

## Hard Power Elements in Nation Branding: Bayraktar TB-2 Example

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### Abstract

This paper aims to provide evidence on hard power elements' involvement in nation branding. This novel approach recognizes the importance of elements that have been traditionally incorporated in the concept of nation branding but goes beyond this definition to measure whether hard power elements can be associated with a subject nation by observers.

The paper is designed as a qualitative theory building study. The research examines the attitudes of a sample of Ukrainian nationals residing either in Türkiye or in Ukraine. Using a semi-structured interview using snowball sampling methodology, a set of questions are directed to 8 respondents to understand if Bayraktar TB-2 impacted their perception of Türkiye.

Findings indicate that all respondents either associate Bayraktar TB-2 with Türkiye or their perceptions towards Türkiye are affected by it. Although current literature indicates that “exports” is a part of nation branding, research showed that Bayraktar drones, and thereby hard power elements, are not considered as exports, but instead a factor on its own, positively influencing the perception of a nation. As for limitations, the current sample size is not sufficient to represent the whole mass and further study has to be conducted to empirically test the suggested theory.

This research paper aims to contribute to the concept of nation branding and offer new insights into the scope of its application. While recognizing the validity of the current pillars of nation branding, this research suggests that hard power weighs in the domestic and international perception of a given country in this case Türkiye, and therefore should not be excluded from nation branding.

**Keywords:** Nation Branding; Hard Power; Public Diplomacy; Branding; Country of Origin

## 1. Introduction:

The ongoing war in Ukraine has seen the first drone vs drone combat in history. (Forbes, 2022) While both parties to the conflict, Ukraine and Russia largely use drones to conduct their operations, both for surveillance purposes and to conduct attacks, the Bayraktar Tactical Block 2 has emerged as a symbol and acquired visibility through popular culture. A popular Ukrainian song praises the drones *“Those shiny tanks are being set ablaze – Bayraktar – that’s the new craze”* (CNN, 2022). The mayor of Kyiv announced that a newborn lemur at the city’s zoo has been named after the drone and the foreign ministry also went on to name a puppy at the Kyiv police dog training center. Videos of operations performed by the drone went viral on social media and visioned around the world.

While this drone has been used in different combat zones and 19 more countries ordered drones from the Turkish company, the Bayraktar TB-2 is publicly associated with the war in Ukraine. The CEO of Bayraktar, Haluk Bayraktar went on to say: *“We are very proud, and it is very touching for us to be one of the symbols of this big resistance in Ukraine”*. (Anews, 2022). The use of these drones has been promoted as the result of a long collaboration and *“years of efforts”* between the two countries in the defense area.

Selcuk Bayraktar, the chief technology officer of Baykar Technologies, who also happens to be the son-in-law of the Turkish president, praises the contribution of the drone: *“People are resisting and defending their homeland from an illegal occupation and ... if you want independence you have to be able to stand up and resist and I think that’s what the brave people of Ukraine and leadership has done”* (Anews, 2022). Thus, an element coming from military power, and solely used as such has found its way into popular culture. (Witt, 2022)

This research seeks to explore the military or so-called hard power component, in the projection of a country’s image, which is designed as nation-branding in the field of marketing.

On the one hand, traditionally, nation-branding is a marketing concept encompassing six elements, mainly to increase a nation's competitive advantage, by bolstering a nation's distinctiveness domestically and internationally. However, none of the elements structuring the study of nation branding allows to measure the reach of military elements, hereby the Bayraktar TB-2, on nation branding. On the other hand, hard power is rooted in political theory, where power is defined as the ability to change the behavior of others (Nye, 2009). Two different kinds of power have been distinguished. Hard power is achievable by military means, as well as economic rewards or punishments (Gray, 2011). On the other hand, soft power represents the ability to co-opt others to share values and consequently share key elements in terms of the agenda for international order and security. (Gray).

While the literature on nation brand offers ample research on the relationship between nation brand and soft power, as well as public diplomacy (Szondi, 2008), elements pertaining on

hard power regarding country brand have been largely ignored and there is, to our knowledge, no academic work on the subject. Therefore, this research's ambition is to fill this gap and extend the academic and practitioners' understanding of country branding.

Furthermore, another contribution of this research falls in line with Szondi's observation about nation branding theory. He asserts that nation branding theory has been primarily explored in the domestic context, although it *"takes place in an international environment and only partly in a domestic context"*. By asking Ukrainian nationals about the measure of the impact of the Bayraktar TB-2 on their perception of Turkey's nation brand, this research offers a transnational study on hard power elements in nation branding.

Therefore, this research seeks to answer the following question: Are hard power elements a factor in nation branding?

## 2. The Concepts of Nation Branding, and Brands in General

Because this paper aims to discuss missing aspects of nation branding in modern literature, to make sense of what aspects might be overlooked, the concepts of nation branding and its relation with soft and hard power, and brands, in general, are inspected separately. While the first part of this section contains a general picture of the understanding of nation branding and its use in current literature, the concept of brands is briefly explained in the second part.

### 2.1. What is Nation Branding?

The term "nation brand" was originally pioneered in 1996 by Simon Anholt, a marketing specialist, (Anholt, 2011) and gained traction exponentially in the 21st century. Six main subfields of nation brand are thereby identified as tourism, exports, governance, people, culture and heritage, and investment and immigration.

Jansen (2008) justifies the emergence of the use and study of the term in the context of the end of the cold war as it allowed to meet the new ideological and pragmatic needs of nation-states and transnational corporations, who were forced to rethink their alliances and positioning in the world, as both were facing a geo-political identity crises. By definition, nation branding is performed both by private and public actors. Gudjonsson (2005) explains that both governments and private companies use their power to persuade actors who can to change a nation's image.

Further, although the term nation brand is used interchangeably with country brand and state brand (Anholt, 2003) these activities are being carried out when a substantial part of the population is a part of the initiatives and includes the strategies into their everyday lives, to address the public themselves. In simpler terms, it can be described as a promotion activity from citizen to citizen or public to public.

The concept has also been defined as a multidimensional blend of the elements that allow a nation to build culturally grounded differentiation for the spectrum of its target audience (Dinnie, 2008). Therefore, it is used by governments to craft by self-consciousness strategies a certain image of the nation-state (Bolin and Stahlberg, 2010).

Beyond that, Aronczyk (2013) argues that nation-branding uses elements of the corporate brand management world to create and communicate elements of national identity. Thereby, the distinction of a nation's identity and this strategic representation enhances the competitiveness (Moor, 2007) of a nation through economic, political, and social interest promotion domestically and internationally by increasing its reputation (Szondi, 2008).

Ståhlberg (2022) adds that nation branding is directed on the one hand toward a domestic audience, but it became evident the concept is also largely directed toward the field of international politics. This perspective supports Fan's (2010) argument that nation branding reshapes international opinions as a whole whereas public diplomacy is a subset of the concept focusing on the political brand of a nation, and thus contributing to a country's soft power. By communicating a nation's policies and culture to an international audience, Jordan (2014) asserts that nation branding is essentially the public face of international diplomacy.

Currently, two other concepts, nation-branding and public diplomacy, are increasingly used interchangeably too by having international public relations at their heart and practicing relationship management (Szondi, 2010). Beyond that, the relationship still remains ambiguous, the first concept belonging to the field of marketing, while the second is included in international relations and international communication (Szondi, 2008).

Peter Van Ham has been at the forefront of exploring the intersection of the use of branding in international relations as well as public diplomacy, especially arguing that place branding is part, along with soft power and public diplomacy of postmodern power (Van Ham, 2008).

Regarding the application of nation branding, a given government is the initiator of a process using branding and marketing communications techniques (Fan, 2006) to modify the behavior, attitudes, identity, or image of a nation in a positive way (Gudjonsson, 2005).

Jansen (2008), asserts that the nation brand intends to achieve 5 objectives: internationally, it intends to create greater visibility, attracts foreign investments and tourists, expand exports as well as boost a nation's geo-political profile, often among members states of international organizations, while domestically it generates national pride and internal solidarity while repairing potential reputational damage.

The literature on soft power and nation branding offers an extensive overview of the intertwinement and some insights into other forms of power. At the antipodes of soft power lays the concept of hard power. While the concept of power in IR scholarship is to be understood as the ability to influence an outcome, Nye (2009) has conceptualized two distinctions in nature that exist on a continuum. (Wagner, 2021)

On the one hand, soft power – is the ability to reach an outcome through attraction rather than coercion and relies on the mobilization of resources such as culture, values, and policies. (Nye, 2008)

On the other hand, hard power combines means ranging from military intervention to economic sanctions and coercive diplomacy, call in inducements and threats. (Wilson, 2008) This end of the spectrum is using tangible resources such as a country's military and economic capacity. (Wagner, 2021)

As mentioned previously, Wagner (2021) argues that soft power and hard power exist on a continuum and Smith-Windsor (2000) demonstrates the boundaries between them are blurred, as military elements can be used to increase the attractiveness of a country through peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. More particularly, Smith-Windsor shows how Canada has used peacekeeping operations, for instance in Kosovo, to be part of the countries' cultural identity and ability to attract support to its agenda on the international stage.

## **2.2. What is a brand, and what components do they have?**

In the broadest terms, brands are usually perceived as an aspect of business that provides differentiation and customer retention by offering superior value in at least one dimension of the product. However, definitions vary based on the field. To fully understand what a brand is, both legal and business perspectives are offered in this paper. First, by their legal definition, they are protected trademarks that encompass brand names, logos, product designs, and other differentiating elements of a company. In other words, brands can be considered as a mark that provides trust resulting from its producer and it protects the producer by prohibiting others to use that particular brand as long as it is trademarked (USPTO, 2023). For example, Nike's trademark protects its logo, designs, and other intangibles from its competitors, so customers can identify products bearing the same logo as Nike's products, whilst it prohibits other parties from imitating their products. This aspect is easy to apply to countries too since article 6 of the Paris Convention indicates a similar perspective on the use of flags, state emblems, and other official hallmarks of countries. In plain words, any unauthorized party may not use a state emblem without its direct consent. In this sense, it can be said that brands and countries react similarly to one another in terms of protecting symbols that differentiate them from others.

Secondly, the most basic definition of brands from a business perspective suggests that they embody an organization's name, logo, and other design elements that identify and distinguish what it offers from its competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2016). For instance, Coca-Cola's white-on-red calligraphic name print and its bottle design became one of the most recognizable symbols in the business world, differentiating it from its competitors such as Dr. Pepper and Pepsi.

However, it is important to keep in mind that brands are much more complex and a broader concept than just being tools of differentiation. Each and every brand might occupy different meanings in different consumers' minds. Such differences occur from the observers' individual experiences, culture, and values. Each of these factors can potentially shape how an observer might perceive and interpret a brand, and such a difference might lead to

different associations for a brand. Depending on an individual's encounter with a particular brand can affect how that brand will be evaluated in the subject individual's mind. For example, a quick response to a customer complaint might lead the observer to develop a belief that the brand is reliable and trustworthy, whereas an unpleasant experience such as a defective product might create the opposite perception (Fournier, 1998). Further, different cultural backgrounds can have an impact on how a brand is perceived too. For example, a luxury watch brand may signify economic power and status in one culture, while it might be deemed as "pretentious" in another (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Also, personal values and beliefs play a critical role as well. An observer with higher sensitivity to environmental sustainability might perceive an "eco-friendly" brand more as appealing than other companies that do not show the same initiative (Aaker, 1997).

These explanations indicate the importance of who the observer is in order to understand the meaning of a brand. Observers, in this sense, co-create the meaning of a brand with their individual perspectives, experiences, and values by interpreting the brands based on their own qualities. Acknowledging brands as complex structures underscores the value of considering the viewer's role in forming brand significance (Schroeder, 2009).

Intangible constructs in the observers' minds emphasize the importance of the audience's understanding of a brand since they become the co-creators of the brand based on brand equity, brand personality, and brand associations (Aaker, 1997). Inspecting those three concepts one by one, brand equity refers to the value of a brand that's added to a product or service's value without the brand "marked on it". In other words, brand equity can be described as the additional amount of money that a customer is ready to pay for a product solely because it carries a particular brand aside from its functional value (Keller, 1993). McDonald's brand equity, for example, derives from its unmistakable logo, global awareness, loyal customers, and perceived value as a "reward meal". A high brand equity results in customer loyalty, customer retention, lower price sensitivity, and as a result, a stronger competitive advantage over the competitors. Additionally, Aaker (1997) suggests that brands, just like human beings, have a set of personality characteristics that can be associated with them. The five dimensions of brand personality are sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. In simple terms, a brand personality refers to a hypothetical persona that its customers might answer to a "if this brand was a human, what kind of a person would that be?" question. For example, a Ford Mustang can be personalized as a sophisticated and a rugged person, which would attract more adventurous customers by creating an emotional connection between the product and the user. Another important aspect of a brand is the brand association. Keller (2003) argues that brand associations are constructed mental connections between a brand and a customer based on the brands' perceived functional, emotional, and social aspects. Google, for example, is often associated with innovation, analytical achievement, and convenience. Such associations result from various sources such as the direct experience of the observer, word of mouth, and marketing communication efforts of the organization.

Considering all aspects of the term "brand" would lead to the conclusion that brands do not only exist as a legal business asset, but also as an intangible, dynamic, and constructed being

in observers' minds that have a value (equity), personality, and associations. This conclusion points out that if the principles of a brand, as understood in marketing, applied to nations, it can not be restricted to a set of dimensions, but a country brand, in reality, is what an observer makes out of it. This being pointed out, there is no reason for keeping hard power elements categorically out of the scope of nation and/or country branding.

### 3. Methodology

Given that the terminology used for nation branding and brands does not perfectly fit, a qualitative research is required to conceptualize the main argument of the paper: hard power elements should not be excluded from nation branding studies.

In order to achieve such a task, the authors decided to examine how Ukrainian people perceive Türkiye. Ukraine is specifically selected for two reasons. First, the ongoing war (as of 19/04/2023) between Ukraine and Russia is a major political and international event with many unknowns, and Bayraktar drones' involvement in the war is richly popular within the country. Second, Türkiye being one of the major holiday destinations of Ukrainian people, many of them have a better understanding of Türkiye, and many Ukrainian nationals currently reside in Türkiye, so it is possible to compare their perspectives with ones do not live in Türkiye.

Because of the qualitative nature of the study, and the availability of access to the sample, the authors decided to use snowball sampling method and in-depth interviews.

Snowball sampling technique, a non-probabilistic sampling technique is used in social sciences especially when studying hard-to-reach or hidden populations (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). It begins with an initial participant, or a set of participants called "seeds" and they are expected to fit in the description of the research's group of interest. They are typically reached through personal contacts or other sources of references (Goodman, 1961). Later, they are asked to refer other potential participants that might be willing to contribute to the study (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

Snowball sampling begins with an initial set of participants, known as "seeds," who are identified through various means such as personal contacts, referrals, or purposive sampling (Goodman, 1961). These seeds are then asked to refer other potential participants who meet the study's criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The recruitment process continues until there are no new participants available, or the desired sample size is reached (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Snowball sampling is usually preferred by researchers when studying either hidden or hard to reach populations, such as immigrants, and people who are engaged in illegal and/or socially unapproved activities, who might be difficult to contact with using other sampling methods.

Because there is a full-scale war going on in Ukraine, and it is hard to locate and contact Ukrainian nationals living in Türkiye, snowball sampling is a good fit for the needs of the study. Also, snowball sampling can be a cost-effective method in terms of time and money, given that it relies on already-known participants' reference groups for identifying new

respondents. Further, because it relies on personal connections, snowball sampling may create a sense of intimacy and trust between the participants and researchers which would result in a higher probability of participation and data quality (Browne, 2005).

The data collection method of the study, in-depth interviews are widely used as a qualitative research method that offers researchers unique insights into participants' perspectives, experiences, and beliefs. A one-on-one discussion between a researcher and a respondent is referred to as an in-depth interview, and its main aim is to obtain intricate and delicate information regarding a certain topic (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). These interviews tend to be semi-structured, allowing researchers to use a flexible interview guide while leaving space for any unpredictable themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Braun & Clarke (2006) indicate that the data collected from in-depth interviews is usually subjected to thematic analysis, content analysis, or grounded theory approaches. Qualitative research often utilizes in-depth interviews due to the numerous advantages they offer. The first advantage of in-depth interviews is that they can collect detailed and subtle information about participants' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives, giving valuable insights into complex phenomena (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Additionally, the semi-structured format of in-depth interviews allows for the adaptation of the process depending on the responses of the participants, which facilitates the exploration of unexpected themes and topics (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Additionally, the intimate setting of an in-depth interview allows for the researcher and the participant to create a relationship, leading to improved quality of data (Seidman, 2013).

In this study, eight Ukrainian nationals agreed to contribute to the research. Respondents' age varies between 23-40, three male and five female, among them are an international relations scholar, one military person, a stay-at-home mother, and students. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, an online meeting software. Before the interview, each contributor's consent is asked and their responses are recorded on video. All interviews are conducted in the presence of a contributor who is native in both Ukrainian and Turkish, who helped the authors to be able to conduct the interviews in the respondents' native language. Respondents are asked five questions to uncover how Türkiye is perceived and if Bayraktar drones or Turkish military power is a factor in their perceptions of Türkiye. The questions asked are:

*Q1: "What comes to mind when you hear the word Türkiye?"*

*Q2: "What comes to mind when you hear the word Bayraktar drone?"*

*Q3: "Did Bayraktar drones affect your perception towards Türkiye in a positive or negative way?"*

*Q4: "Do you associate Bayraktar drones with Türkiye?"*

*Q5: "Is Turkish military power a factor in your perception of Türkiye?"*

*Q6: "Where do you reside now?"*

Probe and follow-up questions were asked when required to clarify the responses of the contributors and the records are saved in a hardware storage only accessible by the researchers. The respondents retain their rights to withdraw from the study at any time.

A seven-step approach is used for the in-depth interview data collection and analysis of the data. Because in-depth interviews are a qualitative research methods that concentrates on individual perceptions of a small number of respondents, a systematic qualitative approach is required to properly introduce the insights gained through the research.

First step of analysis involves transcribing the video recordings to familiarizing researchers with the data collected. In this study, the researchers used a read and re-read method (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with initial idea notations. Second, the data is coded and labeled by going back and forth on the text and videos to identify significant features that can be relevant to the research question (Saldana, 2016). Next, a thematic analysis is conducted to identify, analyze and report the themes noticed within the interviews. Doing so, the researchers had the opportunity to investigate deeper meanings or relevance of some of the notes they obtained throughout the interviews. The fourth step of the analysis would have been checking the results' trustworthiness to assess the quality of the qualitative research by checking its features such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Although the researchers are confident that the data collected is credible since it is collected directly from the concerned population, and researcher bias is minimal as the questions are straightforward and non-leading, transferability and dependability of the insights have to be studied separately to find out if the results are still valid for larger masses, and for a longer period of time. The researchers are planning to conduct a secondary research to validate their results in a quantitative manner to strengthen the validity of their findings.

However, the researchers applied a member-checking protocol for increasing the credibility of their interpretations, as the fifth step of the evaluation process. Research findings are discussed with a number of participants, and scholars (including but not limited to interview participants and scholars from similar fields).

The sixth step, triangulation (Patton, 1999) is also to be conducted with the follow-up research to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the research question. Finally, the researchers decided to report their findings by interpreting the data available for them by making sense of the identified patterns in relation to the research question and literature, and they are presented in results chapter.

## 4. Results

Although the researchers are confident that their findings are useful in understanding the general fabric of the phenomenon studied, it is vital to keep in mind that the aim of qualitative analyses are not to generalize the findings the same way as quantitative research. Instead, the main aim of this study is to offer a rich, detailed, and nuanced understanding on how hard power elements can be observed as a dimension of nation branding.

For simplicity and clarity, the answers given by the contributors are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Answers matrix

	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8
Q1	A1,5	A3,4,5	A2,3	A1,4	A4	A7	A4,5	A1,3,5,7
Q2	Safety	Joint Operations	Safety	Solidarity	Solidarity	Solidarity	Solidarity	Military
Q3	Positive / Improved	Positive / No Change	Neutral / Improved	Neutral / Improved	Neutral / Improved	Neutral / Improved	Neutral / Improved	Positive / Improved
Q4	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES
Q5	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES
Q6	TR	TR	UKR	TR	UKR	TR	UKR	UKR

Source: Interviews conducted for data collection purposes

Abbreviations in Q1 refer to the known aspects of nation branding based on Anholt's work. The six aspects of nation branding according to Anholt are tourism (A1), exports (A2), governance (A3), people (A4), culture and heritage (A5), and investment and immigration (A6). The authors introduced a seventh aspect in this study: military (A7).

As seen from the table, most of the respondents' initial answers to Q1 were among the already existing aspects of nation branding mentioned by Anholt. However, two of the respondents also mentioned military aspects of Türkiye when they are asked what they associate Türkiye with. For Q2, two of the respondents said they associate Bayraktar drones with safety, four of them associate them with the solidarity between Ukraine and Türkiye, one with the military and one with joint operations between Ukraine and Türkiye. Based on the answers given to Q3, seven of the respondents' perception towards Türkiye has improved with the introduction of Bayraktar drones. The only respondent who said it didn't change their perception said it was already positive. In Q4, six of the respondents said that they associate Bayraktar drones with Türkiye, yet the other two said they find Bayraktar drones a mutual creation. On Q5, five out of eight respondents said that Turkish military power is a factor in their perception of Türkiye.

These findings regarding the relationship between Ukraine and Türkiye confirm the validity of Anholts theoretical framework of the aspects of nation branding, but more importantly, indicate at that the hard power elements – the Bayraktar drone in the scope of this research – have a considerable impact in Ukrainian's perception of Türkiye, and thereby in the perception of a nation in a positive way. IR literature recognizes the blur between distinctive types of power, but this finding is novel in the understanding of nation branding. The authors found that for the overwhelming majority of respondents, the hard power elements increased the sense of collaboration between the two nations and the general perception of the nation initiating the process.

These findings complement the existing theory on nation branding by suggesting a novel element.

## 5. Discussion and Limitations

Based on the responses provided by the subjects of the study, it is safe to say that although not dominant, hard power elements are a factor for the subjects in their perception of Türkiye. Results confirm that most of the responses fall within Anholt's six pillars of nation branding, however, there is evidence that at least some of the Ukrainians include hard power elements for describing the brand of Türkiye. Also, results show that Bayraktar drones affected the subjects' perception of Türkiye in a positive manner. Also, given that most of the respondents associate Türkiye's military power and Bayraktar drones with their perception of Türkiye, results dominantly point out that hard power elements play a role in brand associations, at least within this particular context.

The results offer valuable and significant insights into hard power elements' involvement in nation branding. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that this is an early study to develop a hypothesis suggesting that hard power elements can be a factor for nation branding. Although this particular research's results might look conclusive, they are hardly generalizable as they are without further quantitative research to statistically prove that hard power elements are a valid part of a nation's brand. This is a direct outcome of the limitations of the research design. Clearly, when trying to establish a theory, or uncover a hypothesis that has not been studied yet, current research design is the only logical choice for the authors. However, because of the sample size and sampling methods, results are in need of further research.

First, snowball sampling being a non-probabilistic sampling technique, it may not provide a sample that's enough to represent the target population, which hampers the generalizability of the study's findings. Also, there is always a possibility that participants might be biased in a certain way since they are connected with one another this way or another, so a risk of a homogeneous sample is plausible.

Second, a small number of participants, because of the nature of in-depth interviews, participants' unique experiences and/or beliefs cannot be generalized to the whole society. Also, even though researchers did their best to remain neutral throughout the study, there is always a risk of a researcher bias too when asking and processing the information.

All aspects considered, it can be concluded that based on the available information, hard power elements can be a part of nation branding, but in order to accept it as such with more confidence, a further research done with a statistically representative sample has to be done as a further research. Furthermore, applying the same research for different observers and different subject countries would strengthen the insights gained in this study.

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