

PRODUCT CHOICE IN DIFFERENT CULTURES: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION AMONG TURKISH CONSUMERS

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Product choice may be different between Western, Eastern and Pacific regions depending upon cultural factors together with demographic profile, life style and economic well being of consumers. The most important difference is the Economic factor which determines the buying power of consumers. Many products which are available to consumers in Western cultures may not be available in Eastern cultures because of lack of availability of financial resources. In addition, differences in life style may affect the product choice and purchasing behaviors. Consumers in the Western Hemisphere may have different type of needs and shopping patterns than the consumers in Eastern Hemisphere. As a result, their needs and wants may be different, or may not be able to satisfy them although they are willing to do so.

Literature review on this issue demonstrates that household purchasing behaviors can be attached to enduring characteristics of consumers. It may be that personality characteristics may play a key role in predicting purchasing patterns of consumers (Massy, Frank and Lodahly, 1968). For example, in developing countries, urban consumers tend to divide their purchases among number of store types. They buy groceries from grocery store, fresh meat from butcher shop, and others from specialized outlets. They go shopping very frequently, at least four times a week, and women are responsible for shopping trips. Low income consumers of developing nations tend to place a great emphasis on personal relationship and shy away from unfamiliar environments

(Goldman, 1974). In the Far East, on the other hand, a study found evidence that relationship linking attitude toward a product with intention to buy is stronger and has heavy cultural contents than the relationships reported in the Western studies (Tan and Farley, 1987). In China, it is projected that overall consumption patterns could be significantly change in years to come. In particular, it may be slower pattern for high income families in food consumption in urban areas than rural, because Chinese consumers are becoming increasingly particular about what they buy (Taylor, 1987; Cutler, 1988).

Global marketing strategists are trying in full force to find an acceptable product which will be demanded by consumers in the various part of the World. However, Domino pizza which has 1160 stores in 46 different countries introduced different pizza flavors in Tokyo and in India because of local taste. So is McDonald which is offering vegetable hamburger in India. Indeed, in this market of 950 million consumers, Western consumer marvels have been colluding with a force that can not be swept away easily. On the other hand, Green Giant has faced some cultural hurdles in its race to foreign markets. Although vegetables are a significant diet in Asia, the Asian women take pride if they prepare the food themselves instead of using frozen vegetables. In London, customer do not like the idea or think it is rude, if salesperson knock the door. In addition, British people use corn as a sandwich or pizza topping. In Japan, it is after-school treat for school children, and sprinkled over ice cream in Korea (Parker-Pope, 1996).

Tastes and demand in the European Community are considered to be similar; therefore, it is expected that products will be standardized and will be purchased by 360 million European consumers regardless of their cultural, language, climate, economic and behavioral bases. In essence, it should not be much different washing clothes in London than in Spain. However, Germans demand a laundry detergent which is gentle on lakes and rivers, and the Spanish consumers want cheaper products that get clothes white and soft. Therefore, although standardization is defended and it has been tried to be implemented in the European market, over all viewpoint is that treating Europeans the same is not a realistic approach. In Europe, national differences are more important than similarities when marketers are planning to approach the European consumers. Therefore, products must be changed to appeal to different tastes and life styles. For example, Philadelphia brand cream cheese used with bagel in the US, but salmon-flavored cream cheese are popular in Spain, tuna-flavored in Italy, and pear-flavored in Germany. Language differences between different nations in Europe also pose a problem. For example, an advertisement can work well for English and German consumers, but the idea fall apart during the French translation. Color differences may also be important. Red is appropriate color for Mediterranean countries, but not in Northern Europe (Reis and Eisenbrown, 1994).

A study demonstrated that, in Saudi Arabia, cultural norms and values have important roles in purchasing decision. Although Saudi husbands are dominating for the most of purchases, Saudi women decides about their own clothing (Yavas, Babakus and Delener, 1994). However, another study showed evidence that personality traits, decision making styles are to be largely independent of the culture and descriptive of a personal orientation (Durvasula, Lysonski, and Andrews, 1993).

For product choice, another study found evidence that people in developing countries prefer product from established foreign producers. This can be attributed to the degree of economic

development, culture, political climate and perceived similarities with the source country's belief system (Tan and Farley, 1987). However, in China, the most of the washing machines sold to urban consumers are Chinese made because of the government restrictions on import of consumer goods and limits of people's access to foreign exchange currency. Whereas, there are more foreign made refrigerators in China and the Chinese urban households with refrigerators bought a foreign-made products. (Cutler, 1988). When Chinese shoppers go shopping a hierarchy of choice has developed in a sense that the important products the most desired, followed by goods made in China at joint venture factories. A distant third are the home-grown products which are cheap but generally poor in quality. The foreign-brands are from three to eight times as expensive as Chinese products, but seems hardly to matter (Sterngold, 1992).

Purpose of the Study

This study attempts to investigate the affects of cultural, economic and life style factors to purchasing behaviors of the Turkish consumers. The reason of using the Turkish consumers in the study is that several Western and domestic companies in Turkey are trying to devise new marketing strategies or reinforcing existing marketing operations to tap the growth in the Turkish market. An increase in the consumer product demand because of the rapid population growth and a strong consumer purchasing power has resulted in an increase marketing potential of Turkey.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will help to design product introduction and adoption strategies, pricing, distribution of goods and promotion strategies for the Turkish products in domestic and Global markets. With interest in entering in the European Union, the Turkish multinational companies need to implement new and aggressive marketing strategies or reinforce existing marketing operations to tap the growth in the Turkish and Global markets. It is expected that the findings will present long-term strategic alternatives for implementation purposes.

Methodology

The study was conducted using a group of Turkish consumer in the Istanbul region. Istanbul is a largest metropolitan city in Turkey, and its inhabitants have mix background in Culture, buying power, and life-style; therefore, they are suitable for the purpose of the study.

The Questionnaire has a total of 48 close-ended questions. It was adopted from the study which was conducted by Greenberg and Bellinger (1974) in the United States. The original version of the questionnaire was translated into Turkish using the back-translation technique. The back-translation is a proper and effective technique to be used in multi cultural studies, and known with increase equivalence of meaning to produce meaningful outcome (Nasif, Al-Daeaj, Ebrahimi and Thibodeaux, 1991).

Sample of the study was selected using the judgment sampling method. In the judgment sampling, the researcher subjectively choose sample members who are believed to be representative of the target population or particularly knowledgeable about the topic being studied (Crask, Fox and Stout, 1994). Therefore, it is a proper sampling technique to be used, because the selection of cultures and the subjects which were based upon opportunistic availability

may be very difficult to overcome in cross-cultural research. Accordingly, the questionnaires were distributed to a total of 300 Turkish consumers in Istanbul, and 152 questionnaires were returned at the end of two weeks. The products tested in the study were a pack of cigarettes, suit/dresses, automobile tires, appliances, automobiles, vacation/holiday trips, car insurance and color televisions. The majority of products were considered complex and high-involved purchases; therefore, cultural, behavioral, economic and life-style factors play an important role in decision making process.

Data were analyzed using the One Way Analysis of Variable (ANOVA) technique in the SPSSX routine. The ANOVA is proper statistical technique and used to compare the means of several populations. The underlying assumptions in ANOVA are that the population variances are the same, or there are differences; therefore, it is suitable technique to be used for the purpose of this study. For this purpose, the ANOVA technique calculates F-Statistics which is the ratio of two separate estimates of the common population variance. The significance of F-Statistics determines the assumption that there are differences among the population means. Accepted significance level for F-Statistics is $P < .10$.

Findings

Demographic characteristics of respondents indicated that the majority of the sample consumers were male (59.6%), between 25 and 44 years of age (80.1%), single (68.5%), college educated (61%), have clerical (32.3%) or managerial positions (35.3%). Table I shows demographic profile of respondents, and Table 2 shows age distribution by gender in each household..

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Turkish Consumers

Demographic Characteristics

Gender Male (59.6%) Female (40.4%)

Age: Under 18(.7%) 18-20(1.4%) 21-24(6.2%) 25-34(52.1%)
 35-44(28%) 45-54(9.6%) 55 and older(2%)

Marital

Status: Single(68.5%) Married(28,8%) Divorced(2.7%)

Education: Elementary(4.8%) Middle School(6.2%)

 High School(23.3%) College (61%) Others (4.8%)

Occupation: Workers(9.8%) Technicians(9%) Salesperson(1.5%)
 Clerical(32.3%)Managerial (35.3%)Retired (11.3%)
 Unemployed (.8%)

Table 2
 Age Distribution in Each Household by Gender

| <u>Age Distribution</u> | <u>Male (%)</u> | <u>Female (%)</u> |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 60 year and older | 16.4 | 22.4 |
| 45-60 | 52.6 | 26.3 |
| 30-44 | 20.4 | 11.9 |
| 18-29 | 13.2 | 23.0 |
| 6-17 | 52.7 | 36.2 |
| Under 5 year | 17.8 | 14.5 |

Table 3
 Purchasing Behaviors Among Turkish Consumers

| <u>Purchasing Factors</u> | <u>Products</u> | | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| | <u>Cigarette</u> | | <u>Dresses/Suits</u> | | |
| | <u>Education</u> | <u>Income</u> | <u>Income</u> | <u>Education</u> | <u>Gender</u> |
| Time/Effort | NS | NS | 1.900 (.106) | 4.090 (.005) | NS |
| Brand Loyalty | NS | NS | NS | 2.351 (.063) | NS |
| Own Knowledge | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Store Displays | NS | NS | | | 7.141 (.009) |
| Salesman | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Family Members | 1.980 (.106) | 1.980 (.093) | NS | NS | 4.137 (.045) |
| Friends Recommendation | 3.087 (.021) | 2.432 (.044) | NS | NS | NS |
| Television | 2.777 (.034) | 2.780 (.025) | 3.418 (.008) | 4.026 (.005) | NS |
| Radio | NS | 2.232 (.062) | 2.186 (.065) | 3.797 (.007) | NS |
| Newspaper | 3.324 (.015) | 3.604 (.006) | 3.956 (.003) | NS | NS |
| Consumer Report | 5.05 (.014) | NS | NS | 3.412 (.013) | NS |
| Magazines | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Other Information | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |

Automobile Tires

| | <u>Income</u> | <u>Age</u> | <u>Occupation</u> | <u>Education</u> | <u>Marital Status</u> | <u>Gender</u> |
|---------------------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| <u>Purchasing Factors</u> | | | | | | |
| Time/Effort | NS | NS | NS | 2.777 (.087) | NS | NS |
| Brand Loyalty | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Own Knowledge | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Store Displays | NS | 4.953 (.025) | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Salesman | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Family | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------|----|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Members (.063) Friends Recommendation | NS | NS | 2.620 | NS | 9.143 | NS |
| Television | 2.538 (.057) | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Radio | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | 2.922 (.099) |
| Newspaper | 3.471 (.018) | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Consumer Report | NS | NS | NS | NS | 3.412 (.013) | NS |
| Magazines | NS | NS | NS | 2.777 (.087) | NS | NS |
| Other Information | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |

Appliances

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|----|-----------------|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|
| Time/Effort | NS | NS | NS | NS | 9.308 (.038) | NS |
| Brand Loyalty | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Own Knowledge | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Store Displays | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Salesman | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Family Members | NS | NS | 2.435 (.057) | NS | 2.912 (.096) | NS |
| Friends Recommendation | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Television | NS | 2.371 (.072) | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Radio | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|-----------------|-----------------|
| Newspaper | 3.303 (.045) | NS | NS | NS | NS | 9.226 (.008) |
| Consumer Report | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | 3.351 (.086) |
| Magazines | NS | NS | 5.479 (.008) | NS | NS | NS |
| Other Information | NS | NS | | NS | 3.351 (.086) | NS |

Automobile Purchase

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----|
| Time/Effort | NS | NS | 2.770 (.105) | NS | NS | NS |
| Brand Loyalty | 3.785 (.01) | 3.553 (.018) | NS | NS | 2.630 (.063) | NS |
| Own Knowledge | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Store Displays | 2.767 (.039) | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Salesman | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Family Members | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Friends Recommendation | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Television | NS | NS | NS | 4.366 (.011) | NS | NS |
| Radio | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Newspaper | NS | NS | NS | 2.171 (.111) | NS | NS |
| Consumer Report | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Magazines | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Other | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Information | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|

Vacation/Holiday Trip

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Time/Effort | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|---------------|----|----|----|-----------------|----|----|
| Brand Loyalty | NS | NS | NS | 4.887 (.022) | NS | NS |
|---------------|----|----|----|-----------------|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|----|----|-----------------|----|----|
| Own Knowledge | 5.655 (.006) | NS | NS | 2.645 (.102) | NS | NS |
|---------------|-----------------|----|----|-----------------|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|----|----|-----------------|----|----|
| Store Displays | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Word-of-Mouth | 4.607 (.012) | NS | NS | 6.004 (.007) | NS | NS |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|----|----|----|----|----------------|----|
| Family Members | NS | NS | NS | NS | 3.642 (.03) | NS |
|----------------|----|----|----|----|----------------|----|

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----|----|----|----|
| Friends Recommendation | 3.087 (.021) | 2.432 (.044) | NS | NS | NS | NS |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----|----|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|------------|----|----|----------------|----|----|----|
| Television | NS | NS | 1.919 (.09) | NS | NS | NS |
|------------|----|----|----------------|----|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|-------|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Radio | 2.311 (.062) | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
|-------|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|----|----|----|-----------------|----|----|
| Newspaper | NS | NS | NS | 2.413 (.072) | NS | NS |
|-----------|----|----|----|-----------------|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Consumer Report | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
|-----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Magazines | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Other Information | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
|-------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|

Auto Insurance

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|----|----|----|----|-----------------|
| Time/Effort | 6.410 (.004) | NS | NS | NS | NS | 4.176 (.057) |
|-------------|-----------------|----|----|----|----|-----------------|

| | | | | | | |
|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Brand Loyalty | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
|---------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|---------------|----|----|-----------------|----|----|----|
| Own Knowledge | NS | NS | 2.719 (.073) | NS | NS | NS |
|---------------|----|----|-----------------|----|----|----|

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----|-----------------|----|----|
| Store Displays | 6.510 (.000) | NS | NS | 6.481 (.001) | NS | NS |
| Salesman Family Members | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Friends Recommendation | NS | 7.421 (.001) | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Television | 2.565 (.049) | 2.850 (.053) | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Radio | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Newspaper | NS | NS | NS | 2.628 (.067) | NS | NS |
| Consumer Report | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Magazines | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Other Information | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |

Color Television

| | | | | | | |
|------------------------|----|-----------------|------------------|----|----|----|
| Time/Effort | NS | NS | 10.263 (.040) | NS | NS | NS |
| Brand Loyalty | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Own Knowledge | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Store Displays | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Salesman | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Family Members | NS | 2.190 (.115) | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Friends Recommendation | | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|----|----|----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Television | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | 4.428 (.049) |
| Radio | NS | NS | NS | NS | 4.362 (.050) | NS |
| Newspaper | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |
| Consumer Report | NS | NS | NS | 2.813 (.119) | NS | NS |
| Magazines | NS | NS | NS | 7.364 (.015) | NS | NS |
| Other Information | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS | NS |

As it is demonstrated in Table 3, there are significant differences among purchasing behaviors of Turkish consumers. The most common factors which influence upon purchasing decision of the Turkish consumers were brand loyalty, their own knowledge, store displays, influence of family members, friends recommendations, television, radio, newspaper and magazine advertisings, and consumer report. Each factor had different influence depending upon purchasing a pack of cigarettes, dresses/suits, automobile tires, appliances, automobiles, vacation/holiday trips, auto insurance and color televisions. With the exception of cigarette purchase, all the other products tested in this study were high-involved complex purchasing decisions. Therefore, each factor had different effect, and their significant level varied. Following paragraphs discuss the purchasing behaviors of the Turkish consumers

Cigarette Purchase. Data demonstrated that the Turkish consumers had significance differences according to their education and income levels. They were under the influence of friends, television, radio and newspaper advertisings and family members when they decide to purchase a pack of a cigarettes. Consumer report was more influential to educated consumers. It is true that cigarette consumption is very high among the Turkish consumers. It is a cultural decision and life-style of the Turkish men and women. They addicted to nicotine when they were very young, and continue smoking many years after the first attempt. Because of this high demand to cigarettes, the tobacco industry is very profitable in Turkey. However, the cigarette consumption is relatively less among educated Turkish consumers.

Dresses/Suits. Purchasing dresses/suits is relatively complex decision making, and because of its cost it is also considered as a high-involved purchase. Therefore, data showed evidence that differences in purchasing habit exist according to income, education and gender of the Turkish consumers. Therefore, evidence revealed that income and education were significant factors for purchasing dresses/suits. In addition, data demonstrated that educated Turkish consumers were brand loyal, they get information from television, radio and consumer reports. Income was also a significant factor and television, radio and newspaper advertising were their information sources. On the other hand, store displays and family members were significant source for gender factor.

Automobile Tires. All six different demographic factors such as income, education, gender, age, occupation and marital status were significant for purchasing tires, automobiles, vacation holiday trips, auto insurance and color television. Among these, education was significant with time spent to purchase an automobile tire, and magazines was the information source. Television and newspaper advertisings were associated with income factor. Age was associated with store displays, and family member was with occupation and marital status. In addition, significant evidence existed between marital status and the information gathered from consumer report, and gender with information received from radio advertising.

Appliances. Data demonstrated a significance evidence between marital status and time spent to purchase appliances. For married consumers, it appeared that family members and other sources also had a significance influence on appliance purchase. It is true that married consumers spends more time and consult with each other when they purchase appliances. In addition, evidence demonstrated that income and information gathered from newspaper advertisings were significant along with information from television advertisings and age factor. On the other hand, it appeared that the professional Turkish consumers discuss with their family members before they decide to purchase appliances. The professional Turkish people also gets information from magazine advertisings. Consumer report and newspaper advertisings were significant for gender factor.

Automobiles. Evidence shows that professional people spends more time when they purchase automobile. On the other hand, income and brand loyalty were significant factors along with age and marital status in purchasing automobiles. This evidence indicated that brand loyalty was strong among the high income, older, and married Turkish consumers. Store displays also effect high income group. For educated consumers, television and newspaper advertisings were significant source, and radio advertising was an information source for gender group.

Vacation/Holiday Trip. For this product/service, brand loyalty was significant among the educated Turkish consumers. Data demonstrated that high income people use their own knowledge, word-of-mouth information, friend recommendations and radio advertisings for purchasing vacation/holiday sites. Friend recommendations were also used by older people, and television advertisings by the professional Turkish consumers. The educated Turkish consumers use their own knowledge, word-of-mouth information and magazine advertisings. Family members were significant source for the married Turkish consumers.

Auto Insurance. Income and gender factors had significant relationships with time spent to purchase auto insurance. This result indicated that these group of Turkish consumer spends more time for auto insurance. In addition, television was a significant source for income and age factors, family members for younger, and newspaper advertisings for educated consumers.

Color Television. Data showed additional evidence that educated consumers spend more time when they purchase color televisions. For purchasing color televisions, significant relationship exist between family members and younger consumers, television advertisings with gender factor, radio advertisings with marital status, consumer report and magazine advertisings with the educated Turkish consumers

Conclusion

This study of purchasing behaviors of Turkish consumers demonstrated that cultural, economic, demographic, and life-style factors influence on their purchasing decisions. In this sense, data of the study showed strong evidence in relation with brand royalty, knowledge, store displays, family members, friend recommendation, television, radio, newspaper and magazine advertisings, and consumer report, and number of demographic factors such as education, income, occupation, age marital status and gender. These factors were tested in purchasing a pack of cigarettes, dresses/suits, automobile tires, appliances, automobiles, vacation/holiday sites, auto insurance and color televisions. The majority of the products/services which were tested in the study were high involved; therefore, a long search process was expected.

Although Turkey is a Middle-Eastern country and cultural factors would be a strong influence on purchasing decision, the Turkish consumers' needs and wants were similar to the needs and wants of consumers in Western hemisphere. The Turkish consumers' purchasing style seems to look similar to their Western counterparts. Most likely, this might depend upon the location of Turkey in the Middle East. It is considered a bridge between the East and the West. Accordingly, data of the study demonstrated that the Turkish consumers get information from television, radio, newspaper and magazine advertisings, and they consult their decision with their family members and friends. However, there were variations in utilizing different sources depending upon their demographic background.

In summary, the study demonstrated concrete evidence in relation to purchasing decision in a Middle Eastern country. Nevertheless, limitation of the study are still in sample selection, survey methods and data collection techniques. However, further opportunities are still available to conduct comparative studies between Western, Eastern and Pacific Rim countries.

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