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#### **Research Paper**

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# The Role of Millennial Tourists in Promoting Responsible Tourism: A Case in Singapore

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**ABSTRACT:** The tourism industry has emerged as one of the main contributors of gross domestic product (GDP) in many countries, including Singapore. Though the direct benefits associated with the growth of tourism industry is promising, the social-culturally and environmental problems that arisen simultaneously must not be overlooked. This paper presents five hypotheses for understanding the inter-relationship between millennial tourists' evaluation on tourism experience, their attitude towards the tourism experience, attitude towards the destination as well as their responsible tourism intention by using the consumption value theory, the halo effects and the theory of planned behavior as guiding frameworks. The paper proposes that the perceived value of millennial tourists is made up of six distinctive dimensions, which will have a positive effect on their attitude towards the tourism experience. Their positive attitude arisen from tourism experience will, then, affect their attitude towards the destination and thus their intention to engage in responsible tourism behavior. This paper offers opportunities to refine concepts and build on existing theories.

**KEYWORDS:** millennial; responsible tourism; perceived value; attitude; behavioral intention

#### Introduction

Tourism industry has emerged as an important source of growth, employment and income in many countries (Butowski, 2016). It has been estimated that, by the year of 2026, the tourism industry could support 370 million jobs and USD 11 trillion in the global GDP (Raga, 2017). Similarly, the tourism industry in Singapore is also a major contributor to the economy of the country (Singapore Tourism Board, 2020). In 2019 alone, Singapore welcomed a total of 19,111,300 visitors, which is even more than the number of its population of 5,690, 000 (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2020).

Yet, the rapid growth of the tourism industry is paralleled with undesirable effects such as destruction of nature and habitat loss as well as causing annoyance to the residents (Nulkar, 2018; Postma & Schmuecker, 2017). The prevalence of these issues has presented tourism-related business with challenges and opportunities. If not dealt with appropriately, these socio-environmental problems could give rise to harmful effects on both humans and the environment. In view of this, one of the main challenges facing the tourism industry is the

need to decouple its growth from the negative social and environmental impacts (World Tourism Organization & International Transport Forum, 2019). To resolve the conflict, many cities and destination are now encouraging responsible tourism, which is a growing focus of both practitioners and researchers alike (Um & Yoon, 2020). To define, responsible tourism can be seen as a concept to manage the tourism-related businesses "in a way that benefits its local community, natural and business environment and itself" (Frey & George, 2008, p. 108). While there have been a multitude of studies examining the role of responsible tourism and its outcomes (e.g., George, 2017; Hanafiah, Azman, Jamaluddin, & Aminuddin, 2015; Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017; McCombes, Vanclay, & Evers, 2015; Mody, Day, Sydnor, Lehto, & Jaffé, 2017), there have been several gaps which we will address in turn.

First, papers investigating responsible tourism intention are conspicuously missing. To the best of our knowledge, only one specific study by Um and Yoon (2020) examined whether a favourable tourism experience would encourage responsible behaviour intention among tourists. The reasoning behind is that through visiting the attractions of a destination, travellers are likely to form an attitude towards the destination and this attitude would be influential on their responsible tourism intention (Um & Yoon, 2020). Nevertheless, being the only known study in the field of tourism that suggests perceived value of a tourism service delivered can affect tourist' responsible tourism behaviour, further studies are needed to confirm the claims.

Second, the result of the same study cannot be generalized as well since it only accounts for local tourists visited to Seo-chon and Hongik University areas in South Korea (Um & Yoon, 2020). As cultural differences could be a factor influencing the behaviour of the tourists, generalising result from this study to future ones that are conducted in a different context may yield limited results. Naturally, this means that it warrants grounds for further investigation. Additionally, we also argue that a key predictor to tourists' attitude towards the travelling experience is their attitude towards the destination. In other words, tourists travelling to places that they considered to be of historic and cultural significance are more cautious of their behaviour in those sites (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017). For instance, one should not climb into the Uluru (Ayers Rock) in Australia as it is considered as disrespectful (Parks Australia, 2020). In this respect, we argued that including the construct of attitude towards destination into the analysis is expected to generate a more holistic finding to understand the causal inter-relationships within the process of tourists' responsible behaviour intention.

Third, limited research has been conducted to understand the beliefs and values of millennial populations (Altinbasak-Farina & Guleryuz-Turkel, 2015). Millennials offer a key market for responsible tourism as they are a generation that concerns with sustainability, travels frequently, craves for new experiences, spends more on travelling and more socially responsible than the previous generation cohorts (CBI Ministry of Foreign Affair, 2020; Farhan, Hari Murti, Suharsono, & Kamal, 2019). Given that the behaviour, values and attitudes of millennials are distinctive (Benckendorff, Moscardo, & Pendergast, 2010), it is natural for this paper to adopt a generational perspective in order to gain better insight into how millennials' attitude can be translated to behaviours that are in tune with responsible tourism. In this regard, a number of questions regarding the role of millennial tourists in promoting responsible tourism behaviour remain unanswered: How do millennial tourists evaluate their tourism experience? Can their attitude towards the tourism experience be generalized to the destination? Will a positive attitude towards the destination influence their intention to pursue responsible tourism behaviour?

Finally, there is a lack of consensus when it comes to identifying the perceived value dimensions of millennial tourists and their relative strength of association with the impacts. As a result, a consistent and commensurable empirical measure is unable to be developed (Fernández & Bonillo, 2007). Given that millennial group is relatively more "me-centric" and favours customized service (Chuah, Marimuthu, Kandampully, & Bilgihan, 2017), we propose to include a new perceived value dimension—customization value when studying millennial tourists' value perception. An in-depth understanding of the perceived value of millennial tourists can also shed more light on evolving new ideas as perceived value is context-dependent (Stollery & Jun, 2017).

To address these gaps, this paper reviews the existing literature on tourism and proposes a conceptual framework that aids understanding of the inter-relationship between millennial tourists' evaluation on their tourism experience, their attitude towards the destination and responsible tourism behaviour. The answers to these questions are fundamental for tourism marketers to understand the consumer behaviour among millennial tourists as well as to set an example of responsible tourism.

#### **Literature Review**

## Theoretical framework

The conceptual model of this study is anchored against the theory of consumption values, as well as the theory of planned behaviour (TPB). Firstly, the theory of consumption values espoused that consumers would perceive and attach multiple values to a product or service which can affect their attitude and ultimately influence their consumer choice (Lin, Kao, Tao, & Wu, 2015; Ramkissoon, Nunkoo, & Gursoy, 2009). According to the theory of consumption vaues, values can be segmented into five main aspects - functional value, emotional value, social value, epistemic value and conditional value, in which all five are very much related to the tourism sector. Functional value focuses on the utilitarian attributes of a product or service (Sheth, Newman, & Gross, 1991). For example, from a travellers' point of view, functional value reflects the quality of the travelling experience, variety of tourist attractions, reliability of tour guide, comfort and safety during the trip, prices reasonableness as well as accessibility of a destination (C. H.-J. Wu & Mursid, 2019). Emotional value is the ability of a destination in giving the tourists positive feelings towards it (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). For example, tourists may evoke the feeling of relaxation or feeling of being in the right place when visiting to a destination. Social value refers to the ability of a destination in fulfilling social needs such as the need for belongingness and conveying the desired self-image (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). For instance, one may choose to visit a country music festival as he/she aspires to meet up with other festival goers who share the same mind-set (Tan, Sim, Chai, & Beck, 2020). Epistemic value is the ability of a destination in satisfying a curiosity and fulfilling the need for knowledge (Devashish, 2011). For instance, one may choose to visit Australia to experience the unique indigenous lifestyles of which he/ she is passionate about. Finally, conditional value refers to the ability of a product to be an alternative in a given situation (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). This may be related to the COVID-19 situation that has brought international travel to a standstill. Due to this conditional factor or the fear to come into contact with the virus, individual may want travel domestically instead of internationally. Expectedly, the emphasis on the different values could differ according to travellers' needs and wants. A millennial traveller may place

higher priority on destinations that offer epistemic value than a generation X traveller who focuses more on functional value. On this note, Choe and Kim (2018) spotlighted that depending on the context of the study, modifications of the original constructs could be needed. Based on these, we can see that the consumption values theory provides a holistic explanation underlying travellers' decision and behaviour (Phau, Quintal, & Shanka, 2014).

Meanwhile, the TPB identifies attitudes, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control as the variable that determine an individual's behavioural intentions and actual behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). To explain further, attitude reflects a person's salient behavioural beliefs concerning the outcome of an action (Irianto, 2015; Sutton, 2001). For instance, a tourist who believes that travelling to a destination leads to mostly positive personal consequences will hold a positive attitude towards the visitation. Subjective norm refers to one's normative beliefs influenced by his/ her referents. To illustrate, a tourist may decide to visit a destination because of social pressure and to comply with the referents. Meanwhile, perceived behavioural control measures the extent to which the perceived ease or difficulty in performing a particular behaviour by the person. In other words, a person is likely to engage in certain behaviour if he/ she evaluates the behaviour as favourable and positive, people who are important to him/ her permit the behaviour and he/ she is confident about performing the behaviour successfully (Ajzen, 2001).

## Responsible tourism

As mentioned earlier, the tourism sector has become an important driver of economic growth across the world (Jucan & Jucan, 2013). However, the increase in visitor numbers on destinations has, at the same time, contributed to impact on resources, the environment and local communities at the same time (Nguyen, Erdelyi, & Formadi, 2018). Some common negative effects of tourism include overcrowding, the destruction of heritage and environment, globalisation and detrimental social change. In view of this, many destinations and destination organisations are now encouraging responsible tourism and focusing on becoming more sustainable. Responsible tourism has also caught the attention of many who are involved in the tourism industry, be it the academicians, tourism practitioners, tourists or event society at large (Burrai, Buda, & Stanford, 2019). Responsible tourism can be seen as a form of tourism that would minimize and reverse the negative effects of travelling (Goodwin, 2011) or "any form of development or tourist activity which respects and preserves in the long term natural, cultural and social resources and contributes in a positive and fair way to the development and the bloom of people who lives, works and spend their holiday in this place" (Manente, Minghetti, & Mingotto, 2014, p. 2). Nonetheless, Leslie (2012) claim that not only the providers of tourism products and services have a responsibility but also the purchasers, that is, the tourists. Therefore, it is important to determine who the responsible tourists are and what are their value, attitude and behavioural intentions are like.

## Millennial tourists

In recent years, millennial group has generated a great deal of interest among marketing researchers due to its market potential (Andrew, Pedersen, & McEvoy, 2020). With a size of 72.1 million, millennials make up nearly 20 per cent of the world's population and account for 15% of the global labour force (International Labour Organization, 2016). According to Frey (2018), millennials refer to people who were born in between the year of 1981 and 1997. In other words, by 2020, the youngest of millennials is turning 23. Millennial tourists worth special attention among responsible tourism marketers mainly because of their high level of

social awareness that results in more ethical travel (CBI Ministry of Foreign Affair, 2020). To illustrate, a study of millennials conducted in the UK revealed that 97% of the respondents regard being ethical and socially engaged are important to them, while 51% of them would choose a brand that acts in an ethical manner (Bowen, 2017).

# The case of Singapore

Tourism sector is one of the Singapore's key service sectors and economic pillars. The tourism sector currently contributes 4 per cent to Singapore's gross domestic product (Singapore Tourism Board, 2020). Tourism plays an essential role in reinforcing Singapore's status as a vibrant global city that is a magnet for capital, businesses and talent. It also enhances the quality and diversity of leisure options for residents and helps to create a living environment that Singaporeans can be comfortable living. In fact, following the Singaporean government's decision to position the country as a premier business and leisure destination as well as the steady increase in its annual tourists receipt (Singapore Tourism Board, 2020). In 2018, approximately 18.5 million international tourists visited Singapore (Singapore Tourism Board, 2018). This represented a 6.22% increase on the numbers in 2017, when 17.4 million tourists visited Singapore. In the Jan-May 2019 period, 7.8 million international tourists arrived in Singapore, up 1.49% on the same period in 2018 (Singapore Tourism Board, 2018). Given these increases in numbers, it is natural that there is an urgency of need for responsible tourism planning in the country. In fact, the local government have been responsive to the call to tackle the environmental and resource management issues that are arisen from the tourism activities. Among the initiatives are heavy protection of their forest areas, establishment of urban parks, natural reserves and reservoirs such as the Marina Barrage and providing monetary incentives for land developers which incorporate green technology into the design and construction of new buildings (Frommer's, 2020). A handful of corporations in the country have also made their move towards responsible tourism practices. Nonetheless, it is not enough to merely rely on the service provides to spearhead the way to responsible tourism.

Additionally, Singapore also imposes very punitive measures in the form of fines for noncompliance of responsible behaviour. To illustrate, the maximum fine for littering offenders, be it residents or non-residents, is \$2,000, \$4,000 and \$10,000 for the first, second and third convictions, respectively (Khew 2015). With these regulations in place, they can serve as a deterrent and alter the irresponsible behaviour of anyone who is in Singapore. Hence, Singapore can be seen as a very unique context for the responsible tourism related studies.

# **Hypotheses Development**

## Perceived value and attitude

Not surprisingly, there has been an overwhelming of evidence supporting the positive influence of perceived value on attitude towards the service provider or the service itself (Fam, Ting, Tan, Hussain, & Cheah, 2020; Fiore, Kim, & Lee, 2005; Lee, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2014; McDougall, 2000; Ruiz-Molina & Gil-Saura, 2008; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Tan et al., 2020). From these papers, it is not difficult see that it gravitates towards two perspectives. One, value creation is the fundamental objectives of any service provider. It is about creating value propositions that are align with the expectations of the customers. Two, perceived value is an overall assessment of a product or service that consumers decide after taking into

considerations the benefits and the cost associated with it. From the consumers' perspective, perceived cost includes monetary and nonmonetary sacrifices such as money, time and effort. Perceive benefits, on the other hand, often include a "combination of service quality attributes and customer characteristics or tastes" (Biscaia, Correia, Santos, Ross, & Yoshida, 2017).

Recent literature also demonstrates that customer perceived value has become an object of interest of many hospitality and tourism industry related research studies (e.g., Lee et al., 2014; Mitchell, Schlegelmilch, & Mone, 2016; Peña, Jamilena, & Molina, 2012; Prebensen, Woo, Chen, & Uysal, 2013; Scaglione & Mendola, 2017). In general, there are two approaches in conceptualising perceived value: uni-dimensional and multidimensional. The uni-dimensional approach offers a basis for value as a function of utility of a product or service based on perceptions of trade-off between total benefits and total sacrifices (Weinstein & Johnson, 1999). Nonetheless, some researchers have raised a concern that perceived value is much more complex to be operationalized as uni-dimensional and solely utilitarian based (Woodall, 2003). Some scholars also postulate that consumers, especially that of tourism, hospitality, and leisure industries do not evaluate value based on only the economic terms. Rather, a broader view of consumer value with multiple components is needed to holistically interpret and understand customer experiences (Bradley & Sparks, 2012).

Following the multidimensional approach, different past studies have used and supported different dimensions of value. Nonetheless, after a review of the existing studies, we found that there is no consensus in identifying the perceived value dimensions of tourists and their relative strength of association with the impacts. Notwithstanding, the customer perceived value (PERVAL) scale developed by Sweeney and Soutar (2001) appears to be the most recognized tool for assessing customers perceived value in marketing literature (Karjaluoto, Jayawardhena, Leppäniemi, & Pihlström, 2012; Senić & Marinković, 2014). The model suggests there are four different dimensions of value, namely: emotional, social, price and quality values. These dimensions are viewed as essential in which, millennial tourists would experience emotional and psychological benefits (emotional value) and develop social networks (social value) through the tourism experience. Travelling is also expected to involve substantial travel costs (price value), so the millennial tourists would assess the worth of the tourism experience (quality value). However, it was later claimed that, aside from the four original PERVAL scale value dimensions, researchers should also consider experiential value when measuring tourists' perceived value, due to the experiential nature of tourism (Prebensen et al., 2013; Yang, Lu, Jing, & Li, 2014). This dimension is also important to be examined in a tourism marketing literature, given travellers today are demanding travel products that are more 'experience-driven' (Gade & Raghu, 2016).

On a different note, anecdotal evidence also suggested that millennials tend to favour tailored made services (Myler, 2016). With that, Chuah et al. (2017) proposed a new dimension of customization value, which was found to be positively and significantly related to the attitude and behaviour among millennial mobile Internet subscribers. According to Thirumalai and Sinha (2011, p. 476), customization is "the tailoring of products to the individual needs and preferences of customers". Hence, if applied to the current research context, millennial tourists that are interested in customization would prefer to have their options conveniently available and would seek ways to take control of their schedule and experience when travelling. Even though this particular value dimension has yet to be tested in the tourism context, we argue that it is critical given millennials favour personalized experience that suit

their tastes and preferences and prefer customer experience that involves substantial interactions (CBI Ministry of Foreign Affair, 2020). Based on the foregoing, we hypothesized that:

H1a: Emotional value is positively related to attitude towards the tourism experience.
H1b: Social value is positively related to attitude towards the tourism experience.
H1c: Price value is positively related to attitude towards the tourism experience.
H1d: Quality value is positively related to attitude towards the tourism experience.
H1e: Experiential value is positively related to attitude towards the tourism experience.
H1e: Experiential value is positively related to attitude towards the tourism experience.
H1e: Experiential value is positively related to attitude towards the tourism experience.
H1f: Customization value is positively related to attitude towards the tourism experience.

## Attitudinal generalization

Individual tends to draw an impression of a person or an object based on the known traits (Dong, Chang, & Wang, 2017). Generalization of attitude is very well discussed in the psychological studies (e.g., Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Paolini, Crisp, & McIntyre, 2009; Stark, Flache, & Veenstra, 2013) but not extensively researched in the tourism sector. In consumer behaviour, it is mostly related to brand extension (Ratliff, Swinkels, Klerx, & Nosek, 2012). For instance, a positive association with a brand may persist and results in the formation of positive attitude towards the product that consumers see related with (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Furthermore, Langmeyer and Walker (1991), Till (2001) and De Mooij (2005) also discovered that individuals' attitude towards a celebrity is transferrable to products or brands that the celebrity endorsed. Through the connection of two objects, such as a brand and an event-marketing can cause attitude generalization and transfer the linking of the event over to the liking of the brand (Weihe, Mau, & Silberer, 2006).

With that being said, the formation of positive attitude towards the destination may also be expected via tourism experience that functions as the provision of resources by a destination in exchange for a direct association (Lee et al., 2014; Weihe et al., 2006). Thus, it can be speculated that, when holding favourable or positive attitude towards the tourism experience, millennial tourists are likely to evaluate the destination positively, leading us to the following set of hypotheses.

**H2:** Attitude towards the tourism experience is positive related to attitude towards the destination.

# The TPB constructs and responsible tourism intention

The relationship between attitude and behavioural intentions is also a very well discussed topic in both marketing and tourism literature. Following the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), attitude has been widely used to predict and explain a wide range of behavioural intentions such as: purchasing/ visiting, repurchasing/ revisiting, complaining and spreading positive word-of-mouth (Bashir & Madhavaiah, 2015; Choe & Kim, 2018; Di Pietro, Di Virgilio, & Pantano, 2012; Kruger & Mostert, 2016; Lee et al., 2014; Quintal & Phau, 2016; Wu, 2015). In the same fashion, it is thus expected that positive attitude towards the hosting destination will cause millennial tourists to act in the favour of the place, that is, to engage in responsible tourism intention.

To define, responsible tourism intention "is the intention to participate in responsible tourism, strengthen ethics for sustainable tourism and to conserve an area by restricting visit by self

and others" (Um & Yoon, 2020, p. 6). It is also about tourism that can be consumed in a more responsible way. Putting these together, responsible tourism is a form of tourism which minimizes negative social, economic and environmental impacts, generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities. Therefore, being a sub-category of behavioural intention, responsible tourism intention includes the intention to purchase local products, choosing environmentally friendly transport, behave responsibly towards the local communities and so forth (Budeanu, 2007). Based on the foregoing, we hypothesized that:

## **H3:** Attitude towards the destination is positively related to responsible tourism intention.

Subjective norm is also widely recognized as another important influence in deciding consumers' intended behaviours (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Choo, Ahn, & Petrick, 2016). According to Ajzen (1991) and Schmerler (2018), consumers would directly feel expectations from people around (whose opinions and views are important in a general sense) and would strive to seek social approvals by doing what other people expect them to do. Meanwhile, the social pressure may be exerted through suggestions of referent group such as spouse, relatives, friends, co-workers or even business partners (Han & Kim, 2010). Many previous studies also posited that repurchase/ revisit intention is the consequences of subjective norm (Al Muala, Mat, & Isa, 2013; Chen & Tung, 2014; Han & Kim, 2010; Maichum, Parichatnon, & Peng, 2016; Sparks & Pan, 2009; Ziadat, 2015). Following the same rationale, millennial tourists are more likely to involve in responsible tourism if their significant others are in support of the behaviour. Hence, we hypothesized that:

## H4: Subjective norm is positively related to responsible tourism intention.

Another predictor that can influence an individual's behavioural intention is the perceived behavioural control. According to Ajzen (1991) perceived behavioural control is positively related to the behavioural intention. In the tourism context, most research employed external attributes such as time and income in evaluating the perceived behavioural control among travellers (Lee & Kim, 2018). For instance, Sparks (2007) posited that wine tourists would intend to take a wine trip if they have more income and discretionary time. Meanwhile, Lam and Hsu (2004) claimed that lesser regulations and more discretionary income would affect Chinese tourists' intention to visit Hong Kong. To further the knowledge in the volunteer tourism context, Lee and Kim (2018) took into consideration on time, budget, lack of information and lack of security. In the same fashion, millennial travellers' intention to engage in responsible tourism behaviour may be weakened if they have resource constraints or are not confidence in their ability to conduct the behaviour. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

#### **H5:** *Perceived behavioural control is negatively related to responsible tourism intention.*

The following illustrated the conceptual framework:

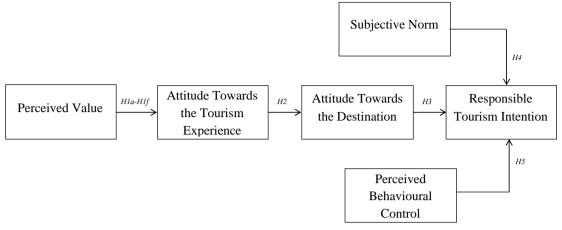


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

## **Potential Contributions and Suggestion for Future Studies**

This study develops a conceptual framework on how millennial tourists' perceived value can impact their attitude, and in turn, affects the responsible tourism intention. This paper would make several contributions. Firstly, it developed a framework recognizing millennial tourists' perceived value towards the tourism experience as the determinant of their respective responsible tourism intention. Rather than investing extra money into promoting responsible tourism, this study aims to provide a theoretical account that tourism companies should prioritize the delivery of superior tourism experience given that a satisfied millennial tourist with positive attitude towards the destination would naturally involve in responsible tourism behaviour intention.

Secondly, this study highlights that attitude formation as a complex and dynamic process from the concept of halo effect perspective. Since this is one of the few studies that employed the concept of halo effect in the tourism marketing context, it advances the body knowledge by enhancing the understanding of attitudinal generalization and subsequently, millennial tourists' responsible tourism intention. In practice, the conceptual framework can also be adopted by tourism companies as they embark on responsible tourism. Tourism companies must realize that normalizing responsible tourism is inseparable from delivering values and benefits that millennial tourists are expected to get. Researchers may also operationalize the framework in investigating whether perceived value induces the actual behaviour of responsible tourism among millennial tourists.

It is important to highlight that there is a constant debate as to whether planned behaviour actually leads to actual behaviour. For this reason, future studies may want to adopt novel methods when assessing the propositions of this paper. In addition, it is expected to offer more insight if future studies would specify the research context to specific visitor attraction sites in Singapore. As such, it would ensure that the data are comparable and enable the measure of the effectiveness of responsible tourism.

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