

BRAND COMMITMENT AND BEHAVIORAL LOYALTY: WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP ? EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to determine the direct and indirect consequences of consumer's commitment to the brand, which is recognized as an essential ingredient of successful long-term relationships. In order to achieve this main objective, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of smartphone users. The exploratory and confirmatory analysis attests to the reliability and validity of the measurement scales, and the descriptive and explanatory analyses of the results, using the regression method, allowed us to determine that the commitment represents a main antecedent to the brand repurchase.

Keywords: Commitment, Attitude, Behavior, Brand loyalty

JEL Codes : M30 ; M31 ; M39

Résumé

L'objectif de cette étude est de déterminer les conséquences directes et indirectes de l'engagement du consommateur envers la marque, qui est reconnu comme un ingrédient essentiel de la réussite des relations à long terme. Afin d'atteindre cet objectif principal, un questionnaire a été administré à un échantillon d'utilisateurs de smartphones. L'analyse exploratoire et confirmatoire atteste de la fiabilité et de la validité des échelles de mesure, et les analyses descriptives et explicatives des résultats, utilisant la méthode de régression, nous ont permis de déterminer que l'engagement représente un antécédent principal au réachat de la marque.

Mots clés : engagement, attitude, comportement, fidélité à la marque

Code jel : M30 ; M31 ; M39

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Introduction

The marketing research on loyalty has made this theory the oldest and, indeed, the most studied question. For almost a century, researchers have been trying to define measure and even control loyalty and finally question the reality of its existence.

The importance that marketing researchers attach to the study of brand loyalty is the result of the central role that it occupies in several streams of research: in consumer behavior, sales modelling, brand capital assessment, etc.

The evolution of the concept of loyalty has always been linked to the evolution of the marketing theory of exchange.

First, the transactional exchange, which excludes any social link between the actors, communication, occupies a very limited place in it, both in duration and content. The transactional loyalty is characterized by the cognitive autonomy of the economic actors; this loyalty is univocal, sequential, revocable and reproduces the transactional past of the unit it has decided.

In this conception of loyalty, the link with commitment remains unilateral, it is the consumer's link with the brand that is unstable, easily, revocable and defines a vulnerable loyalty in the long term.

On the other hand, the concept of relational exchange, created for the needs of industrial marketing and service marketing, has gradually gained ground in people's minds.

This reorientation towards the customer has been introduced by relationship marketing, which considers the customer as a strategic resource, and which consists of establishing lasting relationships with customers (or groups of customers) who are selected according to their potential contribution to the success of the company.

The objective is to win over and retain these customers through a win-win relationship.

Researchers have always tried to explain the notion of loyalty through its antecedents. The players in this line of research believe that loyalty is not directly influenced by satisfaction, but rather via mediating variables, such as trust and commitment (Morgan and Hunt).

This means that loyalty is more than just a favorable attitude or positive evaluation of the brand. It requires the formation of a sustainable commitment on the part of the consumer.

Because of the importance of the concept of brand loyalty and commitment, we were interested during this study in trying to provide elements of an answer to the following problem:

What is the nature of the relationship between consumer commitment to a brand and the repurchase of that brand?

Other secondary questions arise from this main question:

-What are the consequences of the consumer's commitment?

-To what point does the commitment explain the brand repurchase?

The structure of our problem is based on three main assumptions formulated as follows:

-H1: There is a positive relationship between brand commitment and brand repurchase.

-H2: There is a negative relationship between commitment and consumer search for variety.

-H3: There is a positive relationship between the consumer's commitment and his predisposition to spread positive word of mouth

The methodology followed in the realization of this work consists of a descriptive analytical method, which begins with a documentary research in order to highlight the concept of loyalty and commitment to the brand. Then, and in order to answer to our problem we used a quantitative study based on a questionnaire distributed to a sample of buyers and users of smartphones in the wilaya of Béjaia

I. Conceptual frame:

1. 1 what is loyalty?

Until 1960, loyalty was studied through consumer purchasing behaviour. In his article "*A two - dimensional concept of brand loyalty*" (Day, 1969) insists on the importance of repeated buying behaviour in the definition of loyalty, but at the same time, on its insufficiency to speak of brand loyalty; he raised the attitudinal dimension of loyalty and specified that true loyalty exists even before the act of purchase is carried out. In other words, loyalty according to this author exists in the mind of the consumer even before he expresses it;

(Tucker, 1964) in its definition of brand loyalty emphasizes the sequence of purchases, and that it takes at least four consecutive purchases of the brand to build loyalty.

In 1973, Jacoby and Kyner provide the first and most comprehensive definition of brand loyalty as follows (Waarden, 2001, p63):

"Loyalty is defined as a biased behavioural response (because it is not random) expressed over time by a decision entity, considering one or more brands taken as a whole, according to a decision process" (Waarden, 2001).

This definition, which is more than forty years old, expresses loyalty as the behavioural response (the purchase) through the notion of choice between several alternatives. It is also explained by the decision-making process or psychological process that the consumer goes through in order to evaluate between brands and make a purchase decision.

We can also see from this definition that a repeated buying behaviour and a positive attitude must be observed in order to talk about loyalty.

In this context, repeated buying behaviour is non-random and therefore biased, which requires control and observation in order to establish loyalty.

1.2 Approaches to Brand Loyalty

The first approach that has been used for a long time is the behavioural approach to brand loyalty. The main advantage of behavioural theory is that it approaches loyalty based on actual customer behaviour. The latter can be easily observed as in databases, which represents for companies the most important aspect of loyalty since it is at the origin of their turnover and profitability.

The cognitivist or attitudinal approach, which makes it possible to overcome the drawbacks of behavioural theory. The act of buying is no longer sufficient to explain brand loyalty.

In this approach, brand loyalty is studied through the notion of "attitude".

Attitude was first used more than 125 years ago in psychology (Derbaix & Brée, 2000), and represents an unavoidable variable either in social psychology, or in models of consumer behaviour analysis.

It was defined in 1975 by Ajzen and Fishbein as "a learned predisposition to respond consistently (repetitive, consistent over time) favourably or unfavourably to a given object" (Lutz, 1991).

Day (1969) was the first to propose using the attitude towards the brand in the explanation of loyalty. Jacoby and Kyner (1973) suggested the concept of engagement, which reveals two facets (Frisou, 2005): affective engagement (attachment) and cognitive engagement.

Jacoby and Chustnut's concept of fidelity is more comprehensive and has been retained to the present day because it covers both behavioural and attitudinal facets. The affective facet is not really included in this definition, but it is still linked to "preference" which integrates, in part, the emotional and affective aspect. However, this attitudinal dimension also covers other cognitive (commitment, trust) and affective (attitude, emotional attachment and emotions) variables that were subsequently developed by other researchers such as Oliver, Dick and Basu, Morgan and Hunt.

In addition to the behavioural and attitudinal approach that is topical today, brand loyalty requires more variables for its explanation, through the relational approach.

According to the work of Jacoby and chesnut, who are the reference in the explanation of loyalty in a relational context, loyalty manifests itself through three conditions: 1) at the cognitive level, the consumer has information that shows that the brand in question is far superior to its competitors, 2) at the affective level, the consumer must clearly prefer this brand and 3) at the conative level, he must have the intention to buy back.

1.3 The central role of brand commitment

It is essential to clarify and show the role of the concept of engagement in explaining brand loyalty in a relational approach.

The concept of engagement emerged

and developed with the transition from a behaviourist approach to a cognitivist approach. This notion has its origins in social psychology and has been addressed in several fields of research: social exchange theory, organization theory, and the theory of inter-company relations.

The majority of social psychologists define commitment as "a force that stabilizes the individual's behaviour" (Kiesler, 1971), or: "a force that leads the individual to continue in the line of action he has begun, despite the obstacles and the attractiveness of alternatives" (Dubé, Kairouz and Jodoin, 1997).

The principal theorist of engagement, Kiesler, defined it in 1971 as "the link that exists between an individual and his actions" (Kiesler, Collins, & Miller, 1989). This intuitive definition allows us to see that, on the one hand, only our actions commit us and, on the other hand, we are committed to varying degrees by our actions.

Importing the concept of commitment from the resource area humanities and organizational sciences, explain that it was first applied to the study of relationships between individuals or between organizations.

The transfer of the field of application to industrial marketing is easy and intuitively appealing. In both cases, the relationships between groups of people (companies) or individuals (buyers, sellers...) are studied.

For example, a great deal of research has focused on the relationships between buyers and sellers in the field of services (Morgan and Hunt, 1994, p23; Samuelsen and Sandvik, 1998...), or has described an individual's choice in favour of a distribution channel (Ganesan, 1994; Anderson and Weitz, 1989, 1992; Gundlach et al. 1995; Kumar et al., 1995; Moorman et al. 1992, p316).

Commitment is considered an essential component of relational marketing, which was first introduced into the scientific literature with Berry's work in 1983 (Durif, Graf, & Ricard, 2009). More recently, this concept has appearance in marketing and communication research (Leeflang et al, 2009; Brodie et al, 2011) with the aim of providing increased predictive and explanatory power of consumer behaviour (Hollebeek et al, 2014, p152)

The transposition of the commitment to a brand is a little more delicate, since this attitude now relates to an inert and intangible object...

Since the individual indicates that he or she wishes to continue a relationship with another individual or group of people, it will also be assumed that he or she wishes to continue the relationship with a brand, by continuing to buy and use it.

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2002) draw on the d

efinition given by Gundlach et al (1993) and consider brand commitment as the attitudinal and behavioural disposition of the consumer towards a long-term relationship with a brand .

Fournier (1998) dodges the question of definition by stating that as the commitment is based on the history of the interactions (between the consumer and the brand), its nature and its manifestations are diverse...

However, it considers that the commitment stems from the strength of the relationship between the consumer and the brand. Commitment is an attitude that is formed gradually, grows stronger over time and leads to dedication and stable buying behaviour. The consumer makes an investment in the brand and will, for example, continue to buy the brand, even if its quality varies over time .

The definition eventually evolves and becomes more complex through the successive works of Brodie et al in 2011 and 2013. The notion of commitment would have 3 points of influence on the user/consumer of the brand. Engaging would mean acting on the cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of the consumer.

Hollebeek et al (2014), pillars in the research on the notion of engagement with their article on the conceptualization of the notion of engagement. They asked their respondents to illustrate what was meant by cognitive (example: "my smartphone can get my full attention"), emotional (example: "I love the FORD") and behavioral (example: "every Saturday at 9:30 a.m., I'm there for a new episode of this series ").

According to the authors, a brand that is engaging for the consumer would therefore create a relationship through at least 1 of these 3 types of influence on the user/consumer. Conversely, a noncommittal brand would be relegated to use/consumption out of necessity and no longer out of pleasure.

(Hollebeek, Demystifying, 2011) defines engagement as "The level of individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral investment in specific brand interactions ", it represents "A consumer's positively valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioral brand-related activity during or related to, specific consumer/brand interactions " (Hollebeek et al, 2014, p156).

Brand commitment is consistent with the definition of brand attitudes since it is one of the consumer's evaluations of the brand. Oliver (1997) considers that "loyalty is a deep-rooted commitment to buy the product or service in the future, resulting in a repeat purchase of the same brand or set of brands, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that may cause the consumer to switch brands ...".

In this article, brand commitment is considered like the attitudinal condition of brand loyalty; it represents its attitudinal measure and behavioral intent.

1.4 Commitment and consumer behavior

In order to be able to explain the relationship between commitment and behavioral fidelity, we try in the following to measure the impact of the consumer's commitment on his or her behavior. In other words, to measure this commitment through its consequences on the consumer's behavior.

The commitment, as the consumer's willingness to continue in his relationship with the brand, can only have as its main consequence on the consumer's behavior the repurchase of the brand.

This is one of the reasons why the commitment is generally regarded as the most direct attitudinal antecedent of loyalty.

Brand buy-out is also considered a direct consequence of commitment since in the Morgan and Hunt (1994) model it reduces the tendency for a partner/customer to end a relationship in the near future;

The theoretical relationship between commitment and redemption seems to be unanimously supported by the literature. Its translation into actual consumer behavior is sometimes more problematic.

Lacoeuilhe (2000) has difficulty empirically validating this relationship between commitment and redemption. The tests he conducts show a less important than expected link between commitment and redemption behavior, which the author explains by "a certain distortion between declared and actual behavior".

The actual application of this relationship between brand commitment and buy-back on consumer behavior presents some difficulties and differences.

Simon (2004), for example, and in his study on the moderating role of the strength of attitude on the relationship between commitment and effective loyalty behavior, demonstrated that the link between commitment and repetitive buying behavior is not very significant. It also specifies that a consumer must not only be committed and intend to pursue a lasting relationship with a brand, but also think about it often or at the right time, and multiply direct experiences with it, in order to reproduce his effective and repetitive buying behavior.

These last two results can be explained by a limited correspondence between declared and actual or by the low stability of consumer attitudes (Dall'Olmo et al., 1997).

➤ Among the consequences of consumer engagement cited in the marketing literature, we also cite consumer resistance to change, which is also expressed through a search for less variety.

Variety seeking behavior is defined as "a brand change, without dissatisfaction with the discontinued brand" (Darpy, Volley, p246).

Consumers change products or brands, for example due to product, brand or attribute fatigue, and for this reason companies need to offer differentiated products in order to respond to this expectation of variety expressed by consumers.

The search for variety appears as a parameter explaining infidelity, no research has studied whether this variable has a long-term negative effect on loyalty (Mejia, Aurier, 2004, p03). For some reason, the consumer may buy another brand outside the one he is used to buying, except that he may return to his original brand in a future purchase, and his loyalty can only be stronger and more solid.

According to Frisou (2005), loyalty can change over time. He defines infidelity as a decreasing purchasing trend: the consumer gradually disengages from the brand, until he no longer buys it at all. If the change of brand leads to a non-return to the original brand, this is a causal indicator of lasting infidelity: the consumer disengages, chooses a brand that is better suited to his needs or, through his search for variety, discovers a brand that proves to be superior to the one previously purchased.

II. Empirical research

2.1. Methodology and materials

In order to answer the main problem of this work, as well as the various secondary questions, the research relied on the descriptive and analytical method using the empirical survey for data collection. This was achieved through the questionnaire, which was designed to reflect the research objectives and test the relationship between the study variables.

The questionnaire consists primarily of a description of the purchase of the brand possessed by the consumer, and includes items measuring consumer commitment, brand loyalty, and the consumer's pre-disposition to positive word-of-mouth about the brand. At the end, a fact sheet describing our sample is included.

We administered the questionnaire to a sample of 300 consumers who have already purchased a smartphone in the Wilaya of Bejaia. We used a non-probability convenience sample, given the difficulty of choosing a probability sample (due to lack of means and time). The study was carried out during the last quarter of the year 2019.

2.2 Validation of Measurement Scales

The first step before testing the hypotheses of the research, was first to purify the scales that measure the different variables of our research. This is done through Principal Component Factor Analysis (PCA), followed by the calculation of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient to verify the reliability of these scales.

✓ The concept of commitment is measured using the scale developed by (Terasse, 2006) in his research. This scale covers the consumer's resistance to brand price increases, the effort

made to acquire the brand, as well as the consumer's reaction to the presence or disappearance of the brand (7items).

The purification of the latter resulted in all items of the scale are retained for analysis, following a variance explained at 68.25%. The KMO index, which indicates in what proportion the selected variables form a coherent whole and adequately measures a concept, is calculated at 0.711, as was the Cronbach alpha coefficient at 0.690, which allowed all the items on this scale to be retained.

✓ Word of mouth influences consumer choice, preferences and attitudes before and after buying a product (Zeithaml et al, 1996). Several studies have been interested in exploring this construct, and they differ according to the context in which this concept is measured. In the course of our research, we adopted the measurement of Harrison-Walker (2001), who developed a measurement scale that is divided into two components: "word-of-mouth acclaim" measured using 2 statements and "polarity of word-of-mouth" measured using 4 statements.

The calculation of the KMO index gives an average result (0.602), as well as Bartlett's sphericity test which was satisfactory $p < 0.005$, which shows that the data accept factorization and that there is a correlation between them. Factor analysis allowed the scale to remain at 4items. Examination of eigenvalues greater than 1 allows the extraction of two factors, which explain 81.989% of the shared variance, confirming that the scale is two-dimensional. This measurement scale has an acceptable reliability of internal consistency with an Alpha coefficient =0.665

✓ Several scales have been developed in order to measure the search for variety, to do this, we based ourselves on the Girard et al scale (2003), and the terrasse (2006) scale.

✓ Behavioral loyalty is measured based on 2 items, where the consumer expresses his willingness or unwillingness to buy the brand in question again, as well as his judgement on whether or not he is loyal to the brand he has already bought.

The results of the analysis are acceptable; the KMO index is greater than 0.5 and the Bartlett test $p < 0.005$. This means that the scale accepts factorization.

This the fidelity scale takes a single factor that explains 87.929% of the shared variance. The scale has good reliability, with an Alpha coefficient equal to 0.862.

III. Results and Discussion

We will begin by describing our sample according to the variable sex, age, income of consumers.

According to the descriptive analysis of the data, we were able to collect, our respondents are divided into 62% male and 38% female consumers, for age, 85% are in the age groups between 31 and 45 years old and over 45 years old, and 25% are under 30 years old. On the other hand, the sample was dominated by consumers earning more than 50,000 DA with a percentage of 33 per cent, 29 per cent for the income bracket between 15,000 DA and 35,000 DA, 26 per cent and 12 per cent for the income brackets between 36,000 DA and 50,000 DA and less than 15,000 DA respectively.

For the smartphone brands that the consumer owns, we found that 30% for the Samsung brand, 18% for the Huawei brand, the Condor and Wiko brand tied at 15.3%, the same result for the

two Apple and Oppo brands at 11.7%, followed by Lenovo at 9.3% and Sonny at 6.7%. The remaining percentage is shared between other brands on the market.

3.1 Explaining behavioral loyalty to the brand through commitment

The calculation of the correlation coefficient gives a synthetic measure of the intensity of the relationship between two variables, thus giving us information on the existence of a linear relationship (in the form of a straight line) between the two variables under consideration.

The following table presents the results obtained following the analysis of the data with the SPSS software, In order to model the relationship, we used simple linear regression, and the results are presented in the following table:

Table 1. : Results of the simple linear regression analysis

Model	R	R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	Standard error of estimate	Variation in R-squared
1	,748	,559	,558	,74439	,559

Source: Based on the results obtained with SPSS

Table 2. The regression coefficients

Model		Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Standard Err	Beta		
1	(Constant)	,418	,136		3,071	,002
	Commitment	,896	,041	,748	21,995	,000

Source: Based on the results obtained with SPSS

From the results in the table 1, it can be seen that there is effectively a statistically significant relationship between brand buy-back and consumer commitment to the brand at the level ($\alpha \leq (0.05)$). Indeed, the strength of the link is estimated with a correlation coefficient equal to 0.748, which explains a strong positive relationship between commitment and brand repurchase.

The R squared, or the coefficient of determination, which measures the quality of prediction of a linear regression is estimated at $R^2=0.559$, which explains that consumer commitment to the brand explain 55.9% of the consumer's repurchase to the brand. Therefore and based on these results, hypothesis H1 is verified.

3.2 Explaining behavioral loyalty to the brand through commitment and other attitudes

During this second phase of the analysis of the consequences of the commitment to the brand, we try to introduce the two other variables (variety search, word of mouth) with the commitment to attempt to better explain the brand repurchase.

We established a multiple linear regression with the addition of the variety search variable and the consumer's predisposition to positive word-of-mouth (Wom). The results of these analyses are shown in the following tables:

Table 3. Model quality indicators

Model	R	R-squared	Adjusted R-squared	Standard error of estimate	R-squared variation
1	,767	,588	,584	,72161	,588

Source: Based on the results obtained with SPSS

Table 4. The regression coefficients

Model		Non-standardized coefficients B standard Err		standardized coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1,698	,321		5,078	,000
	Commitment	1,182	,070	,986	15,230	,000
	positive WOM	,565	,114	,305	4,952	,000
	variety search	-,041	,045	-,295	-,918	,015

Source: Based on the results obtained with SPSS

From Table 4, we can observe that the Sig is less than 0.05. This result confirms that the correlation coefficient R is statistically significant at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$).

In other words, there is a significant relationship with a correlation level estimated at 76, 7%, at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) between behavioral loyalty (brand repurchase) and the others attitudes: consumer's commitment, the predisposition of the consumer to spread positive word-of-mouth as well as a search for less variety on his part.

Table 3 shows that the model's determination coefficient is higher than the one previously measured, in general, the higher the R-squared, the better the model fits your data.

For this second model, the R squared is higher, which means that the introduction of the two variables allowed a better explanation of the brand buyback, the commitment alone explained

56% of the brand repurchase, with the insertion of the two others variables, we arrived at the R-squared equal to 59%. Nevertheless, commitment remains the most important variable in explaining this behavioral loyalty.

From this analysis, we can also examine the links between commitment and its other consequences:

Table 5. Correlation between commitment and its consequences

	Commitment	Variety research	positive word-of-mouth
Commitment	1	-,529	,843
Variety research	-,529	1	-,402
positive word-of-mouth	,843	-,402	1

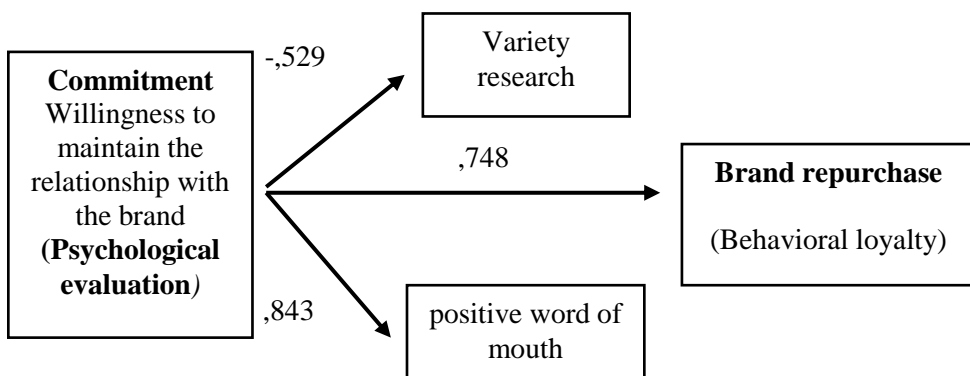
Source: Based on the results obtained with SPSS

Table 5 shows a significant positive impact between commitment and the others attitudes; the results also point out that the variable that recorded the strongest relationship with the dependent variable was the consumer's predisposition to positive word-of-mouth, with a correlation coefficient exceeding 0,80. The second consequences for consumer's commitment is search of variety: There is a significant but negative relationship between the two variables, at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), the correlation coefficient equal -0,529.

These correlations lead us to accept hypothesis H2, as well as the last hypothesis H3 made during our research.

Based on these analyses, we can summarize the consequences of brand commitment through the following model:

Figure 1: the explanatory model of the consequences of brand commitment



Source: the results of the study.

Conclusion

At the end of this research, we were able to carry out a descriptive and explanatory analysis of the concept of consumer loyalty and commitment to the brand, which allowed us to test the hypotheses put forward beforehand.

This validation was carried out in two parts; the first part tested the relationship of the concept of engagement, which represents the relational facet of brand loyalty, with the brand buyout. In the second part, we proceeded by adding two other attitudes, assumed by the marketing literature as attitudinal consequences of the consumer's commitment to the brand, these being presented by the consumer's predisposition to positive word-of-mouth as well as a reduced search for variety on his part.

In this regard, the empirical study of a sample of 300 smartphone buyers and users confirmed that consumer brand commitment, which is defined by the consumer's willingness to continue the relationship with the brand while accepting to make certain efforts and sacrifices plays an important role in explaining the brand buyout. This concept also has other consequences, which are so important in explaining consumer behavior.

Nevertheless, this research has certain limitations, which are represented by the nature of the products being researched, taking into consideration other consequences of the commitment, as well as extending the study to other wilayas in order to be able to generalize the results.

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