

Poor Branding of China Pakistan Economic Corridor

Business Project – 1

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Poor Branding of China Pakistan Economic Corridor

Abstract:

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project that is the reflection of the friendship between Pakistan and China. This economic partnership is in line with the vision of Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative. Unfortunately, due to the Chinese way of work ethics of keeping the details secret, CPEC has received negative feedback from almost all stakeholders. On top of it, the Chinese did not have a proper marketing strategy to brand CPEC. This weakness was heavily exploited by the critics. Even today the project is heavily criticized by a number of people. This project looks in detail on how the project was initially branded through conferences and media appearances of academics. Why this strategy was not in the favor as it lacked theoretical backing? What are the theoretical models that can be implemented in branding CPEC and what is the way forward for CPEC branding.

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was announced in April 2015. An initial budget of \$ 46 Billion was announced for the venture. The venture bought in anticipations of improving the economy of Pakistan by creating new openings in the country's transportation, energy, and Agriculture sector. CPEC is also classified as the front runner project of augmenting the economic corridor between the two ally countries i.e. China and Pakistan and is estimated to be completed by 2030.

CPEC has been divided into three distinct phases labelled as, Early Harvest Projects, Medium Term Projects and Long Term Projects. The early harvest projects comprised of basic infra structure projects like roads and power plants that are a pre requisite for development. The medium term projects include projects like the special economic zones which will lay the foundation of industrialization in Pakistan.

CPEC is currently in the second phase. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor pledged to pull out Pakistan from its long due cure of poverty and socio-economic crisis. Yet as the venture progresses forwards towards its completion, it only spikes turmoil and inconvenience among the local citizens of the country. This is largely due to the lack of public information about the financing details of CPEC projects.

The uncertainty was further fueled by the people tasked to promote CPEC as the game changer for Pakistan. The selected individuals were also not well versed with the project details and this lack of information created doubts and opened up the windows of heavy criticism against China.

The Chinese way of doing business is that it always maintains a certain degree of secrecy in its projects. Whereas, in Pakistan the general trend is that the details of public projects are open and the information is generally available to the public. This was not the case for CPEC and this heavily dented the branding strategy adopted by Planning Commission of Pakistan.

The strategy was further damaged when the Chinese took over the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka and it was openly said by local and foreign analysts that Pakistan will lose Gwadar just like Sri Lanka has lost its port. It is recommended for the ruling bodies to act responsibly and devise up ways to diffuse the situation by holding meetings with the involved stakeholders in order to develop a much prompt and successful execution of CPEC.

This could easily be achieved by branding the CPEC project, formulating an effective communication strategy that highlights all the necessities and provisions prioritized by the people, the industry front-runners and the workers behind the venture.

Theoretical Models:

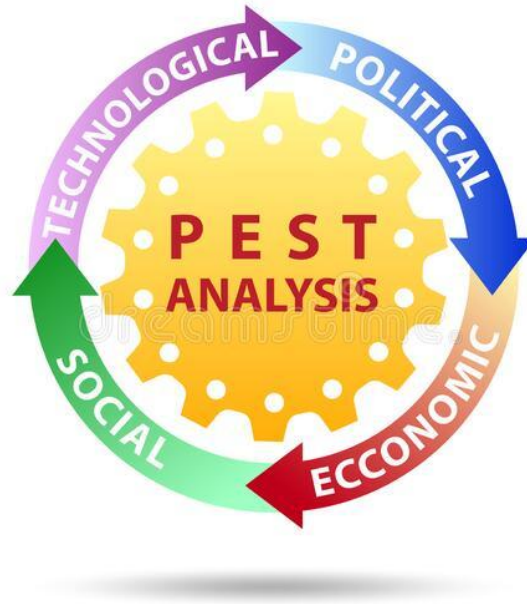
No branding strategy is a success if it is not linked with theoretical models. To understand why the initial branding strategy of CPEC was not a success, it is important to study and apply a few models to the project so that a conceptual clarity can be achieved. For this purpose, PESTLE, SWOT, Daisy Wheel, and The Aaker's Model of building brand identity are applied to understand what can be the theoretical models that can build the branding strategy of CPEC.

PESTEL ANALYSIS

Political Factors

- CPEC's successful completion depends entirely upon the political environment of the country. Any unrest in the political climate can slow down the project's operations and development.
- Since CPEC is a produce of the friendly ties between China and Pakistan, a conflict between the two countries can lead to the termination of the project.
- Change in trade regulations, tax policies, labor laws, tariffs and environmental laws need also to be looked out for the project. But since both the countries are strategic allies of one another, and China being one of

Pakistan's largest trading partner, the aforementioned would only support the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor enterprise.



Economic Factors

- Being a developing country, Pakistan still has a long way to strengthen its economy. The Covid-19 impact on the Pakistani's economy has been recorded to be significantly adverse as the country has lost a considerable amount of its revenue and exports. Yet at the same time it has been a blessing for its textile sector that has booked export orders for months to come.
- According to reports, CPEC continues to progress towards its second phase of conclusion despite the major impediments of the deadly virus. As per

sources the China-Pakistan Economic corridors stands tall and high in providing jobs, carrying on construction and continuing its maneuvers.

Social Factors

- As CPEC promises to uplift the people of the least developed areas of the country such as Gilgit Baltistan, Baluchistan, Sindh and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Still as the venture progresses along, it is likely for it to intervene in to the settlements of the people already residing in the area owed to the project's heavy duty construction and assembly line.
- For the successful execution of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor the brand should address the perspectives of the general public and locals as the ongoing development of the project continues to affect their livelihood, norms and households.
- The brand should devise ways to compensate for the damages faced by the people by guaranteeing jobs, funds and resources as a socially responsible brand before and after its completion.

Technological Factors

- CPEC should use digital and social media platforms to spread awareness about the project in the positive, effective and affordable manner. The channels incorporated for marketing the project should include those platforms where most of the target audience lies such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter. Discussion forums like Quora and Yahoo answers can also be targeted to encourage debates regarding the benefits of the initiative.
- Big data Analytics can also be used to make use of the data available to the project authorities in order to get a deeper insight of the projects analytics on the internet with the help of data application software's. This will make it easier to understand customer and market preferences, develop correlations and analyze unseen information available.
- It is advised for CPEC authorities to stay aligned with the continuous rapid digital advancements to save them from utilizing obsolete technological trends in the market.

Environmental Factors

- The operations of the project can lead to the emission of many harmful gases and carbon emissions into the air thus destroying the environment and in the long run the earth's ozone layers. The authorities should take in precautions to keep the project as ozone friendly as possible as mandated by the WHO and its peripheries.

Legal Factors

- Risk management laws should be taken in to account in order to make sure that the project site is safe and hazardous free for the laborers and resources appointed to perform their duties. Suitable working hours should be mandated for the laborers to ensure their mental health and productivity.
- Stable and friendly Relations with suppliers and vendors should be formed in order to ensure a healthy working environment and on time completion of the project.

- Racial and ethnical discrimination laws should be promoted with the in the project site and organization as such practices promote productivity and employee motivation.
- As a responsible brand the CPEC must be watchful while dealing with the private information of their clienteles to safeguard their cyber security and obey the cyber security laws.



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SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths:

- With the construction of contemporary transport linkages, establishment of trade opportunities, developments in infrastructure, and the improvement of the country's energy and social sectors, CPEC aims to strengthen Pakistan's economy by margins.
- China having the second largest economy in the country enjoys a stable and sound position therefore the China-Pakistan economic corridor is backed with a steady influx of funds.

- CPEC doesn't face any significant competition from its competitors in the country. Therefore the project wouldn't be a subject to being affected by labor costs, production etc.
- The geographical proximity of Pakistan facilitates CPEC as it lies close to the Persian Gulf, Africa and other adjacent countries thus making trade and operations easier for the Chinese and Pakistani government.

Weaknesses:

- The lack of transparency, dissemination of funds and resources can become an obstacle of building a relationship of trust among the stakeholders of the project. This could lead to the project being viewed negatively and peculiarly by other foreign authorities.
- CPEC is a big project which requires skillful laborers and leadership for its successful completion. The unavailability of laborers and the right leadership to head the project can lead the project towards failure.
- Since the project is financed with the US currency, a change in its demand can affect the projects efficacy despite using all the resources and funds at hand.
- The project can be affected by the ties between the two countries in case of political unrest and tension as the project is a product of the friendly ties

between the two. Pressure in the form of FATF by countries like United States and India can also slow down the project pace.

Opportunities:

- The successful completion of the project would lead to an increase in employment opportunities within Pakistan and China. The construction of transportation networks would promote ease of doing business not only between the two allies but also between the Middle Eastern and central Asian countries.
- CPEC would help strengthen the Pakistani economy due to the establishments of new businesses, transportation linkages and energy projects throughout the country.
- With the improvement in the country's economy, CPEC would also ultimately improve the standards of living of the people. Thus decreasing the poverty rate which at present lies at 40 percent.

Threats:

- The project can become a subject to security threats from insurgents or terrorists. Therefore, it is advised for the CPEC authorities to devise a strategy to create a win-win situation. This can be done by forming collaborations with stakeholders as their support would help in tackling the militants and ensure the projects safety.

Current Situation of CPEC

According to the current scenario, The CPEC's operations have relatively slowed down over the years. Earlier CPEC was deemed as a game changer for Pakistan's economy but conferring to a recent report published by Bloomberg; Gawadar, being labelled as the headquarter of heavy duty projects still lacks basic resources such as water and electricity that are required for the smooth running of the project. The series of attacks at Gawadar has also discouraged the Chinese government from investing any further in to the project as they demand.

As per reports to create transparency among stakeholders, General Asim Bajwa was appointed as an official to coordinate the development of the project among the two countries.

All in all CPEC continues to face criticism left right and center due to the Chinese custom of maintaining secrecy and not disclosing their key functions to their stakeholders over the years. The venture needs to become transparent in its actions as setting up operations in a country like Pakistan where its people are sensitive and expressive in their activities are more comfortable working under a transparent business model.

THE DAISY WHEEL OF BRAND EQUITY



The Daisy Wheel model of brand equity illustrates a mapping of primary and secondary stakeholder's integral for building brand equity for an organization. Both primary and secondary stakeholders have a reciprocal relationship with the brand. In order to assist CPEC in developing brand equity, the daisy wheel model would help in identifying the relative importance of its stakeholders for developing a competitive advantage for CPEC, establishing trust, and improving its accountability. It also distinguishes stakeholders by dividing them in to two broad categories of primary stakeholders and indirect stakeholders.

Primary Stakeholders:

The primary stakeholders possess a higher relationship of interest and power as compared to the category of secondary stakeholders. The primary stakeholders exhibit a direct relationship with the brand whereas the secondary stakeholder exhibit an indirect relationship with the brand. If we talk about the primary stakeholders of CPEC then the majorly include both the Pakistani and Chinese government, the provincial governments from where the key activities of the projects originate such as Gwadar and Baluchistan, the manufacturing and construction industries, research institutes and industries.

Secondary Stakeholders:

On the other hand the secondary stakeholders of CPEC consist of neighboring countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, and India. USA as its ties with China have been bitter due to both the countries opposing self-interests. The insurgents in Pakistan and the militants residing in Baluchistan.

CPEC has successfully been able to embark a position of its own through its assurances of upgrading the economy of Pakistan and its infrastructure by constructing transportation linkages, and establishing energy and socio development projects.

CPEC promises to improve the country's agricultural sector, magnify its tourism activities and increasing the overall employment rate by margins. All in all CPEC has been able to deliver its promises but it still lacks far behind in gaining the trust of its stakeholders because of Chinese custom of maintaining secrecy. This notion has been picked up by many in Pakistan and abroad who feel that CPEC projects needs to be more transparent in their mechanisms.

The daisy wheel of brand equity helps in analyzing the goals and missions of a brand which is then translated into the relationships it has with each of its stakeholders. The core belief of CPEC is to improve the living standards of the people of Pakistan and China through the establishment of an economic corridor between the two countries.

For CPEC to be able to identify what defines it, the people involved need to communicate their core beliefs with their stakeholders as this will help in bringing transparency about who they are and what the project holds for them in future.

Since it is delimited with its primary and secondary stakeholders it needs to manipulate the relationships it shares with each of these stakeholders for its own benefits. This can be achieved by developing an effective communication strategy that addresses the stakeholder possessing higher interest and power.

Communication Strategy

After the initial identification of stakeholders of CPEC, it is necessary to involve the primary stakeholders at each step of the implementation project. This can be achieved by formulating a report that is updated on a regular basis regarding the developments and the current status of the project since an effective method of reporting can help reduce controversies and speculation's made against CPEC.

The report also needs to be made public and shared on public forums so that the masses have access to it and can also act as to counter the propaganda that revolves around CPEC projects. Stakeholder expectations need to be met by following a

preset framework in the form of Project charter that shall highlight the scope, deliverables and involved parties. Since CPEC has a number of developmental projects that aims to enhance the living standards of the people of China and Pakistan.

CPEC projects can act as a socially responsible brand and make the key visions of the charter available to the public as this will help them in gaining the trust of not only their stakeholders but also for the people for which the project has been designed.

The shifting views of stakeholders need to be monitored vigorously as they are crucial for on time project completion, the form of financing and in an ideal situation at a much lower cost than the estimated budget.

The failure of meeting stakeholder expectations can become troublesome for the successful execution of CPEC as not addressing the prospect of even one stakeholder could lead to a change in the scope of the project which can later on affect the projects timeline, pricing and accountability.

It is important for CPEC to observe the actions of its indirect stakeholders as any disobedience and criminal damage commenced by the stakeholders would only affect the project negatively. Therefore, CPEC needs to become proactive and

equip itself with a reactive strategy by opting for a legal redress or by working on publicizing its image to earn the consideration of the public and media.

[Integrating Digital and Traditional Media to create Brand Awareness](#)

The China- Pakistan Economic Corridor brings a ray of hope for the development of the socio-economic ranking of Pakistan. However, not every state wishes for the betterment of the country. India due to its rivalry with Pakistan and China is clearly against the project and United States of America due to its adverse ties with China and friendly inclination towards India is against CPEC.

Both the countries leave no opportunity to sabotage the project's efficacy on public forums by making fabricated narratives. Alice Wells the former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs is known for her anti CPEC speeches. They fear that the increased Chinese Pakistani interdependence could become a threat for them in the long run.

Which is why the Pakistani media needs to play its part in presenting a positive view and counter all the negative comments made at CPEC on international forums. As it affects CPEC's brand equity and can become a foundation for CPEC to be viewed as a scheme by the people and underdeveloped states.

The negative comments need to be targeted by mindful information regarding CPEC's importance and significance for shaping Pakistan's economy. CPEC needs

to formulate a comprehensive communication strategy across all media channels which could include content marketing, article releases and press conferences to address the issue and communicate its message and intentions to all concerned audiences. This is called Share of Voice (SOV). This will also require using digital marketing tools to track the effectiveness of the communication strategy and to determine how the company name is being perceived

- [Tracking Word Of Mouth \(WOM\) and Media](#) It is critical for CPEC to gauge how severe and to what extent the brand has been discussed from a negative outlook. For this, CPEC authority has to track what the general public, press and regional states are saying or have said about the brand thus-far and determine what percentages of positive, neutral and negative WOM and press persists regarding the brand and its activities.

If the negative press and WOM dominates, then a greater effort would be required in order to recover. But if there are mixed reviews, then that means that the situation has a higher potential to eventually cool-off and it will be less difficult for the brand to restore its reputation. Once the depth of the damage is determined, it will be easier for CPEC to monitor.

- [Tackle Negative Online Searches](#) Each time CPEC gets caught up in a debatable situation it is very much likely for it to become a heated topic on digital media. Many e-newspapers and blogs hire technical writers to come up with negative content to bash a company under the public and foreign eye. Which leads to negative search results circulating on the internet. CPEC unfortunately is going through a similar situation. In order to successfully disseminate positive insights about the brand, CPEC needs to get rid of the most appeared negative search engine results a user can obtain while looking them up on the internet. Though it is impossible to remove all the negative content circulating about them on the internet. CPEC authority can at least block all content which might appear on the first page of the search engine that pops up after making a search. And as per research this is the most far an average user usually looks up something or someone on the internet.

[Publish Engaging & Informative Content](#)

Informative content in the form of videos and documentaries highlighting CPEC and its endeavors should be strategically designed, dubbed in regional languages and broadcasted on leading television channels such as PTV, Geo TV etc. as they'd prove helpful in educating the people about how viable CPEC is going to be in providing increased facilities, jobs and ease in to their lives once the project gets completed.

This approach would also help in gaining the peoples trust and enhancing the brands equity and value. The documentaries should than further be published on CPEC's official website, Social media platforms and discussion forums to increase brand awareness and build engagement.

Collaborating with Opinion leaders on Social Media

Reputed bloggers and influencers should also be reached out to use their platforms for educating the audience regarding the significance of CPEC for the country's economy. This is considered the most affordable way of building awareness and consciousness among the people.

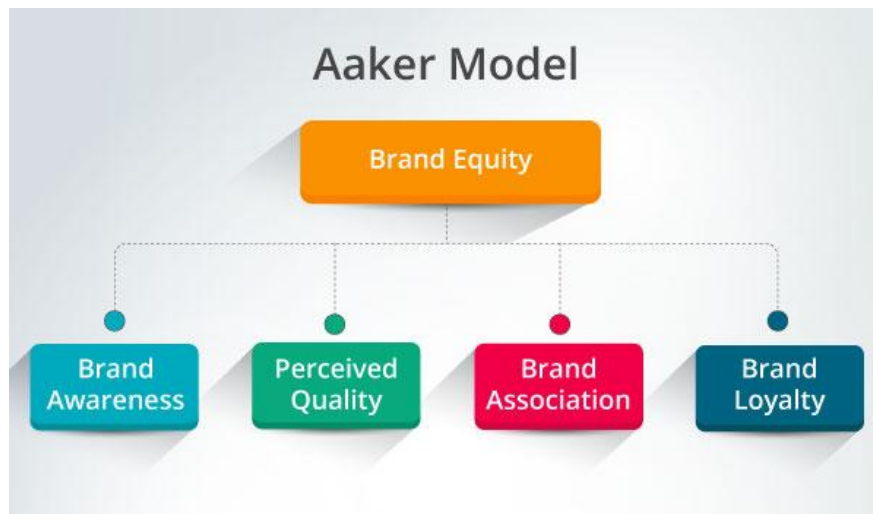
Taking Authorized Officials on board to increase Awareness

Authorized officials for leading the CPEC initiative should also be instructed to record their testimonials and publish them on their official social media handles in order to create brand credibility, accountability and transparency.

Partnering with Leading Journalists and Hosts

The leading journalists and hosts of the country can also be reached out to host shows promoting the importance and current developments taking place under the CPEC franchise to create healthy discussions and anticipation among the citizens and viewers. The information shared should be factually correct and should not sound like a propaganda.

The Aaker Model – Building CPEC’s Brand Identity



The Aaker Model help an Organization create a unique identity of its own in the market by undertaking a succession of activities leading towards building brand Equity. The model was coined back in the nineties and has still remained to be relevant till this very date. The Aaker model can help the authorities at CPEC improve their brand equity by working on constructing the strategic building blocks important for their marketing and branding. These building blocks include Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand Association and Brand Loyalty.

Brand Awareness

Creating brand Awareness is the first and foremost tactic CPEC must adopt to get their message across the general public and stakeholders. As CPEC is a series of development projects planned to improve the socio- economic infrastructure of both China and Pakistan.

It must be preached among the masses by incorporating it into CPEC's key branding feature i.e. its logo. At present CPEC is operating its promotional activities through the help of multiple logos displaying the flags of china and Pakistan with symbols of highway or the Gawadar seaport.

The logo doesn't emphasize on the association between the two countries working hand in hand to improve the status quo of its people. It doesn't make it easier for an illiterate individual to be able to tell what the logo represents keeping in mind the fact that most of the population in Pakistan aren't educated.

In order to communicate their image, value and positioning and allow the people to be able to be familiar with the brand and be able to recognize and recall it in the future CPEC should consider adopting the iconic "hand shake" symbol representing the immortal Pak-china friendship in their logo as it holds an emotional value and is already registered by both the citizens of Pakistan and china.

The official website of CPEC should have the Hreflang tag so that it make it easier for the readers to read the content published in their desired language. Though Pakistan has several regional languages but its national language remains to be Urdu the Hreflang tag would make the readers from Pakistan

easily translate the content in to Urdu, same goes with the Citizens of china as they could translate the content in to Chinese. The content published on CPEC's key social media platforms should also be translated in Urdu. The documentaries and videos shot regarding CPEC should be dubbed in all the regional languages of Pakistan to get the message across the entire country for an effective representation of what CPEC stands for and what it aims to offer to the people.

Perceived Quality

To build the perception of CPEC actually being a game changer for the country's economy, the authorities at CPEC must be transparent about the continuous progress achieved by the CPEC management's endeavors. They should highlight the budget allocated towards implementing the projects under CPEC, the advance technology and resources being used by the laborers in providing superior services to the people. so that the people as well as the stakeholders would actually believe that CPEC is actually aiming towards providing quality and ease in their lifestyle. Not only that once the initiative gets completed it will provide them with increased jobs and opportunities.

Brand Association

Forming brand Associations would CPEC build a solid online and offline reputation and most of all influence people to think positively about the

initiative through positive testimonials and endorsements. CPEC can form associations by reaching out to welfare organizations operational in the country to conduct seminars regarding the significance of CPEC and its benefits for the economy.

It can also form communities and membership clubs both online and offline to provide networking opportunities and educational resources to the people. CPEC could also develop its own Management trainee and internship programs to source talented resources from top universities in the country for making their initiative successful and collaborated.

The authorities at CPEC could also reach out to journalists, TV spokespersons, concerned stakeholders and reputed social media influencers to talk about the economic corridor on their platforms to educate their audiences regarding the tell-tale of CPEC and its current accomplishments to foster credibility and accountability.

Brand Loyalty

Through the successful execution of the aforementioned strategies, CPEC would ultimate rise towards creating brand loyalty. It would be able to create brand advocates which would make it easier for it to be defended on podiums, social media and talk shows. To reach at the final element of the

Aaker Model, CPEC would have to take the digital route and invest into marketing itself as an accessible modern initiative that promotes socio-economic welfare, improved living standards, trade and business opportunities and relationship building.

Social Media Brand Voice

The grid presented below by Stephanie Schwab (2011) can be the perfect tool and guide that can be used to decide the character, tone, language and purpose of the online brand voice or conversations. Deciding the online voice of the brand is a very clever strategy in developing a personality, engaging with the customers and building a community. The tone and nature of the voice is highly crucial to building a brand and communicating the brand image and brand personality.



- The character/persona that would be incorporated in brand voice for CPEC should be Engaging, educating, informing and serious while also maintaining professionalism and authoritativeness which should be consistent across all the online communication activities and social media content
- The tone of the conversations should be honest and personal as they align with the brand's value proposition of ‘’. These elements should be keenly observed by the customer support team and social media team while conversing with the online customers or potential customers.
- The language used in the brand conversations, ads, stories, posts and comments should be interactive, intriguing, and inspiring while also making the people feel like they are the insiders to add the personal and open element. It would also help build a loyal online community for the brand.
- The purpose of the social media brand voice should be to engage, inform, enable amusement and preach.

The Road Ahead

The road ahead of CPEC is full of uncertainty and plagued with disinformation that exists due to the lack of public information. Although the government has

published the details on the official website, it is not being utilized and yet a lot of negative perception surrounds the projects.

To improve this uncertainty the CPEC authority must carry out the following actions:

- Devise a strong branding strategy that is rooted in the masses. The current branding strategy by the CPEC authority has not worked properly and has opened a lot of loopholes that was clearly exploited by the adversaries.
- As part of the strategy, use information that is factually correct to project a positive image of the projects built under CPEC.
- Analyze the impact of the projects on the employment generated in the region. This would also add in building brand equity of CPEC.
- Incorporate contemporary methods of marketing and promotional activities to create brand awareness for effectively reaching out to the masses of the country and create a significance impact in preaching the mission of the CPEC initiative.

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