

## The management of changing the attitudes of the factors involved in the tourism industry

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**Abstract:** Acting as travel plan organizers, travel agencies can perform a series of actions that lead to the implementation of sustainable tourism.

In the context of the entire tourist plan implementation process, travel agencies must take into account the quality of the scenery, the architecture specific to each area, the role played by the tourist in the environment transformation and protection, the transportation means used, as well as all the activities that shall be part of the marketed tourism product; these should not conflict with any of the environment components.

**Key words:** sustainable tourism, implementation, factors, attitudes, promotion, research variables, selective research, environment protection.

### 1. Introduction

Sustainable development should not be exclusively related to the environment protection issue<sup>[1]</sup>; this type of development should be approached from an increasingly broader perspective that brings together into a system the economic, social and ecological aspects.

Sustainable development implies the development of all tourism forms, as well as the tourism management and marketing, so as to respect the natural, social and economic integrity of the environment and ensure the exploitation of the natural and cultural resources for the best interest of the future generations<sup>[2]</sup>.

Sustainable tourism must rely on the partnership between the different decision making factors involved<sup>[3]</sup>.

Problems such as the ones related to the efficiency of human actions, i.e. communication, motivation, conflict or stress-related problems, each correlates in a specific way with the issue of attitudes.

Attitude is a fundamental concept for a high number of sciences: psychology, sociology, marketing and management.

The concept is extremely important for marketing since it is involved in the approach, understanding and even in the solving of a large number of systemically correlated problems.

Apart from the accurate and complete evaluation of the tourist potential, sustainable tourism development also implies the formation and consolidation of a system of attitudes and, if applicable, their modification for the factors involved in the process, both for those related to the tourism offer, i.e. decision makers, investors in the field of tourism, employees involved in tourism activities, potential investors, and for those related to the tourism demand, i.e. existing and potential customers.

### 2. Problem formulation

The factors involved in the tourism industry, i.e. tourists, locals, economic agents, tourist services suppliers, or local authorities must be educated about the use of the natural

resources based on the sustainable development principles so as to ensure the unaltered preservation of the nature beauties. Though difficult to reach, this goal is not impossible, and, once reached, we shall be able to say that the inhabitants of these wonderful places have also started to think about the future of their descendants, considering that: "We do not inherit the Earth from our parents, but borrow it from our children" <sup>[4]</sup>.

Attitude is a key concept for personality psychology, but also for social psychology. In its quality as a variable that can explain human behavior in a relevant way, numerous researchers have made efforts to explain the structure, formation, functioning or change of attitudes.

The specialized literature offers numerous definitions for the concept of attitude, considered from different angles of approach and proving the concept's controversial character.

The situation can be explained since the term covers a highly wide semantic field, having lots of interpretations ranging from body posture and outer look to behavior, the tendency of the individual to behave in a certain way.

Apart from the differences in the approach, attitude is a vector invariant with a directional and evaluative function over behavior, a selective relationship between the individual and the world.

While in social psychology attitudes refer to circumstantial relationships and opinions that can be modified, in personality psychology attitudes are closely related to character, i.e. the personality component related to value and relationships.

Character is defined as a system of attitudes specific to a subject, that he/she constantly translates into his/her behavior, having a relevant social human significance and defining the subject from an axiological viewpoint.

This meaning retained, we can distinguish between attitudes towards humans and towards oneself, attitudes towards work and profession, attitudes towards knowledge and culture, attitudes towards society or the

environment, all these being materialized in the positive and negative character traits.

In the present research, we are going to consider both sides of the concept, which cannot be arbitrarily separated.

The problem of changing attitudes that are tightly linked to individual behavior is an essential one. In social psychology, changing attitudes means approaching conditions in which the individual or collective position changes its meaning or intensity. Psychologists provide various explanations with respect to the ways attitudes are 'acquired': classical conditioning, instrumental conditioning, social learning through observing or communicating opinions to other persons, through information means, etc.

Changing attitudes depends on a series of factors. First of all, one must take into account the functions fulfilled by attitudes. As a result, any persuasive appeal must focus on these functions as well.

Research proved that attitudes can change first of all due to personal experiences. In our days, however, communication means are so extensive that the individual can hardly ignore what others think about the majority of problems.

Consequently, most of the research focuses on changes that intervene as a result of the communication in which one or more persons express their viewpoint.

Persuasion is seen as the most efficient way to change attitudes.

A persuasive communication is a message, in most cases verbal, compiled and organized so as to convince, and addressed to one or more persons in order to make them adopt a certain viewpoint.

A persuasive communication has a unique meaning since the message receiver neither has the opportunity to convey and defend his/her viewpoint nor to answer the message; the message is, broadly speaking, argued with arguments that justify the adopted position.

The sender or the source is the term used to describe the person speaking, the message is what is being said and the channel is the

means via which the message is communicated.

Each element of the communication scheme stands as a set of factors that have certain effects on the receiver's attitude and opinions.

A first aspect is the credibility of the source, meaning that it has to be competent, trustful and worth considering. Ever since 1951, Hovland and Weis<sup>[10]</sup>, have proven the importance of the source's social status and its competence either in general or in a specific field.

Another means of influencing attitude changing is to give the receiver the feeling that the source has nothing to win from a successful communication.

The degree of personal involvement of each individual determines the relative impact of the source's experience and of its speech quality.

If the person believes the proposed change shall affect her/him directly, this means that his/her attitude was based on the quality of the source's proposition (the sender's).

If the person thinks the proposed change shall not affect him/her, his/her attitude shall rely on the credibility of the source. The effect of the source's credibility depends on the type of object and the social problem that is communicated, especially in the case of the intelligent and educated subjects; it also depends on the importance given to the problem and, last but not least, on the nature of the arguments used in the message.

The research on the content of the message focused on two types of problems:

- the nature of the arguments;
- the great discrepancy between the viewpoint of the source and that of the receiver;

Attitude changing is only a possible answer of the receiver to the discrepancies between the source and him/herself; the result can be both a perceptive distortion which minimizes or exaggerates differences, as well as a depreciation of the source or a denial to take discrepancies into consideration.

*The characteristics of the receiver in the stages of the attitude changing process.*

It is supposed that certain personal characteristics of the receiver influence the degree to which this last one changes or not his/her attitude towards the object presented via the message.

Among these, mention can be made of: gender differences, degree of education, level of intelligence, past experience, immediate state of mind, self respect.

The study of attitude changing via persuasive communication focuses on the receiver's individual change, as isolated from the common social circumstances and the context of the society to which the object of the attitude belongs.

The successive stages of the change process are, in McGuire's opinion<sup>[10]</sup>, the following.

The first two stages focus on the reception of the message; if the subject is not paying attention and cannot understand, then the message is not effective.

In the opposite situation, the receiver accepts the message, retains it and, in the end, a change of conduct (an action) shall take place.

Numerous authors question the need for a retention phase when this term means the entrance and maintenance of the message in the memory of the source.

Some authors propose the introduction of an evaluation stage, meaning the time in which the subject estimates the conclusion of the message, based on the arguments and counter-arguments brought by the message. The personal position after the message depends on the balance, which can be in favor of the message (change of attitude) or against it (non-change).

Persuasive communication is not the only way to change attitudes. Numerous strategies exist in this respect and can be grouped as follows<sup>[12]</sup>:

- changing the primary motivational function; in this case, the attitudes' functions are changed;
- associating the product or service with certain social groups or events; it is possible to modify certain attitudes towards certain products or services by underlining the links to certain social groups and events;

- taking into consideration the contrary attitudes which can lead to a change of attitudes by assessing the advantages of the current or potential conflicts between attitudes.

Based on one of the multi-attribute models of M. Fishbein, the following ways of changing attitudes exist:

- changing the relative evaluation of attributes (changing the order in which the consumer orders his/her beliefs about a product or service according to its attributes);
- changing beliefs related to brand;
- adding an attribute, either of one previously ignored or of one which represents a technological improvement or an innovation that can lead to a favorable change in the respective subject's attitude.

What we have attempted was to obtain a conclusive and, in the same time, representative image on the attitudes of the travel agency employees with respect to the sustainable development of Romanian tourism<sup>[5]</sup>.

The research focuses on the way in which travel agencies understand to carry out their activity in harmony with the environment and tries to find out if the environment protection stands as a priority for the above mentioned.

For this purpose, we have assessed the knowledge of the travel agency employees with respect to the measures that can be adopted to promote sustainable tourism, the role of the decision-making factors on a national and local level in relation with the implementation of a series of measures for the environment protection, as well as the interest of society in general in the environmental issues.

Objectives of the research:

- identifying the degree to which sustainable tourism is deemed a priority by the travel agency employees;
- establishing the extent to which travel agencies can perform actions to protect the environment;

- analysing the influence of the business relationships with active companies in the fight for the protection of the environment;
- determining the degree to which tourists, aware of the environmental issues, require products that observe the principles of sustainable tourism;
- identifying the measures that the travel agencies have adopted for the purposes of the sustainable tourism development;
- assessing the advantages of the promotion of a sustainable tourism;
- identifying the most important sources of information on the local environment with a view to adapting the activity to a sustainable tourism.

### 3. Problem solution

#### 3.1. Hypotheses of the research

Hypotheses of the research:

- in Romania, sustainable tourism is deemed a priority by the travel agencies<sup>[6]</sup>;
- travel agencies can initiate actions for the environment protection; the tourist information on the value and quality of the environment is the most frequently used method in the environment protection field;
- the business relationships with partners from the hotel and transportation industries only slightly influences the agency's position with respect to the environment<sup>[7]</sup>;
- the clients of the travel agencies are only slightly interested in the environmental issues; the acceptance of tourism by the host population stands as the main advantage of the promotion of sustainable tourism;
- the main source of information with respect to the environment is represented by the departmental agencies in charge with the environment monitoring and protection<sup>[8]</sup>.

#### 3.2. Means and tools of research

Apart from the main models for attitude measurement developed by Rosenberg,

Fishbein, Sheth and Hansen, which combine their convictions and evaluation, there are also other methods based on which we can build an image of attitudes.

Besides the direct observation of behavior, a method that is at the same time highly difficult and subjective, we can conduct in-depth interviews, group interviews or projective tests, i.e. qualitative researches, which reflect the thoughts and beliefs of the factors involved in the tourism industry and which are established in the decision process.

The measurement of attitudes and opinions can be performed using different scale types, each of these having certain operative characteristics according to the following elements:

- the time lapse before the answer is provided;
- the simplicity and accessibility of the construction;
- the easiness in obtaining the answer;
- the way respondents accept the scale;
- the flexibility - the capacity to adapt the respective scale to the requirements for the obtaining of the information from the different population categories;
- the most important possibilities to measure are: the dichotomous measurement, the ranking measurement, the semantic differential, the multiple semantic differential, the Stapel scale, the Likert scale, the interval scale with semantic support<sup>[9]</sup>.

These instruments for the measurement of attitudes and opinions differ, the choice of the scale type depending, first of all, on the attitude-related component that is going to be measured. In this respect, we distinguish between<sup>[11]</sup>:

- the affective component, which reflects the emotional reactions, the positive or negative feelings of a subject towards a situation, object, person, idea, etc.
- the cognitive component, which stands as the subject's level of knowledge of the respective object and reflects the degree of information available to the respective person.

- the intentional component, as expression of behavior which, unlike the other two components, refers to the proneness or tendency to act in relation to the object of the attitude.

Apart from considering these three components, which define individuals' attitudes, the choice of the scale type also depends on the way the problem to be researched is defined, the types of analysis methods required, the evaluation method, the characteristics of the variables taken into consideration and the ways the interviews are conducted.

For the purposes of our research, we have used the primary information obtained as a result of a selective search among travel agencies based in the city of Brasov. A survey has been carried out on a general community made of the travel agencies from the city of Brasov.

The travel agency was considered the observation unit and the person designated as the main representative of the company was the sampling unit.

The survey included 32 travel agencies, chosen among the 50 travel agencies from Brasov County (the selection criterion was their membership in the National Association of Tourism Agencies (ANAT)).

We have sent questionnaires to all the agencies from Brasov and we were sent answers back by 36 agencies, 4 of the received questionnaires being incomplete.

The variables used in the research have been represented by the system of attitudes developed by the questioned subjects.

- the attitude of the travel agencies towards the environment;
- the attitude of the travel agencies towards tourism sustainable development;
- clients' attitude towards sustainable tourism; the influences exerted by habits, manners and reasons which trigger a certain demand for tourism products that promote sustainable tourism;
- the impact of the relationships with the business partners; the extent to which the travel agency partners influence the

implementation of certain programs that support sustainable tourism;

- the impact on the company’s image; the extent to which the company image can get improved as a result of the sustainable tourism promotion.

### 3.3. Research results and graphic interpretation

Result interpretation and conclusions of the research:

- 91% of the travel agencies’ representatives are aware of the possibility to perform a series of actions to protect the environment, this being a first step towards tourism sustainable development.

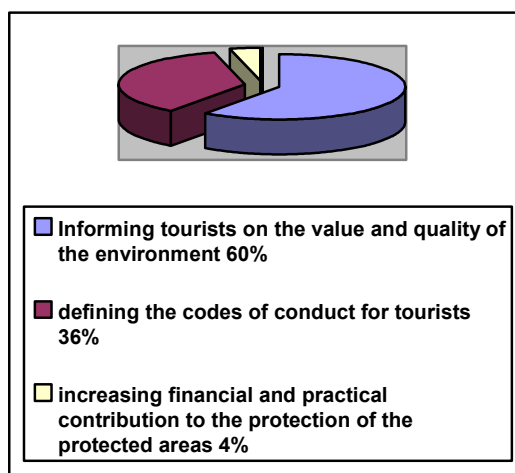
The answer to the question

1 ‘What measures have you adopted for the implementation of the sustainable development?’, provided by 60% of the respondents, was that one of the adopted measures is informing tourists on the value and quality of the environment.

According to the answers, this measure is followed by the definition of the tourist-related codes of conduct (36%).

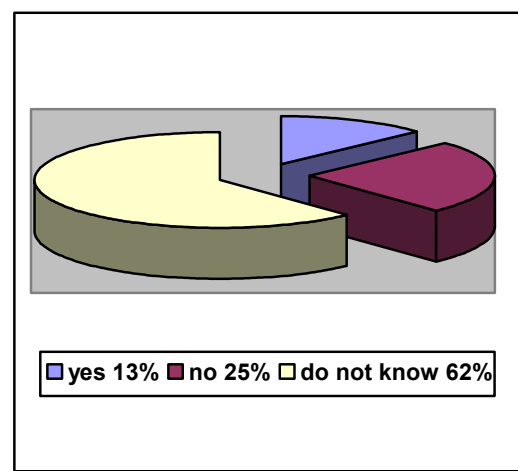
The third place is occupied by the increase in the financial and practical contribution to the protection of the protected areas, 4% of the respondents indicating this measure;

Fig.1. Graphic representation of question 1



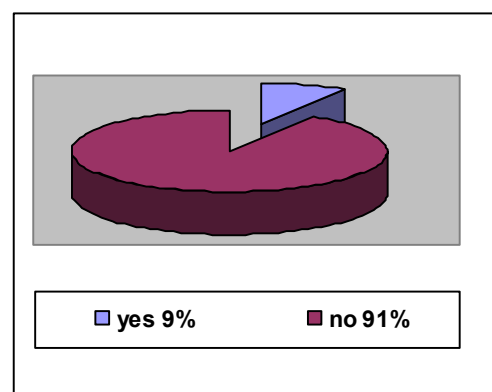
2. “Do you have any business relationships with hotels or transporters that are actively involved in the fight for the environmental protection?”, only 13% of the respondents replied that they have business relationships with companies that activate for the purposes of the environmental protection, 25% of them said they do not have such partners, while 62% do not know if their partner companies have any connection whatsoever with the environment protection.

Fig.2. Graphic representation results of question 2



3. Are you informed on the characteristics of the local environment and on the existing possibilities to protect it?

Fig.3. Graphic representation of question 3



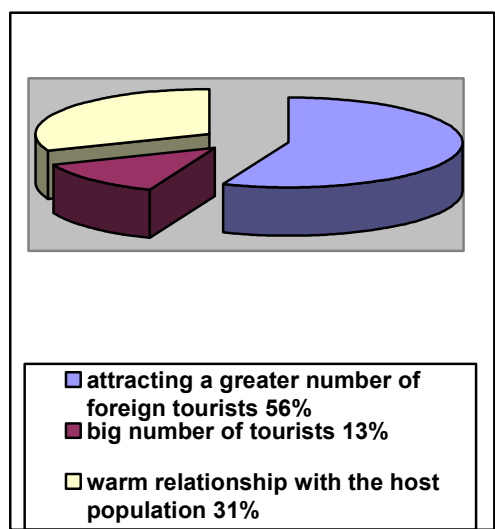
These answers indirectly prove that the business partners of the travel agencies did not define a clear position with respect to the

environment, for which reason those who design travel plans are not acquainted with their partners' position;

As far as the information flow is concerned, 91% of the respondents replied they do not receive information and advice on the local environment in order to be able to protect it; we, thus, consider that this result also explains the lack of preoccupation from the part of the travel agencies with respect to the environmental protection and the practicing of the sustainable tourism, due to the lack of information;

4. Which do you think are the advantages of the sustainable tourism promotion for a travel agency?

Fig.4. Graphic representation of question 4



The respondents considered that foreign tourists are much more sensitive than Romanian tourists to the issues related to the environment. Another advantage would be the fact that sustainable tourism would bring about less conflicts and a greater degree of acceptance of tourism by the host populations (31%).

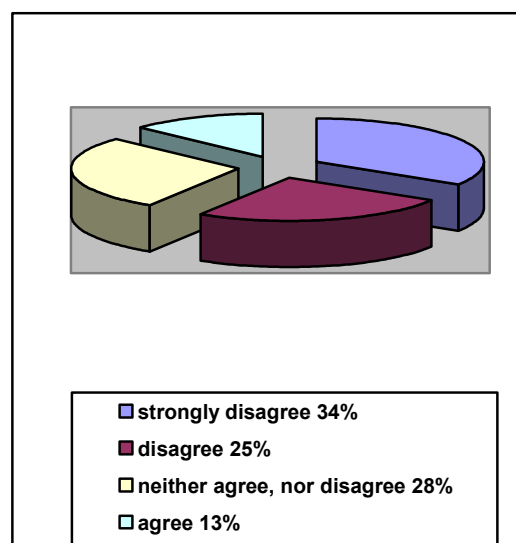
For the rest of the information obtained as a result of the questionnaire processing, a scaling method has been used, namely the Likert scale: a 2 to -2 scoring has been granted for the 5 scale levels (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree,

strongly disagree) which was then multiplied by the frequency of the responses;

5 What do you think of the following statement?

The travel agency clients become increasingly aware of the importance of the environment and, as a result, require ecological tourism products.

Fig.5. Graphic representation of question 5



Following the application of the Likert scale, question number 7 registered a 0.81 score, meaning that the subjects do not agree with the statement: 'The travel agency clients become increasingly aware of the importance of environment and, as a result, require ecological tourism products';

6. 'What do you think of the following statement: sustainable tourism is a priority for Romania?'

The score 0.9 obtained by the question 'What do you think of the following statement: sustainable tourism is a priority for Romania?' shows us that development tourism stands as a priority for the respondents;

Fig.6. Graphic representation of question 6

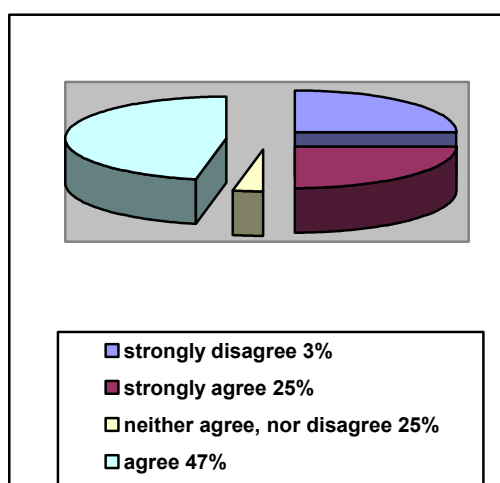
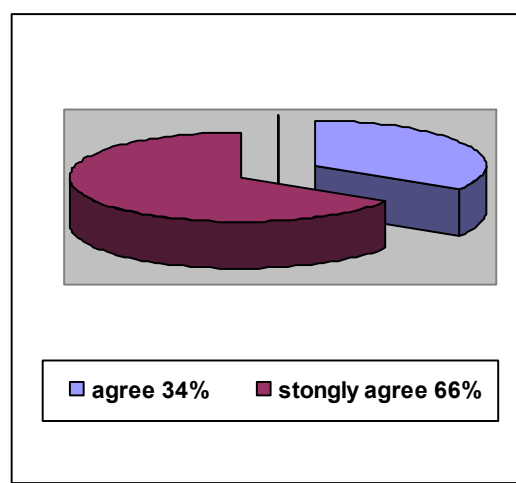
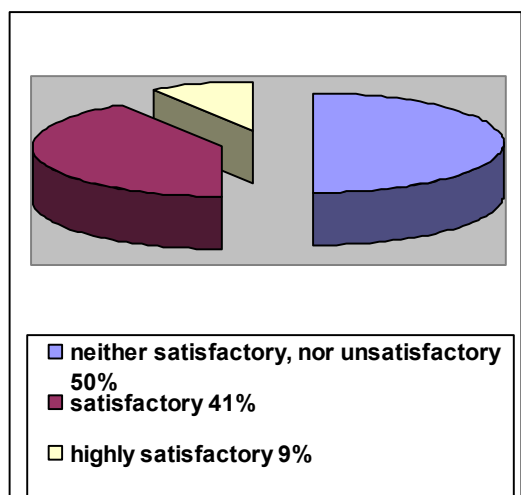


Fig.8. Graphic representation of question 8



7. What do you think of the importance that your personnel attaches to the ecological problems?

Fig.7. Graphic representation of question 7



What do you think of the statement: ‘good ecological reputation improves company reputation’.

We can thus say that the attitude of the travel agency personnel towards the ecological issues is a positive one;

Question number 8 obtained a 1.66 score, which proves that the respondents completely agree with the statement: ‘Good ecological reputation improves company reputation’.

The main conclusions specifically that resulted from the research are:

- the respondents agree that sustainable tourism is a priority for Romania, which confirms the initial hypothesis;
- 91% of the subjects consider that they can perform a series of actions for the environment protection, which means they are aware of the available alternatives; the attitude of the personnel towards the ecological issues is a positive one, so the hypothesis is once again confirmed;
- 87% of the travel agencies do not have or do not know if they have business relationships with companies that activate in the fight for the environment protection, meaning that hotels and transporters do not influence the activity of the travel agencies, the preoccupation for the environmental protection failing to be a criterion in their choice as business partners;
- from the travel agencies’ viewpoint, clients are not interested in the environment, meaning they do not encourage the activity in this direction. The hypothesis is again confirmed;
- in 60% of the cases, informing tourists on the value and quality of the environment is used by the respondents as a measure for the implementation of



sustainable development. The definition of the tourist-oriented codes of conduct is used in 36% of the cases, while the increase in the financial and practical contribution for the protection of the protected areas is only used in 4% of the cases (hypothesis confirmed);

- while 56% of the company representatives think that attracting a greater number of foreign tourists stands as the main advantage of the sustainable tourism promotion, 31% of them estimate that another advantage is the higher degree of acceptance of tourism by the host population and 13% of the respondents think of the increase in the total number of tourists that would be for the benefit of the agency as a potential advantage. The respondents completely agree that a good ecological reputation improves company reputation;
- 91% of the travel agencies do not receive sufficient information on the local environment, which means that the hypothesis according to which travel agencies receive help from the departmental agencies for the monitoring and protection of the environment is not confirmed.

#### 4. Conclusions

Results confirmed the premises of the research.

As a result of this research, the following general conclusion can be drawn: all travel agencies are aware of the importance of the environment protection, as well as of the advantages of the tourism sustainable development, but, due to the lack of cohesion between these entities and the various public institutions and organizations involved in the environment protection or their business partners selected or not yet selected, they only stick to a general informing of the tourist on the environment without taking into consideration the characteristics that are specific to an area or region.

In today's business world, characterized by an increasing number of modifications on the

level of technology and the competitive environment, change is becoming a permanent element in the life of companies. Under these circumstances, an efficient change management can bring companies significant benefits [Richard Newton].

To conclude, managers must be aware of the importance of change on the level of the organization as a general strategic instrument and to adapt to the increasingly fast rhythm of change in the business environment.

The tendency to change shall make its presence felt more and more often in the life of organizations.

The dynamics of the current economic environment obliges companies to adopt profound changes more and more frequently, this state of things extending into the future.

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