

A MODEL OF MALE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN BUYING SKIN CARE PRODUCTS IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The chief purpose of the research is to examine in some depth the phenomena of male consumer behaviour in buying skin care products in Thailand. In order to cope with the research purpose, Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action model is employed as a theoretical framework and modified by adding the self-image construct. The research question is "To what extent do beliefs in product attributes, self-image, normative influences, and attitudes toward applying skin care products, affect Thai male consumers' purchase intention and purchase behaviour in buying skin care products?" A questionnaire was developed and distributed to Thai male consumers aged 21 to 50 years in Bangkok metropolitan by using shopping mall-intercept and cluster sampling. 422 completed questionnaires were returned and then were analysed by using factor analysis, correlation, regression analysis, and path analysis in SPSS version 15.0. The results of the study confirm that beliefs, self-image, normative influences, and attitudes have impacts on purchase intention and purchase behaviour in buying skin care products among Bangkok male consumers, and therefore, the modified theory of reasoned action is appropriate to explain male consumer behaviour in the purchase of specific cosmetic product in the Thai setting.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, men have become more conscious about their image than ever before, resulting in sales on male grooming products are expected to increase by 18 per cent globally between 2006 and 2011, when the market is forecast to be valued at \$25 billion (Mermelstein & Fielding 2007). This change in male grooming is becoming a new trend and is expected to blossom in regions where consumers are increasingly adapting to Western lifestyles.

Within countries in Asia-Pacific region where people are likely to be westernized, Thailand is recognized as one of the fast growing cosmetics industry, particularly male grooming market; perhaps due to a Thai government campaign to promote the country as the future beauty capital of Asia ('Unilever-P&G skincare war' 2006). Among male grooming products, skin care market in Thailand shows the fastest expansion since it achieved a 30 per cent volume growth of 3,800 million Baht in 2006 (102.70 million US dollars) ('Men's grooming products-Thailand' 2007).

As a result, it is significant to identify what variables are affected in the purchase of male skin care products and it found that among consumer behaviour theories, Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of reasoned action model (TRA) is the most prevailing and well-accepted in terms of predicting consumer behaviour caused by attitude constructs (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen 1975; Choo, Chung & Pysarchik 2004; Nysveen, Pedersen & Thøbjørnsen 2005; Wan, Luk & Chow 2005; Xu & Paulins 2005). To better explain male purchasing skin care products in the Thai con-

text, an addition construct, self-image, has been added to TRA.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to test the validity of the modified reasoned action theory in explaining male consumer purchasing behaviour regarding skin care products in the Thai market.

2. Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

To explain male consumer purchasing behaviour regarding skin care products in Thailand, the theory of reasoned action (TRA) developed by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen in 1975 and 1980 is employed as a theoretical framework.

The core structure of TRA can be presented as the relationships among beliefs (B_i), normative structures (NB_jMC_j), attitudes toward behaviour (A_{act}), subjective norms (SN), behavioural intentions (BI), and actual behaviour (B) as described in the formula below.

$$B \sim BI = (A_{act}) w_1 + (SN) w_2$$

$$A_{act} = \sum_{i=1}^n B_i E_i \quad \text{and} \quad SN = \sum_{j=1}^n NB_j MC_j$$

Based on this formula, behavioural intention (BI) leads to behaviour (B), and that behavioural intention (BI) is determined by the consumer's attitudes towards behaviour (A_{act}) and by subjective norm (SN). Attitudes toward the behaviour (A_{act}) refer to whether the person is in favour or against the specific behaviour, whereas subjective norm (SN) refers the other people or groups who would approve or disapprove of the respondents performing specific behaviour. Attitudes towards behaviour (A_{act}) are a function of a cognitive structure ($BiEi$),

which is a belief-evaluation composite, where B_i is the belief that performance of the behaviour will lead to a specific outcome i , E_i is the evaluation of each consequence, and n is the number of salient outcomes. The subjective norm (SN) is represented as a function of a normative structure (NB_jMC_j), where NB_j is the perceived expectation that referent j thinks the individual should perform the behaviour. MC_j is the consumer's motivation to comply with referent j , and k is the number of salient referents.

To put TRA into simple terms, a person's behaviour is predicted by his/her attitudes toward that behaviour and how that person thinks other people would view them if he/she performed the behaviour. A person's attitude, combined with subjective norms, forms his/her behavioural intention. If a person intends to behave in a particular way then it is likely that the person will do it.

TRA is appropriate for this study because of its performance in predicting consumer behaviour and providing an explanation of that behaviour (Manstead 2004). Furthermore, it is one of the most predominant attitudinal models broadly applied in various investigations (e.g. online travel shopping behaviour (Lee, Qu & Kim 2007); mobile chat services (Nysveen, Pederson & Thorbjornsen 2005); adopting banking channel (Wan, Luk & Chow 2005); the purchase of food products (Choo, Chung & Pysarchik 2004)) and in a number of cultural settings such as U.S.A (Lee & Littrel 2005; Ulaga & Eggert 2006), Norway (Nysveen, Pederson & Thorbjornsen 2005), Australia (Patterson 2004), Hong Kong (Wan, Luk

& Chow 2005), and Taiwan (Shih & Fang 2004).

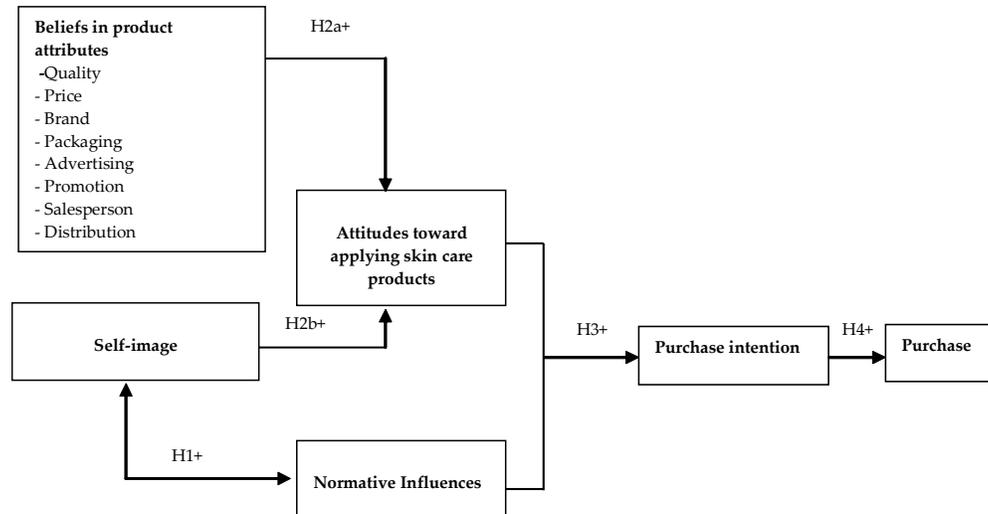
Self-image has been added to TRA in order to enhance the predictability of male consumer behaviour toward buying skin care products in Thailand. Self-image is significant because men have purchased skin care products for the creation, development, and maintenance of their "self-image" (Sturrock & Pioch 1998; Thompson & Hirschman 1995), which portrays the image of a well-groomed working person, a sophisticated urban guy who has good taste and a fashionable lifestyle in this context.

3. Hypotheses

In order to examine Thai male consumers in buying skin care products, hypotheses in the present study are formulated based on relationship among research variables in TRA as follows.

- The relationship between self-image and normative influences
- The relationship between beliefs in product attributes and attitudes
- The relationship between self-image and attitudes
- The association among attitudes and normative influences upon behaviour intention
- The relationship between behaviour intention and purchase

Figure 1: The conceptual model of male consumer behaviour in buying skin care products



The Relationship between Self-Image and Normative Influences

Self-image and normative influences are likely to demonstrate a linkage. Self-image refers to the perceptions individuals have of what they are like (Goldsmith, Moore & Beaudoin 1999), whereas normative influence is defined as the other people or groups who would approve or disapprove of the respondents' performing behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). Hu and Jasper (2006) revealed that an individual adopts a behaviour, which complies with others (normative influences), resulting from the belief that the adoption will enhance the individual's self-concept or self-image. Therefore, the first hypothesis is expected as follows:

H1: Among Bangkok male consumers, there is a **positive relationship** between the self-image and normative influences.

The Relationship between Beliefs in Product Attributes and Attitudes

The study of Siu and Wong (2002) investigated price, packaging, promotion, salesperson, and store distribution for cosmetic product attributes in Hong Kong. Anderson and He (1998) found quality, price, brand, packaging, advertising, and salesperson as influential attributes when Chinese consumers considered using cosmetics in China. Additionally, Johri and Sahasakmontri (1998) revealed that consumers' attitudes toward "green" (environmentally-friendly) cosmetic products evaluate a product based on its fragrance, colour, performance, brand name, price, whether it is safe for skin, opportunity to pre-test, outlet atmosphere, packaging, ingredients, and whether it was tested on animals. Therefore, attributes affecting buying skin care products are expected to include price, quality, packaging, promotion, salesperson,

advertising, brand, and type of distribution. Consequently, there is a need to investigate how those attributes influence the attitudes of Thai male consumer toward buying skin care products. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested as follows:

H2a: Beliefs in product attributes **positively affect** Bangkok male consumers' attitudes toward applying skin care products.

The Relationship between Self-Image and Attitudes

Beaudoin, Moore and Goldsmith (1998) implied that attitudes toward buying apparel were associated with self-image because purchasing apparel satisfies various needs, such as self-image and self-identity. Like apparel, skin care cosmetics have symbolic or communicative value (Coulter, Feick & Price 2002). Cosmetics have been found to influence person perception since these products affect personal appearance (Belk 1978). Accordingly, Coulter, Feick, and Price found that self-image had an influence toward applying and buying cosmetic products for women in Hungary. This study proposes to examine self-image in a different gender and therefore it is expected that self-image influences the attitudes of male consumers in the purchase of skin care product in this study. Hence, the next hypothesis is as follows:

H2b: Self-image positively affects Bangkok male consumers' attitudes toward applying skin care products.

The Association among Attitudes and Normative Influences upon Behaviour Intention

Shih and Fang (2004) found that nor-

native influences such as friends, colleagues, and family and attitudes had influences on behavioural intention in adopting Internet banking for customers in Taiwan. Buttle and Bok (1996) also found two predictor constructs, which were attitudes and normative factors, affecting business travellers' intention toward staying in the hotel on the next business trip in Seoul, South Korea. There is a need to examine the influence of attitudes toward using skin care products and normative influences upon the intention to buy skin care products. In this study, normative influences include spouse/partners, friends, family, and colleagues. The hypothesis is described as follows.

H3: Among Bangkok male consumers, attitudes toward applying skin care products and normative influences positively affect the purchase intention of skin care products.

The Relationship between Behaviour Intention and Purchase

The major benefit of the reasoned action model is that it explains and predicts purchasing behaviour utilising purchase intentions as a mediator (Ryan & Bonfield 1975). On the other hand, Albrecht and Carpenter (Choo, Chung & Pysarchik 2004) have questioned the mediating role of behavioural intention in purchase behaviour and have argued that there is a direct causal relationship between attitudes and behaviour. However, most researchers have demonstrated the validity of behavioural intention as a moderating variable of behaviour in various research settings (Bock & Kim 2002; Chung &

Pysarchik 2000). In the present study, it is expected that the effect of intention to buy will significantly mediate the purchase of cosmetic products. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H4: Purchase intention positively affects Bangkok male consumers' purchase behaviour regarding skin care products.

4. Research Design and Data Collection

This study used a quantitative research method. A convenience sample with a shopping mall-intercept technique was employed for the sampling method. The closed-ended questionnaire developed from standard questions of relevant literature was chosen as a research instrument. Once the questionnaire was finished off, face validity, content validity, and the pre-test of 30 respondents was conducted in order to test the reliability and validity of the research measures.

Data collection was undertaken as an anonymous survey during the weekend of July to September 2007. Research assistants were assigned to recruit respondents from leading department stores located in the metropolitan area of Bangkok. Four department stores including Central, Robinson, Tang Hua Seng, and The Mall were chosen because they exhibit the highest amount of registered capital, as reported by Business Registration Statistics (2006). In addition, they are recognised as leading department stores, with a dedicated male division and regularly promote numerous campaigns related to men's products. Cluster sampling was then used to select branches of four department stores. As a

result, three branches of each department store were chosen at random. For collecting data, Thai male consumers who were shopping in four leading department stores in Bangkok metropolitan, were approached and asked whether they would be willing to participate in this research study. After they accepted to participate, the screening questions were asked to ensure they were within the target population. These questions are: (1) Are you 21 to 50 years of age? and (2) Have you regularly purchased skin care products? The participants were given incentives (e.g. a pen or a bookmark) in order to reduce the rejection rate.

The data collection ended when 900 subjects had been approached. 467 subjects refused to participate in this survey while 433 respondents accepted to fill out questionnaires. Next, the research assistants gathered a total of 433 questionnaires and gave them to the researcher. Eleven of the returned questionnaires were incomplete and unusable. Therefore, the final usable questionnaires set contained 422 cases, yielding a response rate of 46.8 percent.

5. Sample

In the study, the target group was Thai male consumers aged 21 to 50 years who regularly purchased skin care cosmetics for their own consumption in Thailand. The reason for this selection was that during this age span men are in their working period, earning their own income (Cosmeticsdesign 2005), and therefore they have sufficient purchasing power to buy skin care product. Further, it is stated that men

with healthy and young-looking skin have better opportunities in occupational achievements in this competitive era (Manager 2004). Therefore, skin care products are necessary for male consumers during their working period.

Bangkok has been targeted for the collection sample of this study for three reasons. Firstly, it is the capital of Thailand, where many department stores and large shopping malls are located and people with high incomes reside (Shopping in and around Bangkok Thailand 2006). Secondly, the target market for skin care products lives mainly in Bangkok since this city is an urban metropolis where residents are highly competitive and involved in career development. As mentioned earlier, men now think that maintaining a youthful appearance can help enhance career achievements. Thirdly, unlike Bangkok male residents, rural men are not as likely to groom themselves, and are not as concerned about young-looking skin because the lifestyles there are less competitive and relatively relaxed.

6. Instrument

The research instrument has been developed from a comprehensive review of relevant literature focusing on male consumer behaviour in purchasing decisions. Some questions are modified to apply to the research site, Thailand. The questions have been initially written in English, and then translated into Thai. Corrections have been made on the basis of changes in the translation. All the measures used in TRA (beliefs,

attitudes, normative influences, behavioural intention, and purchase) (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975) and the measure of self-image (Dodd, Linaker, and Grigg 2005) were previously established. A five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was employed to measure variable items for the research questionnaire. The value of Cronbach's coefficient alpha ranges from 0.821 to 0.864 greater than a criterion of 0.7 recommended by Nunnally (1978).

Beliefs in Product Attributes - the respondents were asked to indicate their opinion on 39 items relating to quality, price, brand name, packaging, advertising, promotion, salesperson, and distribution. For example, "Quality is an important factor in purchasing skin care products" and "I am likely to buy skin care products if I recognise its brand name". The reliability score of this construct was 0.864.

Self-Image - subjects were asked to rate their opinion toward applying skin care products reflecting their self-image such as "Applying skin care products give me confidence" and "I do not feel it is important to keep up with the latest trends in skin care products". The value of Cronbach's coefficient alpha was 0.827.

Attitudes toward applying Skin Care Products - to measure this construct, respondents were asked to rate their attitudes toward applying skin care products with two items. One item was: "Applying skin care products is a good idea." The other was: "I like to apply skin care products." The reliability of scales was 0.825.

Normative Influences - normative influences were measured with eight items relating to spouse, friends, family, and colleagues. The respondents were asked to rate their opinion. The value of Cronbach's coefficient alpha was 0.841.

Purchase intention - for these measures, subjects were asked to rate their opinions about skin care purchase intention such as "When I shop for grooming products, I look for skin care products." (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The score of Cronbach's coefficient alpha was 0.821.

Purchase behaviour - to measure the purchase behaviour of skin care products, respondents were asked to report the number of times they bought skin care products within the last six months. The question was as follows: "How many times have you bought skin care products within the last six months?" The respondents were asked to fill in the number.

7. Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences program (SPSS) version 15.0 was used in this study with a 0.05 level of significance for all of the statistical assessments. The data set was screened and examined for incorrect data entry, missing values, normality and outliers. In this study, descriptive statistics are first employed and then inferential statistics including factor analysis, Pearson's correlation, regression analysis, and path analysis were applied to test the hypotheses.

8. Sample Characteristics

Considering the profile of respondents, the largest age groups were 21-25 (31.3%), followed by age group of 26-30 (30.1%). Over half of the respondents had obtained a Bachelor Degree (53.8%). Most of the respondents were single (63.7%). About 30% of respondents were married. Of all respondents, nearly 40 % earned a monthly income of between 10,001 and 20,000 Baht. The majority worked in the private sectors (61.4%) and the remaining had other types of employment.

9. Research Findings

For beliefs in product attributes, principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed to reduce the data into surrogate variables and to represent the variable groups before testing hypotheses. Initially, 39 items of beliefs in product attributes were divided and grouped into 8 subsets according to similar characteristics. After conducting factor analysis, 10 factors dimension were derived and 6 items were dropped due to low factor loadings. Two additional factors were extracted from original 8 factors which named "The country of origin" and "Label" based on the common characteristics of the variables. Next, Internal reliability was calculated for each factor dimension and that all values were acceptable with scores ranging from 0.623 to 0.870 as suggested by Hair et al. (1988). Hence, the remaining 33 items (factor 1-

10) with factor loading greater than ± 0.5 and eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were further used for testing hypothesis.

The relationships between each variable in conceptual model were tested and will be discussed separately according to each hypothesis. Pearson's correlation was firstly employed in order to examine hypothesis 1 (*H1*). showed that there were a statistically significant relationship between self-image and normative; therefore, the finding confirmed a positive relationship between self-image and normative influences for Bangkok male consumers. Multiple regression was then performed to investigate hypothesis 2a. *H2a* states that beliefs in product attributes positively affect Thai male consumers' attitudes toward applying skin care products. The result revealed that some parts of beliefs in product attributes such as salesperson, promotion, and packaging positively affected Bangkok male consumers' attitudes toward applying skin care products. Therefore, *H2a* was partially supported. Simple regression was used to examine hypothesis 2b. It was found that self-image was associated with attitudes toward applying skin care and was a significant explanatory variable for male consumers' attitudes toward applying skin care products. Hence, *H2b* was supported. Multiple regression was utilized to investigate hypothesis 3. The findings revealed that attitudes toward applying skin care and normative influences positively affected the purchase intention of skin care products for Bangkok male consumers. Thus, *H3* was supported. Simple regression was used to examine hypothesis 4. The result revealed that purchase intention was associated with actual purchase and was a significant explanatory variable for male

consumers' purchase behaviour regarding skin care products. Therefore, *H4* was supported. Finally, path analysis was employed to answer the research question, which is the degree of extent beliefs in product attributes, self-image, normative influences, and attitudes toward applying skin care products, affect Bangkok male consumers' purchase intention and purchase behaviour in buying skin care products. The result of path analysis confirmed that all four research variables (beliefs in product attributes, self-image, normative influences, and attitudes toward applying skin care products) had impacts on purchase intention and purchase behaviour in buying skin care products among Bangkok male consumers.

10. Conclusions and Discussion

This study implies that TRA can be successfully applied to Thai male consumers, particularly in Bangkok. Further, this modified theory of reasoned action with additional construct "Self-image" appears to fit in a Thai context in terms of explaining or predicting male consumer behaviour in buying specific cosmetic products. In the aspect of normative influences, family and friends were related to self-image. This confirmed the findings of Yoh et al. (2003) that friends or family possibly convinced consumers into purchasing a particular product. Additionally, this result agreed with the findings of Webster (2000) which revealed that a female spouse had decision-making power over her husband. However, this finding disagreed with Hu and Japer's (2006) report that normative influences did not affect the selection

process.

In the aspect of salesperson, this result evidently showed its positive impact toward male consumers' attitudes toward applying skin care products. This was concurrent with the findings of Songpradit (2005) and Mallaliau (2006). On the other hand, this result contradicted Leek and Chansawatkit's (2006) case study of mobile phone in Thailand in which salespeople were a less important source for consumer purchasing decision on this specific product. For packaging, this was consistent with Silayoi and Speech (2007)'s notion that the influence of the packaging element on brand choice among Thai consumers was fairly strong. In terms of promotion, this was congruent with Songpradit's (2005) findings, which revealed that promotional messages were positively related to Thai consumer's purchase decisions. Besides, this finding has broadened Coutler, Feick and Price's (2002) research that claimed only women involved their self-image when applying cosmetic products. This finding showed that not only women but also men perceived the influence of self-image when using product categories in cosmetics.

Further, the results indicated that consumers who had a more positive attitude toward a specific product had greater intention to purchase it than did consumers who had a less positive attitude. Similar to expectations, normative influences were found to be the significant components so as to determine consumers' purchasing intentions, according to the studies of Choo, Chung and Pysarchik (2004) and McNelly (2002). Further, this finding showed that attitudes toward apply-

ing skin care products ($\beta = 0.543, 0.520$) demonstrate a greater indicator than normative components ($\beta = 0.196, 0.282$) toward behavioural intention, which was concurrent with the result of Shih and Fan (2004) about the adoption of Internet banking. In addition, this result agreed with Choo, Chung and Pysarchik's (2004) findings in which purchase intention possibly predicted the actual purchase.

11. Limitations

This study has aimed to investigate variables in explaining male consumer purchasing behaviour regarding skin care products in the Thai market, based on TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975). As a result, the modified TRA has shown power of explanatory in this study. However, there are some limitations as follows. Firstly, there is a national limitation. The findings of the study were confined to Bangkok metropolitan in Thailand. As a result, generalizing the results reported in this research to other countries should be done carefully. Secondly, the sampling frame was Thai male consumers aged 21 to 50 years old. With the sample, it is limited to the scope of this study with regard to reflection of other male age groups such as teenagers. Thirdly, one limitation is related to a statistical technique. Though Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a well-known advanced statistical technique used to test model-fit, it is not suitable for the data analysis of this study due to questionnaire design. Alternatively, path analysis has been applied to test sets of relationships among variables which are linear in this study.

12. Implications and Recommendations

Although this study is exploratory, the findings may reveal new trend in Thai male behaviour, which is consistent with the changing era of consumerism from modernism to postmodernism. Hence, the allocation of men's position in society would shift from production-bound definitions of modernism to consumption-based definitions of postmodernism. In a postmodern perspective, men are moving from identifying with occupational value and social status to perceiving the importance of their self-portrayal or how they present themselves.

Practically, this study can provide useful implications for marketers to undertake the research findings to implement their marketing strategies regarding skin care products so as to better satisfy male consumers as target group in Asian economies such as South Korea, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam. The results suggest that, for male consumers like those in Bangkok, well-trained salespersons, who understand customers' needs and are able to solve their problem, promotional materials such as free samples and incentives, and attractive packaging may encourage consumers to try skin care products. Therefore, it reflects that marketers should employ these attributes to attract consumers in this segment. The motivation for using skin care products appears to be caused by individuals' self perception and influences from others who are important to them such as spouse, friends, family, and work colleagues. Once market-

ing tools are developed, it is important to take social influences groups into account in order to approach this target group effectively.

However, recommendations may generate as follows. Firstly, future research may survey other career groups since these results may provide a more useful insight into buying cosmetic or skin care products. Secondly, other products in similar categories are of interest for future investigations such as grooming products, toiletries, and health cares. Thirdly, future research should investigate other variables which may correlate to dependent variables in order to enhance the scope of the present study such as face saving and group conformity. Finally, future study should be undertaken using qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, or focus groups in order to provide a better explanation of male consumer behaviour.

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