

# Factors Influencing Consumers' Actual Buying Behavior Towards Organic Food Products: An Empirical Study From Bangladesh

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## Abstract:

This paper investigates the factors that affect consumers' actual buying behavior towards organic food products in Bangladesh. The study adopted the theory of planned behavior as a base and developed seven hypotheses based on the extant empirical literature. Adopting the non-probability sampling method, the primary data were collected with self-structured questionnaires from 200 consumers in all divisions of Bangladesh. The data acquired from the consumers were encoded in SPSS software for analysis. This study used descriptive statistics, reliability statistics, and multiple regression analysis to attain objectives. The findings of this study showed that healthfulness, environmental benefit, quality, trust, and promotional strategy factors have direct positive influences on consumers' purchase intention towards organic food products whereas price and availability factors have negative influences. The findings of this study could be beneficial for policymakers, producers, and marketers in the organic food industry.

**Keywords:** Consumers, Buying behavior; Organic food; Bangladesh.

Date of Submission: 24-09-2023

Date of Acceptance: 04-10-2023

## I. Introduction

Organic foods are a form of food produced without using chemical pesticides and herbicides, bioengineering, ionizing radiation, synthetic fertilizers, or sewage sludge in production (Sultan et al., 2020). Organic food refers to agricultural and related products manufactured and processed organically, without using synthetic chemical herbicides, veterinary medicines, feed additives, or genetic technology; these products must also meet organic requirements and standards and have been certified organic by an accredited body (Chen, 2010). Organic farming practices rely on natural methods such as crop rotation, composting, and biological pest control to maintain soil fertility and control pests and diseases. Though Bangladesh is an agro-based country most farmers are poor and heavily dependent on synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and traditional agricultural practices and systems (Ferdous et al., 2021). Conventional agricultural practices could not keep pace with the ongoing demands of the burgeoning population. Consequently, the government introduced the chemical-intensive farming system to meet increased needs. However, chemical agriculture contributed to achieving self-sufficiency in grain food production but created many negative consequences for human health and the environment. Agrochemicals have been linked to a wide range of human health hazards (Rahman et al., 2015). Organic food products are gaining popularity in Bangladesh, with an increasing number of consumers opting for these products over conventional ones. The country has a significant potential for organic food production, as it has a large agricultural sector and favorable climatic conditions. The organic food industry in Bangladesh is still in its early stages, but it has been growing steadily in recent years.

However, the consumer behavior and buying pattern of organic food in Bangladesh is not satisfactory (Gumber & Rana, 2017). Some factors like health consciousness, environmental consciousness, food safety consciousness, price consciousness, novelty consciousness, and trust are factors that significantly affect purchase intention and subsequently, the actual purchase of organic foods (Zheng et al., 2021). The demand for organic food products in Bangladesh is expected to continue to grow, driven by increasing health, safety, novelty, price consciousness, and environmental awareness among consumers. However, the researchers intend to measure the actual buying behavior of organic food products in Bangladesh.

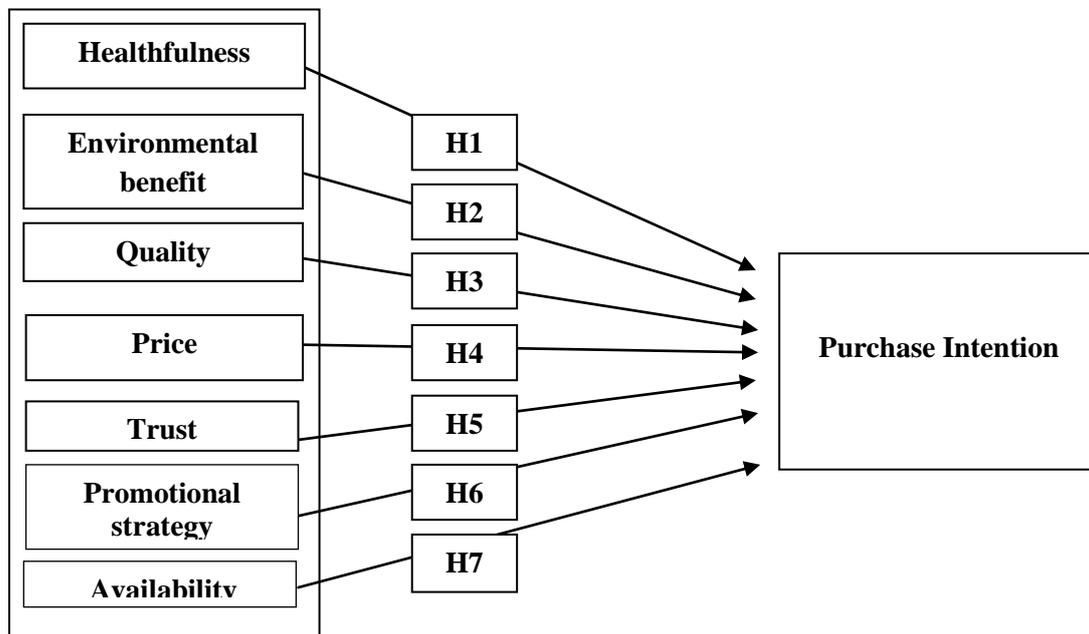
## II. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Research on organic food products has been conducted extensively across the globe. Many studies have explored the properties and benefits of organic food products in various parts of the world. Now, in Bangladesh, there is a possibility to perform a comprehensive study that includes important aspects influencing customers to purchase organic food items. According to Wee et al., (2014) perceptions of organic food products such as health, safety, environmental friendliness, and animal welfare, as well as product quality, all influence customer intentions to purchase organic food products in different ways. Other factors, such as health consciousness (Padel & Foster, 2005; Magnusson et al., 2001; Adawiyah et al., 2021); nutritional attention (Squires et al., 2001); healthy existence (Chen, 2009); environmental apprehension (Williams & Hammit, 2001); food security and ethical concerns (Baker et al., 2004; Magnusson et al., 2003; Lockie et al., 2004) have been found to affect the assertiveness towards organic food and its use. Customer anticipations of organic food are affected by concerns about food security and skepticism, according to Alshammari (2020) organic food knowledge and health alertness have a slight impact on customer approaches toward organic diet. Dangi et al., (2020) pursue to understand the factors that influence organic food buying behavior in a developing economy by applying the theory of planned action (TPA). The study found that primary motivators for buying organic food are health concerns, previous purchasing actions, consciousness, affordability, and sureness in organic certification and labeling. According to Thatte et al., (2016), enlightening requirement and organic food awareness is indissolubly related, and customers with higher earnings are also able to pay a premium for organic food products. Rahman et al., (2016) stated that attitude and specific rules are essential concerns of buying intention when perceived behavioral influence is negligible. Sarker & Itohara (2007) conducted a study on organic food consumers in Bangladesh and found that there is no preference for conventional food due to a lack of awareness regarding organic food. Sarker & Itohara (2008) showed that customers are exceedingly conscious of their health and have a moderate understanding of the environmental deathtraps caused by agrochemicals, and some have no familiarity with them. Kim et al., (2014) noted that one of the obstacles to the advancement of organic food is the absence of marketing efforts by organic food entrepreneurs. Gumber & Rana (2017) identified that consumer behavior and buying pattern of organic food in different cities in Bangladesh is very poor. The main barriers are small knowledge of education, excess prices, lack of certification, and a scarcity of organic food. Kumar and Shekar (2015) have revealed that quality, price, good health consciousness, environmentally friendly, and food safety has positive effects on consumers buying behavior of organic food products. Conversely, low packaging, low availability, lack of information, and short durability hurt consumer buying behavior of organic food products. Padmathy & Sarawathy (2016) have shown that consumer perception about price, environmental concerns, quality, brand name, convenience, durability, and packaging affects the consumer intention and intention affects the behavior of organic food products. Hossain & Lim (2016) found that knowledge, health consciousness, environmental concern, government support and policy, perceived beliefs, and attitude affect consumer purchase intention to actual purchase behavior.

From the previous literature, the researchers conclude that the majority of the previous authors agreed that some factors like health, safety, environment, product quality, nutritional attention, food security, and ethical concerns have a positive impact on customers' intention to purchase organic food products. Some of the previous researchers agreed that all the above-mentioned factors do not always directly impact on purchasing of organic food products. Some of the previous researchers agreed that all the above-mentioned factors moderately impact on purchasing organic food products. From this point of view, the current researchers make a comprehensive study to measure the actual buying behavior of organic food products in Bangladesh.

### **Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development**

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesized Model are developed by the author and shown in Figure 1. The theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been established to quantify and identify behavioral intention variables, particularly from an individual perspective. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) observed that values must be analyzed within the context of the situation at hand to anticipate specific behaviors. The intention-behavior gap is the limitation of the TPB theory, which has been addressed in this study. To explicate major factors influencing consumers' actual buying behavior towards organic food products in the context of Bangladesh. Those major key factors are Healthfulness, Environmental benefit, Quality, Price, Trust, Promotional strategy, and Availability ultimately leading to enhanced consumers' purchase intention toward organic food products



**Figure: 1** Conceptual Framework and Hypothesized Model.

**Healthfulness:**

Organic food products are generally grown without the use of synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, or genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Health consciousness pushes the consumer to buy organic food products. Customer expectations of organic food are affected by concerns about food safety and skepticism, according to Alshammari (2020), Chowdhury and Zayed (2021) health issue and daily life comes first for buying organic food, after that, environmental advantage, product attributes, real quality and price, marketing strategy and trust ensures for willingness to buy or purchase intention of a consumer. So perceived health consciousness affects consumer purchase intention and consumer intention to actual purchase behavior. So H1 is proposed.

**H1:** Perceived Healthfulness of organic food products will positively influence the purchase intention.

**Environmental benefit:**

According to McEachern & McClean (2002), In the case of consuming food, consumers asserted about environmental or ecological benefits. In addition, ethical concern is a positive issue in buying food as it is close to the environment. Sarker & Itohara (2007) conducted a study on organic food consumers in Bangladesh and discovered that most of them were aware of the adverse effects of pesticides and chemical fertilizers on the human body and environment. There is no preference for normal food due to a lack of awareness about organic food. Sarker & Itohara (2008) indicated that consumers are highly aware of their health and have a moderate understanding of the environmental dangers caused by agrochemicals, and some have no knowledge of them. So, H2 is proposed.

**H2:** The environmental benefit of organic food products will positively influence the purchase intention.

**Quality:**

The quality of organic food products is a major driver of consumer purchase intention. Organic food is perceived to be more nutritious, flavorful, and environmentally sustainable, which makes it an attractive option for health-conscious consumers. As such, food producers who prioritize quality in their organic products can differentiate themselves in the market and gain a loyal customer base. According to Mukul et al., (2013), the foremost determinations of their study showed that consumers' perceptions of quality sureness of organic food consumption are influenced by five factors namely food safety, price, environmentally friendly, nutrition, and sensory attributes. Food consumption patterns are shifting because of health and environmental issues. So, H3 is proposed.

**H3:** The quality of organic food products will positively influence the purchase intention.

**Perceived Price:**

Price refers to the monetary value that is assigned to a good or service in a market economy. Some consumers may perceive organic food products as not being worth the higher price. This can be due to a lack of understanding about the benefits of organic farming, or because they feel that the quality or taste of the product does not justify the added expense. Perceived price is a barrier to buying organic food as some researchers claim that high price is a barrier to buying or consuming food (D'Souza, 2006; Aertsens, 2009; Adawiyah, 2021). According to Hack (1992), one of the primary reasons for people's avoidance of organic foods is high costs. Willer et al., (2017) discovered that organic foods are unpopular in underdeveloped nations due to their high costs. Katt and Meixner (2020) exposed a negative link between price awareness and organic food purchase purpose. So, H4 is proposed.

**H4:** The perceived price of organic food products will negatively influence the purchase intention.

**Trust:**

Trust in organic foods is perceived from the implementation of high premiums on the taste, quality, certification, marketing, and production methods of organic foods. According to Zheng et al., (2021), trust in the production process of organic foods, including standards and control, has strong causal impacts on intention and behavior. According to Zheng et al., (2021), trust has a moderating effect on the existing relationship between intention and behavior; educating customers on various organic certifications, production processes, packaging, and trustworthy retailers can be accomplished through mass communication and in-store communication. Certifying bodies could instill confidence in customers regarding the reliability of organic labeling. Such trust may spur consumers into purchasing organic foods that are properly labeled and certified. According to Yu et al., (2021), customer trust has a substantial impact on their propensity to purchase organic products. So H5 is proposed.

**H5:** Trust in labeling and certification of organic food products positively influences the purchase intention.

**Promotional strategy:**

A promotional strategy is a plan of action that a business or organization develops to promote its products or services and increase sales. The goal of a promotional strategy is to create awareness and interest in the company's offerings, encourage potential customers to make a purchase, and ultimately drive revenue growth. Consumers are bound to buy, but not bound to choose a single market. Due to the abundance of marketing in this century, consumers can choose the best alternative. According to Shanjida (2021) promoting and reliability in advertisement is crucial for selling organic food products. Most consumers agree with advertising reliability. So, H6 is proposed.

**H6:** Promotion of organic food products will positively influence the purchase intention.

**Availability:**

According to a report published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in 2018, organic agriculture is gaining momentum in Bangladesh, with a growing number of farmers adopting organic farming practices. The report states that Bangladesh has the potential to become a major producer and exporter of organic food products in the region. Additionally, a research study published in the Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2019 found that organic farming practices in Bangladesh have the potential to increase crop yields and reduce production costs, while also improving soil health and reducing the negative impacts of farming on the environment. Overall, these sources suggest that organic food availability is increasing in Bangladesh and that organic farming practices are gaining recognition for their potential to promote sustainable agriculture and improve food security in the country. So H7 is proposed.

**H7:** The availability of organic food products will positively influence the purchase intention.

This conceptual framework finds out these major key factors such as Healthfulness, Environmental benefit, Quality, Price, Trust, Promotional strategy, and Availability that ultimately led to enhanced consumers' purchase intention towards organic food products.

### **III. Research Methodology**

In this research mainly primary data have been collected from primary sources using structured questionnaires and all the data are quantitative. Conversely, the researchers used different secondary sources of data to develop a literature review that gives insight into the mentioned objectives. The researchers used a five-point Likert scale to stimulate responses from the respondents. The respondents have marked the points they think are best and described the most logical ones. Respondents are asked to rate the degree of agreement or disagreement that ranges from a five-point Likert scale strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Before finalizing the questionnaire, a pre-testing has been done on 20 respondents. To collect primary data a self-

structured questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was divided into three portions. The first portion includes the demographic profile of the respondents. In the second portion, some elementary data about organic food products, and in the third portion identified seven factors that help to enhance consumers' purchase intention towards organic food products. Non-probability sampling has been used because it is relatively less costly and less time-consuming to prepare a sampling frame. Among the different ways of non-probability sampling, the researcher chooses simple random sampling and convenience sampling. For the study purpose, the sample size is around 200 respondents and covers all divisions in Bangladesh. The researchers collected data from March 01, 2023, to June 30, 2023, through online and physically. Data were collected from consumers who already have purchased organic food products and encoded in SPSS software for analysis. The researchers used descriptive statistics analysis, reliability statistics analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

#### **IV. Data Analysis and Findings**

##### **Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

The demographic profile of the respondents is shown in the following table 1. The demographic profile of the respondents shows that most of the respondents are male (65%) and female (35%); among them, most are in the 20-25 years category (55.5%), and maximum respondents from Khulna Division (21%). The maximum occupation of respondents is students (60%) and most of the respondent's family annual income is 200,000 taka – 350,000 taka (35%).

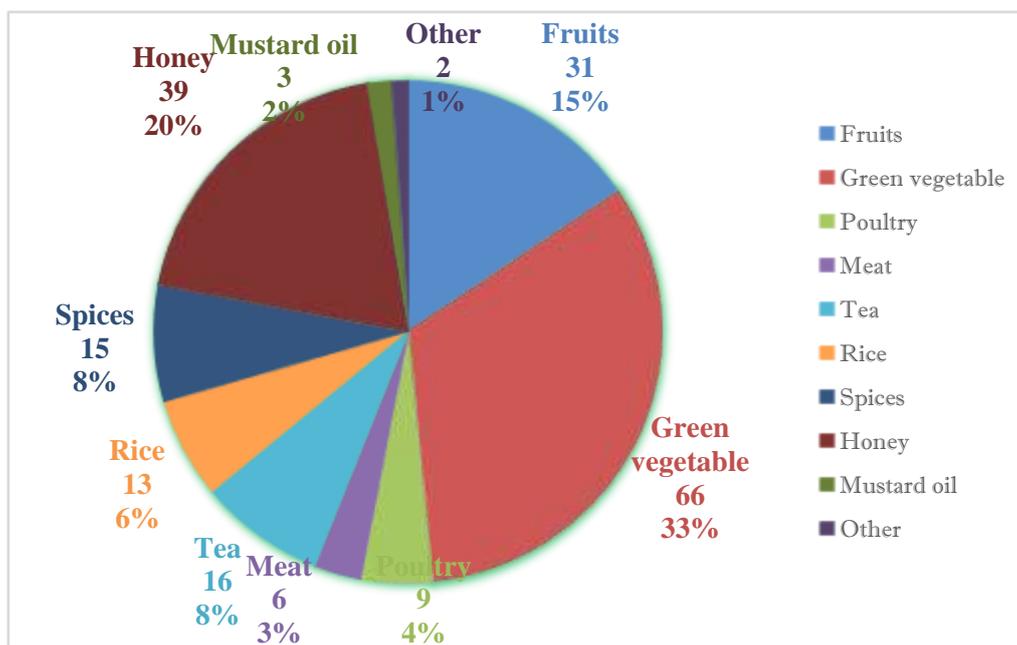
<b>Gender</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Female	70	35.0
Male	130	65.0
Total	200	100.0
<b>Age (Years)</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Below 20	12	6.0
20-25	111	55.5
26-30	52	26.0
31-35	17	8.5
36 or above	8	4.0
Total	200	100.0
<b>Division</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Dhaka	30	15.0
Chattogram	18	9.0
Rajshahi	30	15.0
Rangpur	31	15.5
Khulna	42	21.0
Barishal	10	5.0
Sylhet	22	11.0
Mymensingh	17	8.5
Total	200	100.0
<b>Family Annual Income</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Less than Tk. 2,00,000	2	1.0
Tk. 2,00,000 -Tk. 3,50,000	70	35.0
Tk. 3,50,000 -Tk. 6,00,000	58	29.0
Tk. 6,00,000-TK. 8,00,000	40	20.0
Tk. 8,00,000 or above	30	15.0
Total	200	100.0
<b>Occupation</b>		
	Frequency	Percent
Student	120	60.0
Businessman	27	13.5

Private Job	36	18.0
Govt. Job	17	8.5
Total	200	100.0

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

**Findings from Elementary Data of Respondents**

After analyzing elementary data, the researcher found the majority of consumers purchase organic food products to obtain good health. The result indicates that 48% of respondents are health conscious rather than consider eco-friendly, food safety, good quality, or availability. The maximum sources of information on organic foods provided by social media it's about 37% rather than friends/family, TV media, newspapers, or websites. Almost 46% of respondents purchase organic food products directly from the producer rather than an online shop, specialized shop, supermarket/super shop, etc. Fruits, Green vegetables, and honey are the popular organic food products in Bangladesh. The experience of consumers in purchasing organic food is good because 52% of respondents are satisfied and 21% are highly satisfied.



**Figure 2: Respondent's preferred organic food products**

**Reliability Analysis**

Cornbach's Alpha is tested for the study of 27 items and the overall reliability for the measure was .695 which is matched with the standard value of .60 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994) and it is indicated that above .60 value of reliability is an acceptable level of reliability. So, the questionnaire used was reliable for information collection.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.695	27

**Table 3: Reliability Analysis**

**Hypotheses Testing**

In testing the hypothesis structural model is used to decide on the proposed hypotheses. This model helps to understand the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Structural equation modeling is used to test various hypothesized causal relationships among consumers' purchase intention of organic food products.

Hypothesis	Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Decision
		Beta	Std. Error	Beta			
	Constant	.983	.658		1.645	.164	

<b>H1</b>	Healthfulness	.187	.093	.261	2.564	.011	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H2</b>	Environmental benefit	.164	.076	.186	2.460	.015	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H3</b>	Quality	.131	.083	.234	0.096	.017	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H4</b>	Price	-.037	.042	-.071	-.663	.508	Rejected
<b>H5</b>	Trust	.127	.087	.200	2.034	.000	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H6</b>	Promotional strategy	.191	.078	.127	.643	.024	<b>Supported</b>
<b>H7</b>	Availability	.012	.084	.008	1.898	.631	Rejected

**Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis**

**Dependent Variable:** Purchase Intention

### V. Discussion on Findings

The multiple regression analysis model exhibits that the Healthfulness of organic food products has a positive influence on enhancing consumers' purchase intention ( $\beta = .187$ , Sig. = .011). Table 4 also shows that Environmental benefit ( $\beta = .164$ , Sig. = .015), Quality ( $\beta = .131$ , Sig. = .017), Trust ( $\beta = .127$ , Sig. = .000), Promotional strategy ( $\beta = .191$ , Sig. = .024) has positive impact on consumers' purchase intention on organic food products on the other hand Price ( $\beta = -.037$ , Sig. = .508), and Availability ( $\beta = .012$ , Sig. = .631) hurts enhancing consumers' purchase intention towards organic food products. The findings of this study show that the Healthfulness, Environmental benefit, Quality, Trust, and promotional strategy factors have direct positive influences on consumers' purchase intention towards organic food products, and Price, and Availability have negative influences. The findings of this study could provide valuable insights into the factors that drive consumers' purchase intentions toward organic food products in Bangladesh, which could be beneficial for the government, policymakers, producers, and marketers in the organic food industry.

### VI. Recommendations

i) As healthfulness positively influences the purchasing pattern of organic food products so government should invest in educational campaigns to raise awareness about the health benefits of organic food among Bangladeshi consumers. Highlight the differences between organic and conventional food production methods, emphasizing the absence of synthetic pesticides and the potential positive impact on personal health.

ii) Environmental benefits of organic food products positively influence the purchase behavior of Bangladeshi consumers so marketers should prioritize eco-friendly packaging for organic food products. Use recyclable, biodegradable, or compostable materials whenever possible.

iii) There is a close relationship between product quality and the purchase intention of consumers. So marketers and the government should support research and development initiatives focused on enhancing the quality of organic food products.

iv) The trust in organic food products positively influences the purchase intention of consumers. So marketers should provide detailed information about the certification process, including the specific criteria and standards of organic food products. The regulatory authority may conduct regular inspections and audits activities and ensure penalties for those found guilty of mislabeling or falsely claiming organic status.

v) Promotion of organic food products positively influences the purchase behavior of Bangladeshi consumers. So marketers should identify the key demographics and consumer segments in Bangladesh that are more likely to be interested in organic food products. So the marketer may apply persuasive messaging to convey the value and positive impact of choosing organic.

vi) Though the price and availability of organic food products are not determining factors, but it is essential to educate consumers about the price and availability of organic food products. This can be done through marketing campaigns, consumer awareness programs, and collaborations with health professionals, nutritionists, and influencers. Providing clear and accurate information about the advantages of organic food may encourage more consumers to consider purchasing them.

### VII. Conclusion

The increasing concern for health and environmental issues has led to a growing demand for organic food products worldwide. Organic farming in Bangladesh is still relatively new and several organic foods are available here. Being an agricultural country has a significant potential for organic food production. This study investigated the factors that influence consumers' purchase intention towards organic food products in Bangladesh. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the factors that drive consumers' purchase intentions towards organic food products in Bangladesh, it would be beneficial for policymakers, producers, and marketers in the organic food industry.

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