8437

Discriminant validity was measured using the Fornell-Lacker's criterion. A measurement model has discriminant validity when; (1) item's loading of each indicator is highest for its designated construct, (2) if the square root of the AVE exceeds the correlations between the dimension and all the other dimensions. Hence, to determine the first assessment of measurement model's discriminant validity, the AVE value of each construct is generated using the smartPLS algorithm function. Based on the results, all square roots of AVE exceeded the off-diagonal elements in their corresponding row and column (see Table III). The results confirmed that Fornell and Larcker's criterion had been met.

Structural Model Assessment

The R^2 value shows the amount of variance in dependent variables that is explained by the independent variables. Thus, a larger R^2 value increases the predictive ability of the structural model. The result shows, FV, SV, EV, EPV, and CV are able to explain 50.9% of the variance in tourists' behavioural intention (TBI). On the other hand, FV, SV, EV, EPV, and CV explain 59.8% of the variance in destination image (DI). In the structural model, each path connecting two latent variables represented one hypothesis. This conducted analysis allows the study to confirm or disconfirm each hypothesis as well as understand the strength of the relationship between dependent and independent variables.

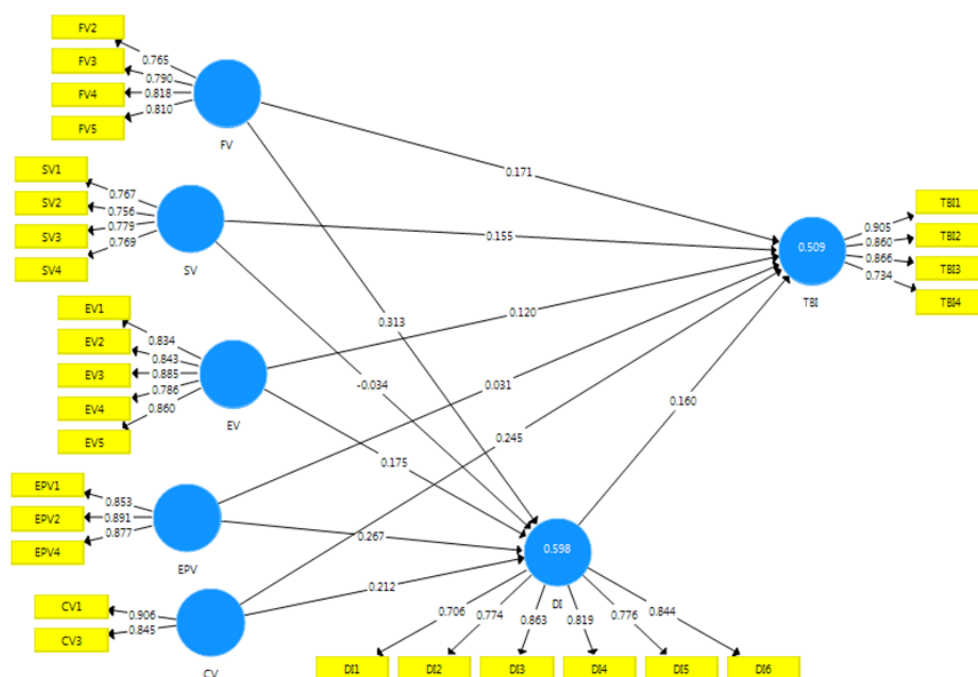


Figure 1: Structural Model (Model 1)

Table IV	Path Coefficients, Mean, STDEV, T-statistics, and Significant Level for all Hypothesised Paths				
	<i>Original Sample (O)</i>	<i>Sample Mean (M)</i>	<i>Standard Deviation (STDEV)</i>	<i>T Statistics (O/STDEV)</i>	<i>P Values</i>
<i>CV-> TBI</i>	0.2453***	0.2422	0.0479	5.1190	0.0000
<i>DI-> TBI</i>	0.1600*	0.1641	0.0724	2.2113	0.0272
<i>EPV-> DI</i>	0.0427*	0.0441	0.0212	2.0095	0.0448
<i>FV-> TBI</i>	0.1708*	0.1702	0.0761	2.2455	0.0250
<i>FV-> DI</i>	0.0501*	0.0510	0.0253	1.9813	0.0478
<i>SV-> TBI</i>	0.1552*	0.1548	0.0701	2.2147	0.0270

*** P Values 0.000 (significant at the level of at least 0.05)

* P Values should be exceeded 0.100

In order to examine the t-statistic for all paths and the significance level, it must be generated via bootstrapping function. Hence, the t-statistic output explained the significant level of each relationship. Table VI explained the supported or not supported by the proposed hypotheses. Functional value (H1a), social value (H1b), and conditional value (H1e) had been identified to have direct significance influence on TBI. Meanwhile, there are two values that have indirectly influenced TBI; functional value (H2a) and epistemic value (H2d). Hence, based on the indirect effect, DI mediates only two out of five values.

Mediating Analysis

Model 2 examined the mediating effect of the study. In model 2, all the items of the five constructs were uploaded into one independent variable, namely consumption values to examine the construct as a one; Consumption Values of Panda Tourism (ConsV). ConsV explained 46.5% of the variance in TBI. Meanwhile, ConsV explained 54.9% of the variance in DI. Henceforth, by comparing these two models, it can be explained that model 1 has a higher percentage of variance towards TBI. However there was no big difference in the variance percentage for both models. Similar to model 1, all the requirements for the measurement model were also fulfilled for model 2.

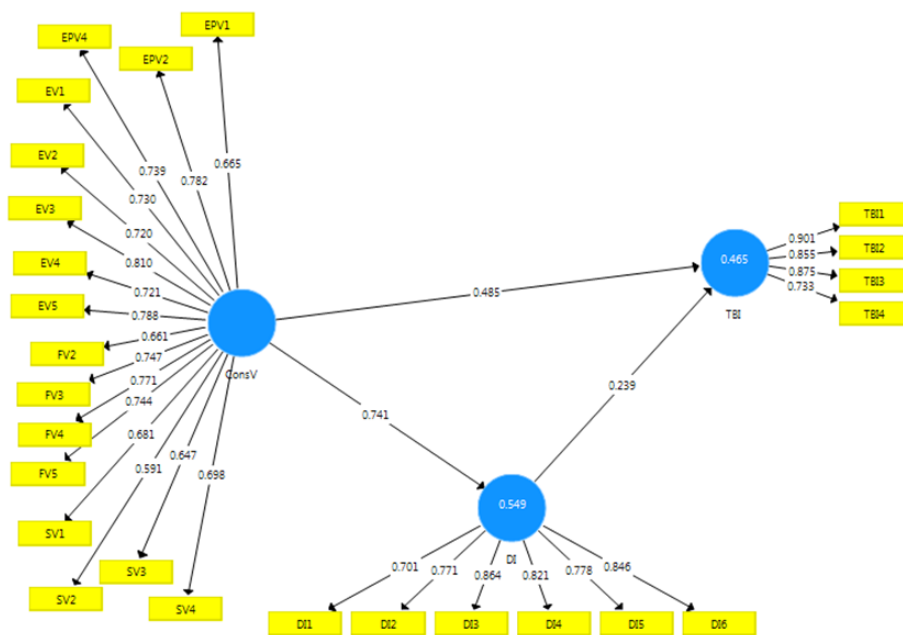


Figure 2: Mediating analysis (Model 2)

Table V	Path Coefficient of Model 2				
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
ConsV -> DI	0.7409***	0.7435	0.0213	34.7935	0.0000
ConsV -> TBI	0.4854***	0.4872	0.0561	8.6536	0.0000
DI -> TBI	0.2394***	0.2386	0.0729	3.2826	0.0011

Table V presented the path coefficient for model 2 which indicated that there is a significant relationship between ConsV towards DI ($p < 0.005$). Not only that, there is significant relationship between consumption values and TBI ($p < 0.005$). And last but not least, DI has a significant relationship which contributes to overall TBI ($p < 0.005$). Therefore the hypothesis H1, H2, and H3 are supported.

The mediating effect of DI towards the relationship of consumption values and TBI are presented in table VI. The hypothesis H4 is supported for the study due to significant of the relationship ($\beta = 0.1773$, $t = 3.2066$, $p < 0.05$). However, all the CV items are not valid and reliable to model 2, thus it has to be deleted in order to raise the AVE. Thus, only four values; FV, SV, EV, and EPV were reflected to consumption values theory to support the hypothesis H4.

Table VI	Mediating Effect of the Relationship between Consumption Values and TBI				
	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
ConsV -> DI -> TBI	0.1773***	0.1776	0.0553	3.2066	0.0014

The Relationship between Consumption Values and Tourists' Behavioural Intention

Model 2 showed ConsV have a significant relationship with TBI. Thus, hypothesis H1 ($\beta = 0.4854$, $t = 8.6536$, $p < 0.05$) was supported. Meanwhile, based on model 1 only three dimensions of consumption values; (H1a) FV ($\beta = 0.1708$, $t = 2.2455$, $p < 0.05$), (H1b) SV ($\beta = 0.1552$, $t = 2.2147$, $p < 0.05$), and (H1c) CV ($\beta = 0.2453$, $t = 5.1190$, $p < 0.05$) had been identified to have direct significant

influence on TBI. Thus hypotheses H1, H1a, H1b, and H1e are supported. This result is slightly consistent with the previous study done by Phau et al. (2014) where social value and conditional value had a significant effect on destination choice intention. Among the three significant dimensions of consumption values, conditional value is the most influential towards TBI. This is in line with the definition of conditional value itself as explained by Sheth et al. (1991) when the price placed on a product and the value it has on the consumer is acquired by the choice that the consumer made based on the situation that the consumer is facing in the presence of antecedent physical or social contingencies that enhance functional or social value. It is worth to mention that the admission ticket price for Zoo Negara and the attraction value is notable to the tourists' behavioural intention. The location of Zoo Negara might perceive Kuala Lumpur as providing CV as in terms of accessibility to other tourism attraction within the area.

The main attraction of this study were the giant pandas and the attractiveness of GPCC establishment which was highlighted in FV where the visitors directly experience from. As in past study by Williams and Soutar (2000), functional value is an important component of the visitor's pre and post-tour values perceptions. In marketing perspective, these functional values found influential in tourists' behaviour for tourism products and services. Therefore, the study suggests that Zoo Negara should emphasize the quality of the GPCC exhibit attraction as righteous motives for enhancing tourists' behavioural intention. Aside from that, SV also significantly contributed to TBI as GPCC is a family-oriented attraction and it is suitable to be visited by all (parents with kids, elderly, teachers, youngsters, etc). The demographic data collected in the study shows that the vast majority of the visitors are young (18- 29 years old), employed, and lower to middle income. These can be described as many young parents and students were the majority visited Zoo Negara for leisure purposes. Hence, this study confirms that ConsV have a significant relationship with TBI. Out of five values dimensions, only three values; CV, FV, and SV have a direct influence towards TBI. However, all five value dimensions are not comprehensively applied to all tourism consumption situations because it will likely to change over time and vary according to the context (Williams & Soutar, 2000).

The Relationship between Consumption Values and Destination Image

The result from model 2 explained hypothesis H2 ($\beta=0.7409$, $t=34.7935$, $p<0.05$) was supported. To measure the relationship of mediating variable, the result is based on total indirect effects generated from smartPLS bootstrapping. It shows only two values have indirectly influenced TBI; (H2a) FV ($\beta=0.0501$, $t=1.9813$, $p<0.05$), and (H2d) EPV ($\beta=0.0427$, $t=2.0095$, $p<0.05$). Thus, DI mediates only EPV and FV towards the TBI. In contrast, the other variables; SV, EV, and CV does not have mediating effect towards TBI. Thus, hypothesis H2, H2a and H2d are supported. FV however, have both direct and indirect significance influenced towards TBI. Referring to the path coefficient value, FV direct effect is stronger than indirect effects with the value of $\beta=0.1708$. Thus, it is worth to mention, FV is better to directly influence rather than indirectly influence TBI. The findings for this research question are in line with past studies by Phau et al. (2014) where EPV and FV have significant effects on overall perceived destination image. This indicates that DI mediates the EPV towards TBI. These could be important attributes that visitors are looking for when visiting GPCC as they can experience new things. It is noted that giant pandas living in Malaysia is a new thing and should be seen because giant pandas are natively from China. Hence, Zoo Negara should continue to be positioned as the place where the giant pandas are living, as an attraction with an image of meeting the EPV. The reason is Zoo Negara is knowingly an attraction that has education embedded that met the EPV. According to Akroush et al. (2016), DI can be improved through effective marketing strategies targeting various market segments. Thus, visitors perceived GPCC, Zoo Negara as an education tourism attraction. Therefore, GPCC, Zoo Negara marketing managers should discover and figure this dimension by facilitating a better environment for visitors to interact and ensure that there are fun and entertaining education elements embedded for the activities throughout the Zoo Negara. Henceforth, the study confirms that ConsV has a significant relationship with DI. In the study, FV and EPV have significant relationship with DI.

The Role of Mediating Effect

Based on the findings above, DI has significantly contributed to overall TBI. Only four values; FV, SV, EV, and EPV were reflected to consumption values theory to support the hypothesis H4. To measure the whole consumption values of Panda Tourism as one variable, CV has been eliminated due to low reliability. This is in line with the earlier discussion where CV has direct significant towards TBI, but not significant in mediating roles with consumption values model. It is worth mentioning that in past studies by Denys and Mendes (2014), CV has been removed leaving only four other values in their research. The reason was CV has the least influential and ambiguous value dimension that appears only under certain circumstances. Henceforward, the study confirms that DI mediates the relationship between ConsV and TBI.

Conclusion

First, the contribution of this study is that it has given a better understanding of Panda Tourism as a concept. It extended the current body of knowledge regarding Panda Tourism attributes and its significant influence on the tourist destination image and tourists' behavioural intention. Based on the findings and literature analysis, the study concludes as follows: (1) CV and SV have a direct influence towards TBI without the need for mediating roles. (2) FV is influential in both direct and indirect effects of TBI. (3) EV has no significant relationship in both direct and indirect effects towards TBI. (4) EPV has significant indirect relationship with DI and TBI. This study would give beneficial input for the field of tourism attraction in Malaysia by explaining more about the characteristics of an attraction based on consumption values theory. It certainly helps in explaining how visitors value their experiences visiting GPCC that might encourage behavioural intention.

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