

## EXPLORING THE ROLE OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION. A STUDY FROM THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

### 企业社会责任对消费者购买意愿的影响：一项来自农业部门的研究

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35633/inmateh-64-50>

**Keywords:** CSR; Environmental Management; Theory of Planned Behavior; Purchase Intention; Buying Behavior

### ABSTRACT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) significantly transforms the global agricultural sector, thereby boosting the foreign economy. Primarily, the study focuses on the social practices of Agro-companies operating in Pakistan, thus influencing consumer buying intention. The study presents the extended theoretical contribution to the theory of planned behavior. However, it provides a fundamental framework for integrating CSR orientation with consumer buying behavior. The data of 587 respondents has been collected through questionnaires by adopting a quantitative research approach and simple random sampling technique. Results reveal that consumers prefer brands and are unwilling to pay the higher price for products involved in CSR activities. Both emotional and purchasing factors affect purchasing intentions. Consumers are willing to support CSR cause and intend to buy their products without compromising on elements of purchase intentions.

### 摘要

企业社会责任极大地改变了全球农业部门，从而推动了对外经济的发展。本研究主要关注在巴基斯坦运营的农业公司的社会实践，从而研究影响消费者购买意愿。这项研究在理论上拓展了计划行为理论。进一步地，它为整合企业社会责任与消费者购买行为研究提供了一个基本框架。本研究采用定量研究方法和简单随机抽样技术，通过问卷调查收集了587名受访者的数据。结果表明，消费者更喜欢品牌，不愿意为参与企业社会责任活动的产品支付更高的价格。此外，情感因素和购买因素都会影响购买意愿。消费者愿意支持企业社会责任事业，并会在不损害购买意愿因素的情况下购买他们的产品。

### INTRODUCTION

CSR is a practice that aims at the social responsibility of sustainable development. Sustainable development has become a concern for most industries in the recent business world. Agriculture is a sector that applies many sustainable principles and aims at several sustainable development goals. With the modernization of agriculture in the Asian region, the concept of CSR has gained considerable importance. The CSR initiatives seek to connect socially responsible activities to human buying behavior. However, despite the current advancement in technology, countries are still experiencing economic vulnerabilities (i.e., poverty). CSR studies are based on organizations initiative, which concerns everyone, but in the actual individual who mainly gets influence by the implementation and execution of CSR policies (Aguinis, 2011). The concept of CSR initially started between the 1930s and 1940s, thus splitting the term into four distinct dimensions: environment, social, economic, and stakeholders (Carroll, 1991). The founder of CSR has suggested that businesses should adopt policies that benefit the global environment in his book.

On the other hand, *Brown (1953)* suggests organizational practice should contribute to the development of an individual community. Indeed, this broad term emphasizes CSR performance and outcome, thereby developing a three-dimensional conceptual model (*Wood, 1991*). CSR has four different types, economical, ethical, legal, and philanthropic. Managerial discretion played the leading role and as the governing body with an emphasis on CSR. Public responsibility means business is responsible for society's goodwill and must consider the community when making profits.

Agriculture activities play a fundamental role in the development of a country's economy. The worldwide agricultural industry has evolved from traditional manufacturing to industrial farming, producing premium commercialized Agro-products (*Kimuyu, 2018*). A recent study reveals that Indonesian Agro companies are fundamentally performing better than others, thereby radically launching novel CSR policies (*Syamni, Wahyuddin, Damanhur, & Ichsan, 2018*). Similarly, another study suggests that CSR programs have significantly increased the universal production of agriculture industries across different regions (*Ika, Akbar, Puspitasari, Sumbodo, & Widagdo, 2021*). Perhaps, CSR holds mounting attention in the global agricultural sector. Indeed, the CSR prism has drastically revolutionized the agriculture businesses, thereby boosting total agriculture consumption.

CSR's role cannot be neglected in the development of societies. There is a need for such CSR activities that can be beneficial to social progress. In Pakistan, several organizations are implementing CSR policies effectively and efficiently. Multinational companies are more involved in CSR, and domestic firms are less interested in these activities due to the CSR perception. Most managers think that CSR activities are unnecessary for society, and they do not feel any pressure from civil society. Multinational organizations are bringing their culture because CSR activities are embedding in their culture. Developing countries are facing severe challenges in the sustainable development policies implementation. One of the critical problems is high inflation and more rations for low-income families. It is also due to the unequal distribution of wealth. In developed countries, wealth is equally distributed among people, so CSR activities are less needed. CSR holds strategic importance in formulating business strategies. Finding reveals a significant relationship of CSR practices with stakeholder orientation (*Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2018*). Corporate social activities allow the stakeholder to design effective business strategies. It helps in improving the organization's performance, thus achieving a superior competitive advantage. From the business perspective, organizations should work towards translating their legal and economic responsibilities into ethical considerations. There are different ways to involve in social activities. Firms have chosen different ways to conduct CSR activities. Companies are cooperating with a non-profit organization.

Organizations spread CSR activities through various channels, which include media, Word of mouth, and advertisement. Consumers actively respond to social events organized by the companies. Consumers are ready to buy CSR companies products, and companies will be rewarded due to their social behavior (*Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Creyer & Ross, 1997; Lichtenstein et al., 2004*). Previous studies show that consumers' behavior changed through CSR activities (*Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Gupta & Pirsch, 2006; Lee & Shin, 2010; Madrigal & Boush, 2008; Mohr & Webb, 2005*). CSR activities also provide opportunities for companies to differentiate their brand name in the global business.

Consumer purchasing decision-making is divided into two categories. One is from the market size, and the second one is from the organization side. The initialization of CSR in corporate activities has significantly influenced customer buying behavior. *Beckmann (2007)* reveals a positive relationship between firm CSR activities and customers' intention to respond. In explaining this notion, different international researches highlight the association between CSR and consumer purchasing decisions in developing countries (*Creyer & Ross, 1997; Maignan, 2001; Uusitalo & Oksanen, 2004*). Furthermore, the literature suggests that poor implementation of CSR practices affects the company's reputation. Perhaps, CSR is a solution to environmental, social, and economic problems in developing countries (*Muthuri et al., 2012*). The presence of CSR cannot be denied. There is a debate going on whether companies should keep caring for corporate social activities or not. The study shows that consumers care about CSR. Companies are using different CSR strategies to attract more and more customers. Notably, the growing significance of CSR practices has allowed companies to add value to the global capitalist economy. With sustainable economic development, CSR appears to be a prime factor in achieving superior financial outcomes. It helps businesses in making optimal decisions by reducing challenges such as environmental hazards and poverty. Pakistan's economy is heavily dependent on its agriculture production. That implies that incorporating CSR practices in agricultural production

will help Pakistan to boost its agricultural capacity. The findings suggest that improved CSR activities encourage the participation of consumers in buying agricultural products.

CSR is a newly developing concept in Pakistan, and only a few organizations are following it. Multinational companies are more concerned about CSR policies. Still, the local industry became aware of CSR in 1996 by breaking the local carpet industry and the Sialkot support industry threat. Though taking the reactive measures, the joint efforts of the industrialists and financial institutes saved the most significant damage, but there are no proactive measures to implement these policies. In Pakistan, a limited number of laws and regulations related to CSR have no role in customer retention. The customer gives preference to price and other factors (Sarfranz, 2014). There are a variety of laws that lead to CSR. These include environmental laws, labor laws, corporate laws, and consumer protection laws. Research has analyzed the relationship between CSR and profitability in Pakistan through the data of 100 companies. In Pakistan, the oil and gas sector mainly contributes to CSR. The financial sector is the second-largest contributing sector, whereas the textile is less involved in social development activities. Organizational justice has a partial mediating role in CSR and Employees performance (Sarfranz et al., 2018a). Organizations are neglecting environmental factors (Sarfranz et al., 2018b). Companies are trying to focus on their CSR policies and their implementation. Most of the managers believe that they can satisfy their customers by showing responsible society organization. They expect every company to implement and participate in CSR (Sarfranz et al., 2020). Implementation of CSR does not depend on how large an organization is in terms of size and profitability. Managers are still expecting it to be an integral part of their performance. Arguably, despite its increasing significance, societies are still experiencing multiple environmental vulnerabilities worldwide. Societies expect companies to play a vital role in solving their problems and using their resources effectively and efficiently. Previous studies have limited focus on CSR. Sen & Bhattacharya (2001) stated organizations had focused more on CSR in the business market but no significant research was made on CSR effects. Investors and policymakers are getting help from adopting renewable energy projects (Liang et al., 2021). Pollution through toxic industrial activities is a serious issue in developing countries, polluting the natural resources likewise groundwater, resulting in soil salinity and low crop yield (Aleem et al., 2016, 2017).

Remarkably, Pakistan is the fast-growing agricultural market, generating maximum profitability through its agriculture activities (i.e., 22% GDP) (Nazam, Usman, & Ayub, 2018). However, despite having a large agro-economy, CSR is still a new concept for Pakistan's agricultural sector. However, the finding indicates that with a steady increase in CSR awareness in Pakistan's agriculture sector, companies are altering consumer's buying behavior through their green practices (Javaid & Nawaz, 2018). Indeed, CSR is a new initiative adopted by businesses for achieving economic sustainability and growth in multiple areas of agriculture. The increasing CSR modifications have made the agricultural sector a prime recipient of CSR implications. Therefore, companies are now exploring new opportunities in agriculture for promoting sustainable investments through the implementation of advanced environmental and social practices (i.e., CSR). Consequently, the finding suggests that agro-companies should embrace socially responsible practices for achieving positive ethical performance.

Significantly, this research explores the impact of cooperative social responsibility factors affecting consumer buying intentions. Primarily, the growing importance of CSR has influenced consumer buying behavior in developing countries such as Pakistan. The strong initialization of CSR practices has made people compromise on various other elements, thus increasing the purchase of CSR commodities. With this given statement, this study aims to examine the companies' CSR initiatives, altering consumer purchasing behavior. Additionally, by incorporating the elements of the planned behavior model, this study investigates the crucial factors predicting consumer purchasing choices. The study aims to focus on understanding the dominant effect of CSR practices on agricultural consumption. Moreover, the paper investigates to answer the emerging research questions. For example, whether CSR practices are the prime concern of consumers while buying a commodity. Are the consumers willing to compromise on CSR practices? Does a company's poor social practice affect the consumers' buying choices? Do the social practices alter consumers' attitudes towards the product? However, the answers to these findings have satisfied the gap by identifying the integral factors determining consumers' intention in developing countries. Subsequently, the study highlights the significance of CSR practices by suggesting a need for extensive research work concerning the environmental incentives of CSR practices. Pakistan being among the fast-growing agricultural countries' is experiencing an immense economic boost concerning agriculture consumption. Hence, this study suggests that the growing knowledge about CSR activities has made Pakistan realize the CSR implications, influencing an individual purchasing intention.

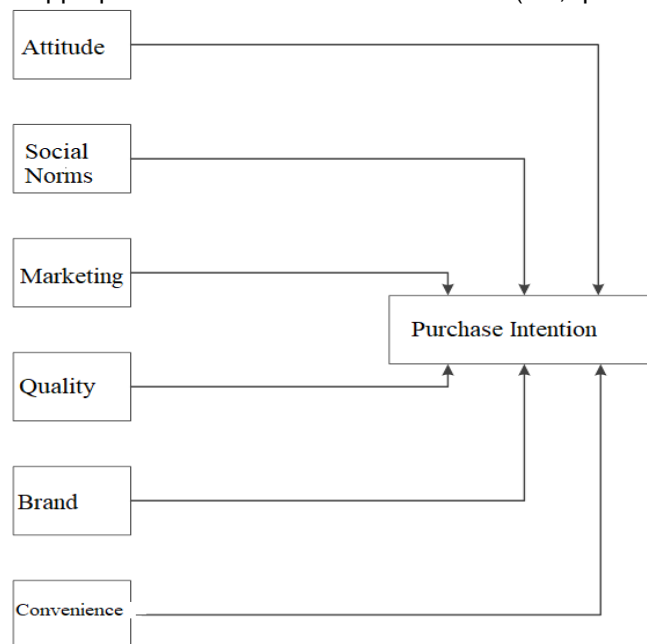
## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Purposely, this study incorporates the fundamental components of human behavioral theory in understanding the relationship between CSR activities and individuals' buying intention. The theory of planned behavior explains the unusual aspects of human behavior named Behavioral Intention. Behavioral Intentions depicts the combination of three different components; Attitude towards Behavior (AB), Subjective Norms (SN), and Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC). However, the human planned behavior model (*Ajzens, 1985*) assists in predicting the consumer purchasing intention concerning the purchase of CSR products. Nonetheless, this theory forms a crucial component of this research by providing an opportunity for understanding the behavioral aspect of a consumer's buying pattern.

The present study focuses on agriculture consumer behavior for CSR firm's products in Pakistan. The theoretical framework is developed, and purchase intention is the dependent variable. Study participants are using different Agri products related to crops and livestock production. Data is collected from the agricultural products consumers by using the simple random sampling method. We distributed 650 questionnaires among consumers, and 587 questions were found to be valid for data analysis. Respondents belong to different age groups, religions, and ethnicity.

Pakistan's agriculture sector is considered the backbone of the economy, and it has made significant developments in the last few decades. The analytical plan defines a rigorous interpretation process, using the proposed quantitative research model SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science). Purposely, the data evaluation process records the use of a linear regression analysis. Significantly, the use of statistical software (i.e., SPSS) had made it easy to elaborate the findings by producing systematic results. Empirically, for analysis, the data has been collected from the customers of the agriculture sector. A significant population participated, providing first-hand information regarding their purchase experiences. Consequently, to achieve data authenticity, reliability and validity were being ensured during the analysis procedure. Reliability refers to the consistency of the methodological process (*Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014*), while validity defines the data accuracy.

The quantitative approach is chosen due to the study nature, and this method is appropriate for the generalization and testing of hypotheses. The quantitative method would also facilitate the generalization of the study findings. For data analysis, a pilot study for examining the feasibility of different variables had adopted. A pilot study supports the main study by testing the appropriateness of the data collection method (*Cooper, Schindler, & Sun, 2006*). However, this trial method ensures that accurate and reliable data is being gathered, thus checking the appropriateness of chosen research tool (i.e., questionnaire).



**Fig. 1 - Theoretical Framework**

Good questionnaire design and layout are essential, influencing and impacting the response rate (*Thomas & Loft, 2005*). The development of the questionnaire design in this study is elicited the relevant data related to CSR. Moreover, collecting a significant amount of data from a questionnaire method would provide

a wide range of results. The survey questionnaire was designed, administered, and analyzed to replicate a quantitative approach (May 1993). Data collection is the most crucial part of any research. In this study, the data are collected through the questionnaire survey. Primary data is called self-generating data, and it is received through the questionnaire. The questionnaire survey is used to obtain the respondents' perceptions regarding different factors' effect on purchase intention.

H1: Attitude has a positive relationship with CSR purchase intention.

H2: Social Norms have a positive relationship with CSR purchase intentions.

H3: Price has a negative relationship with CSR purchase intentions.

H4: Marketing has a positive influence on CSR purchase intention

H5: Brand has a positive influence on CSR purchase intention

H6: Convenience has a positive relationship with CSR purchase intention.

**RESULTS**

Table 1 shows the individual variable reliability analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin is performed to check the validity of the variables. KMO value less than 0.05 indicates the appropriateness of the factor analysis. The value of KMO analysis should be higher than 0.05. Convenience has the highest .956 value, and attitude has the lowest value of .811. Cronbach's alpha values are higher than 0.7 in table 1. Table 2 presents KMO and Bartlett's Test.

**Table 1**

**Reliability Analysis**

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Attitude	0.811	7
Social Norms	0.934	7
Price	0.919	7
Marketing	0.921	7
Brand	0.941	7
Convenience	0.956	7
Purchase Intention	0.849	6

**Table 2**

**KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.753
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	37280.878
	df	1485
	Sig.	0.000

The correlation represents the relationship between two or more than two variables. Pearson's correlation method represents a linear relationship among variables, and its range is from -1 to +1. A value closer to +1 shows the positive linear relationship (Udo, 2007), while a value closer to -1 shows a negative relationship. Pearson's correlation method is adopted to test the relationship between the dependent and independent variables in this research.

**Table 3**

**Correlation Analysis**

		Attitude	Social norms	Price	Marketing	Brand	Convenience	Purchase Intention
<b>Attitude</b>	Correlation	1	.711**	-.144**	.525**	.579**	.473**	.721**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0	0	0.001	0	0	0	0
<b>Social Norms</b>	Correlation	.711**	1	-.249**	.553**	.619**	.483**	.720**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Price</b>	Correlation	-.144**	-.249**	1	-.194**	-.194**	-.138**	-.249**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0.001	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Marketing</b>	Correlation	.525**	.553**	-.194**	1	.777**	.546**	.709**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

**Table 3**  
(continuation)

		Attitude	Social norms	Price	Marketing	Brand	Convenience	Purchase Intention
<b>Brand</b>	Correlation	.579**	.619**	-.194**	.777**	1	.606**	.747**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Convenience</b>	Correlation	.473**	.483**	-.138**	.546**	.606**	1	.579**
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	Correlation	.721**	.720**	-.231**	.709**	.747**	.579**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	N	587	587	587	587	587	587	587

Table 3 has shown the correlation between different items used in this research. It shows how different variables defined in this study correlate with each other. It is evident from the table that all variables have a good correlation with each other and have less error values. Study variables are positively correlated with each other except that of the price, which is negatively associated with all other variables, reflecting that it has a negative impact on purchase intention and negatively affects other factors. It means all variables except price have a positive correlation, but the price has a negative relation, proving our hypothesis.

**Hypothesis Testing**

Multiple variable linear regression was used in the SPSS 19.0 software to test the results of the hypothesis. Table 4 shows the model summary, and R has a value of 0.754 while the value of the R<sup>2</sup> was 0.516, and the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> was 0.509. The model is accepted according to the results, and table 5 presents ANOVA analysis.

**Table 4**

**Model Summary**

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. the error of the Estimate
1	0.754 <sup>a</sup>	0.516	0.509	0.58912

a. Predictors : (Constant), Convenience, Price, attitude, quality, brand, social norms

**Table 5**

**ANOVA Analysis**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	<b>Regression</b>	212.576	6	34.596	98.599	0.000 <sup>a</sup>
	<b>Residual</b>	215.509	490	0.351		
	<b>Total</b>	428.085	496			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Convenience, Price, attitude, Marketing, brand, social norms  
b. Dependent Variable: Price intension

**Table 6**

**Coefficients Analysis**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.401	0.314		1.524	0.119
	Att	0.390	0.050	0.245	8.211	0.000
	Sn	0.160	0.029	0.121	7.089	0.001
	Pr	-0.180	0.009	-0.172	-3.119	0.031
	Ma	0.081	0.018	0.111	4.178	0.001
	Br	.0322	0.030	0.383	9.990	0.000
	Cn	0.157	0.019	0.080	4.213	0.041

In this study, a Multivariable linear regression analysis is performed to test the six hypotheses. The hypothesis (H1) is developed to test the consumer attitude impact on purchase intention. Results show attitude has a positive relationship with the dependent variable ( $\beta = .390$ ,  $t = 8.211$ ) and p-value is less than  $p < 0.01$ . There is a positive relationship between attitude and consumer intention, and study results

are consistent with theory and previous studies (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Dean et al., 2006, Raats & Shepherd, 2008; Mahon et al., 2006). This study has shown that the consumer's attitude towards the purchase of CSR products is highly positive, and they feel that it is good to buy the products of the companies involved in CSR.

The eight items scale was used to measure social norms and their effect on purchase intentions towards companies' products are involved in CSR. Hypothesis H2 tests social norms' impact on the purchase intention and shows a positive relationship between social norms and purchase intention ( $\beta = .160$ ,  $t = 7.089$ ). Pakistanis live in large houses with several family members, and they have strong relations and meetings with neighbors and other people. So, they influence buying behavior when they meet each daily routine. So, social norms are an essential factor that affects the Pakistani people's intention. The result has shown an adverse effect of price and cost on purchase intention. Consumers are unwilling to pay more for CSR products which show higher intention towards price and lower preference towards CSR products, while study results for the price are ( $\beta = -.180$ ,  $t = -3.119$  at significant level  $p > .05$ ). Consumers are aware of CSR's importance. However, their private interests influence the purchase intention. The consumer buying decision is affected by personal interests. Consumers are not neglecting the importance of CSR. Still, they prioritize less expensive products, and some customers avoid choosing CSR companies' products (Trapero, De Lozada, & García, 2010).

Most of the consumer's products selection is based on the price. It is evident from the results that the purchase intention of CSR is positively affected by the marketing of the product, and consumers do not want to compromise product marketing. They prefer marketing more instead of buying CSR products ( $\beta = .0811$ ,  $t = 4.178$  at significant level  $p > .05$ ). Consumer judgment is limited in Pakistan. Consumer decisions are based on products, services, and company brand. Agriculture firms are doing CSR activities, but they are not receiving appreciation from customers. Brand plays a vital role in product or service decision-making. Our study has shown that consumers in Pakistan also consider the brand and are willing to buy branded products from agriculture firms. Companies involved in CSR activities face severe challenges, but consumers have less interest in CSR firms' products. So, brand effects CSR purchase intention, brand reputation, and brand trust influence intentions and consumers. The results for products marketing are ( $\beta = 0.322$ ,  $t = 9.990$ ) at a significant level  $p > .05$ , which indicates that customers have more trust in a brand rather than CSR products purchase. Consumers give more importance and weight to the branded products rather than CSR activities by the companies.

The study results have shown that convenience is positively related to CSR purchase intentions, and the consumer is less willing to compromise on convenience for CSR purchase. The results show that ( $\beta = 0.157$ ,  $t = 4.213$  at significant level  $p < .05$ ) but this relation is weak.

## CONCLUSIONS

The agricultural sector plays a vital role in Pakistan's economic growth, and domestic and multinational firms are engaged in agriculture. The study examines factors affecting consumer purchase intention of agriculture products. The current research examines whether consumers are willing to pay the extra price for those companies' products involved in CSR activities and what factors affect consumer purchase intention in the agriculture sector. CSR has a profound effect on consumer behavior in developed countries, and people are willing to compromise on various elements to purchase CSR products in the agriculture sector. In Pakistan, consumers are less aware of CSR activities. Not surprisingly, attitude, social norms, price, marketing, availability, convenience, and brand familiarity are still critical criteria when making purchase decisions. The study provides an empirical implication of the theory of the planned behavior model. Extended attitude model, social norms, and emotions are good towards CSR purchase, but there are few hurdles in practice such as price, marketing, brand, and convenience. Consumers are unwilling to pay the high price but won't compromise on quality. Consumers appreciate the company's CSR activities, and they want to purchase their products due to involvement in CSR. The agriculture sector consumers face several hurdles, including economic conditions, poverty, and lack of resources. Consumers are unwilling to pay higher/ more prices, and they do not want to compromise on essential issues, including brand and convenience. According to consumers, companies must do CSR activities for society, and their attitude towards buying CSR products is positive. Still, they do not buy at the cost of paying more or compromising quality, convenience, and brand. It has shown that customers do not pay attention to CSR for purchase, but they care about the product, brand, comfort, and price more than CSR.

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