Assessing students' perceptions towards the adoption of AI tools in tertiary education institutions in Mauritius: From a male and female perspective

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Abstract

Digital technologies are revolutionising the teaching and learning process in the 21st century. This study examines the link between the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) and self-efficacy, technological readiness, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use among university students, specifically males and females' students. The technology acceptance model (TAM) is used in the study to investigate the interrelationship between the variables. A quantitative methodology has been used whereby 400 questionnaires were distributed among tertiary learners in public universities across Mauritius. 316 students from public tertiary institutions in Mauritius have been taking part in the study. The participants' answers were examined using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.0. A 5-point Likert scale is used to measure five constructs in the questionnaire. The findings indicate the students' technological self-efficacy and technological readiness, how they use AI tools and how easy they believe they are to use. By supporting learning strategies that support sustainable development, this study advances broader educational goals as stated in the African Union's Agenda 2063, the Mauritius National Development Strategy, and the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 on quality education. Regarding Mauritius, the study supports government initiatives to create a knowledge-based economy and promote inclusive, future-ready educational systems that address issues of local and global development. The findings also demonstrated that even though both males and females are inclined to adopt artificial intelligence, there was not much difference in their adoption. Moreover, the results have provided valuable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and technology developers seeking to foster an AI-driven learning environment that aligns with student needs and expectations to enhance quality learning.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Technology Acceptance Model, Technological Readiness, Self-efficacy, Mauritius, Perception

1.0. Introduction

The growing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) across industries, including education, has introduced transformative shifts in pedagogies, learning methods, and curriculum design in higher education. While many universities incorporate AI peripherally, the early adoption of AI-driven tools has already begun to reshape educational practices, raising critical questions about their broader impact (Selwyn, 2022). Since the youth will be the future leaders of a sustainable world, it is imperative that every country's young person be involved. Involving tertiary students in efforts to accomplish sustainable development goals is crucial (Filho *et al.,* 2024). The SDGs' central idea is to empower people and communities in order to promote inclusive development that benefits all, rather than just economic growth. In Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like Mauritius, technological advancement and globalisation present unique challenges in keeping pace with innovation and ensuring equitable access to educational technologies (Bhujun *et al.,* 2024).

Despite the global momentum towards AI adoption in education, limited research exists on how tertiary students, particularly in SIDS, perceive these technologies. Understanding gendered perceptions is essential in contexts like Mauritius, where socioeconomic, infrastructural, and educational disparities may amplify inequalities in technology use. This study seeks to explore university students' perceptions of AI use in education, identify influencing factors such as digital readiness and self-efficacy, and assess gender-based differences in adoption. Using the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the research examines key constructs like Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU) to compare male and female students' attitudes toward AI adoption. By offering a gendered lens, the study contributes to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of digital equity and readiness in tertiary education across SIDS. Additionally, the findings will inform educators, policymakers, and technology developers on how to foster AI-driven learning environments that are responsive to diverse learner needs. This research not only fills a gap in the academic literature on AI in education but also supports broader goals of achieving inclusive, effective, and quality higher education through responsible technological integration.

2.0. Literature Review

Tertiary education is experiencing a profound shift driven by the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), necessitating the integration of AI tools into teaching and learning resources. To effectively manage this transformation, it is critical to understand students' adoption of technology. Gender disparities are particularly relevant here as Stohr et al. (2024) found that female students generally express more negative attitudes toward AI chatbots than their male counterparts, indicating a need to explore how gender moderates AI adoption in education.

While existing studies affirm the positive influence of perceived usefulness and ease of use on AI adoption in education, socio-demographic factors, particularly gender, remain critically underexplored. Rahman *et al.,* (2025) note the empirical ambiguity surrounding gender's role in AI readiness. The limited attention to how gender moderates self-efficacy and perception within the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) undermines efforts toward inclusive AI integration. Although some emerging evidence suggests differences in how male and female students engage with AI tools, findings remain inconclusive and under-theorised. Addressing these gaps is essential to uncovering whether gender meaningfully shapes PEOU and behavioural intention, thereby informing more equitable and responsive implementation strategies in higher education settings such as Mauritius.

2.1. Technology Readiness

Technology readiness, conceptualized by Parasuraman (2000), encompasses an individual's predisposition to embrace technology, framed through enablers (optimism, innovativeness) and inhibitors (discomfort, insecurity). While widely applied across industries, its role in tertiary education remains underexplored (Carlos et al., 2022). Within AI-integrated learning environments, higher readiness correlates with constructive learning behaviours (Dolmark et al., 2022). However, socio-demographic factors, particularly gender, are often overlooked. Rahman et al. (2025) highlights the lack of empirical clarity on whether gender influences readiness to adopt AI, suggesting the need for research that examines this intersection.

2.2. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, or belief in one's capability to perform tasks (Bandura & Locke, 2003), significantly shapes students' engagement with digital tools. High self-efficacy boosts learning satisfaction and adaptability in AI-enhanced environments (Tang & Osman, 2022). Ait Baha et al. (2024) further assert that digital competence increases the likelihood of adopting AI tools, reinforcing a cyclical link between confidence and usage. However, Mahande et al. (2025) caution that self-efficacy alone does not guarantee successful adoption, as deeper motivational and cognitive factors are also at play. Despite its importance, limited research addresses how gender may moderate self-efficacy in the context of AI adoption, pointing to a crucial gap.

2.3. Perceived Usefulness

A cornerstone of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Perceived Usefulness reflects how users believe technology can enhance performance (Davis, 1989). In higher education, this is pivotal as institutions adopt AI to improve teaching and learning. Strzelecki and ElArabawy (2024) found that students view AI as beneficial for improving educational methods. However, while its positive influence on adoption is well-documented, the moderating role of gender remains underexplored.

2.4. Perceived Ease of Use

Also derived from TAM, Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) refers to the belief that using a system requires minimal effort (Davis, 1989). User-friendly interfaces in AI platforms encourage adoption by aligning with students' cognitive capacities (Konca et al., 2025). Nonetheless, individual differences including digital experience and confidence may affect perceptions of ease. Emerging evidence suggests gender could influence how students interact with AI tools, though findings remain inconclusive. Greater empirical focus is needed to understand how gender dynamics shape PEOU and consequent adoption behaviour in educational contexts.

2.5. Adoption of AI

The adoption of AI in tertiary education is expanding, with studies examining how constructs such as readiness, self-efficacy, and perceptions of usefulness and ease contribute to usage intentions. Pillai et al. (2024) emphasize that AI-based teacher bots are most accepted when users perceive them as useful and easy to use. Additionally, the digital divide, particularly in developing regions, poses a barrier to equitable AI access. Kim and Adlof (2024) stressed that AI supports constructivist learning by enabling personalized, interactive experiences. Thus, understanding the intersection of adoption factors and demographic influences particularly gender is crucial for developing inclusive AI integration strategies that enhance educational equity and engagement.

3.0. Research Methodology

This study explores student adoption of AI amongst higher education institutions through the use of a quantitative research method. 400 questionnaires were distributed in the public tertiary institutions of Mauritius. The questionnaire consisted of two sections including demographic profile and existing 5 Likert scales (1- Strongly Disagree and 5 Strongly Agree) of variables such as technology readiness, self-efficacy, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and adoption of AI. The study used a modified version of the TAM questionnaire. A few questionnaire items were slightly altered from earlier studies to fit the objectives of the quantitative study. A total of 316 valid questionnaires were collected and analysed using SPSS 26.0.

A conceptual framework was developed for the quantitative study and this is shown as per below. Variables such as self-efficacy, technology readiness, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use acted as independent variables and adoption of artificial intelligence acted as dependent variable while gender acted as moderator in the model.

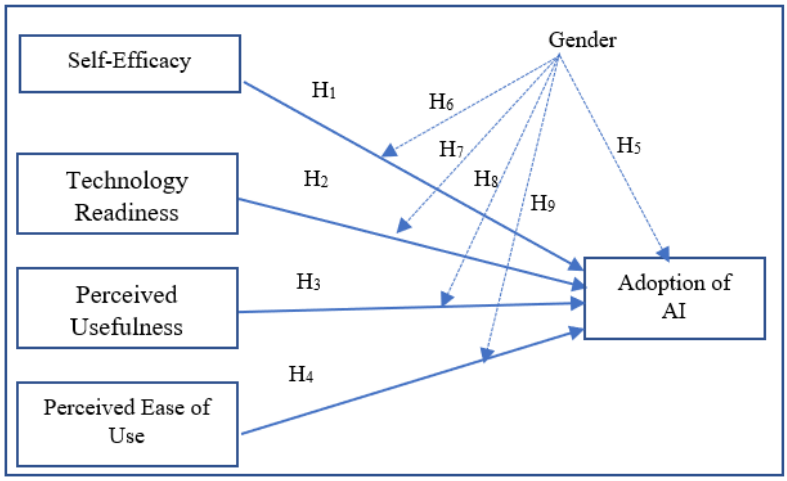

Fig 1. The conceptual Model of the study (Authors' own work)

The following hypothesis are being proposed:
H_1: There is a relationship between self-efficacy and adoption of AI.
H_2: There is a relationship between technological readiness and adoption of AI.
H_3: There is a relationship between perceived usefulness and adoption of AI.
H_4: There is a relationship between perceived ease of use and adoption of AI.
H_5: There is a relationship between gender and adoption of AI.
H_6: Gender moderates the relationship between self-efficacy and adoption of AI.
H_7: Gender moderates the relationship between technological readiness and adoption of AI.
H_8: Gender moderates the relationship between perceived usefulness and adoption of AI.
H_9: Gender moderates the relationship between perceived ease of use and adoption of AI.

4.0. Results

4.1. Demographic Information

This study surveyed 316 valid respondents from public tertiary institutions in Mauritius, mostly undergraduate students (66.3%), with 30.9% females and 60.4% males. Most participants were aged 20–29, with varied academic levels. Participation was voluntary, ensuring a representative and unbiased sample. All demographic information pertaining to respondents are shown in Table 1.

4.2. Descriptive statistics for each construct

Descriptive statistics of each construct item, namely, self-efficacy, technology readiness, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and adoption of AI are presented in Table 2. This includes the mean and standard deviation scores of the items. Table 2 also summarizes the distributional characteristics of the measured variables of the dataset used in this study. Table reveals that the average scores for each dimension surpass the "Neither agree nor

disagree/ Neutral" options for the 5-point scales which indicated a positive perception of artificial intelligence used for learning purposes.

Table 1. Demographic Information of respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	209	60.4
	Female	107	30.9
Age Group	20-29	230	66.5
	30-39	28	8.1
	40-49	50	14.5
	50-59	7	2.0
	Above 60	1	0.3
Marital Status	Single	219	63.3
	Married	77	22.3
	Divorced	5	1.4
	Others	15	4.3
Educational Level	Ongoing Certificate Level Course	8	5.6
	Ongoing Diploma Level Course	5	3.5
	Ongoing Undergraduate Level Course	96	67.1
	Ongoing Postgraduate Level Course	29	20.3
	Ongoing Doctoral Level Course	5	3.5

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of each item in the questionnaire

Construct	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
Self Efficacy (SE)	SE1. I feel confident in my ability to use AI tools effectively to accomplish my tasks.	316	3.48	1.046	-0.510	0.137	0.011	0.273
	SE2. I believe I have the necessary skills and knowledge to get the most out of AI tools.	316	3.35	1.011	-0.266	0.137	-0.358	0.273
	SE3. I feel in control when working with AI tools and can achieve the outcomes I desire.	316	3.42	1.091	-0.489	0.137	-0.259	0.273
	SE4. I am comfortable experimenting and troubleshooting when using AI tools.	316	3.32	1.055	-0.227	0.137	-0.347	0.273
	SE5. I am able to adapt my use of AI tools to fit the specific needs of different projects or situations.	316	3.58	1.134	-0.613	0.137	-0.155	0.273
Technology Readiness (TR)	TR1. I am generally eager to try out new technologies.	316	3.94	1.207	-1.187	0.137	0.486	0.273
	TR2. I stay up-to-date with the latest technological advancements.	316	3.42	1.153	-0.254	0.137	-0.654	0.273
	TR3. I feel comfortable learning and using new technologies.	315	3.73	1.115	-0.790	0.137	0.036	0.274

	TR4. I am willing to invest time and effort to master new technological tools.	316	3.77	1.153	-0.683	0.137	-0.321	0.273
	TR5. I perceive the benefits of using AI tools to outweigh any potential drawbacks.	316	3.61	1.067	-0.505	0.137	-0.164	0.273
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	PU1. Using AI tools would enhance my productivity and efficiency.	316	3.76	1.201	-0.672	0.137	-0.522	0.273
	PU2. AI tools would enable me to accomplish tasks more quickly.	316	3.97	1.189	-1.226	0.137	0.717	0.273
	PU3. AI tools would make it easier for me to complete my work.	316	3.99	1.104	-1.000	0.137	0.217	0.273
	PU4. AI tools would improve the quality and accuracy of my work.	315	3.77	1.155	-0.774	0.137	-0.150	0.274
	PU5. I would find AI tools to be useful in my daily work.	316	3.73	1.260	-0.784	0.137	-0.483	0.273
Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU)	PEOU1. I would find it easy to get AI tools to do what I want them to do.	316	3.60	1.086	-0.585	0.137	-0.253	0.273
	PEOU2. Learning to use AI tools would be easy for me.	316	3.66	1.085	-0.856	0.137	0.326	0.273
	PEOU3. Interacting with AI tools would be clear and understandable.	316	3.57	1.129	-0.720	0.137	0.072	0.273
	PEOU4. I would find AI tools to be flexible to interact with.	315	3.62	1.089	-0.798	0.137	0.283	0.274
	PEOU5. I would find AI tools easy to use.	316	3.66	1.047	-0.667	0.137	0.240	0.273
Adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI)	AI1. I rely on AI tools to help me complete a variety of tasks.	316	3.35	1.157	-0.320	0.137	-0.516	0.273
	AI2. I invest a significant amount of time and effort in learning and using AI tools.	316	3.24	1.060	-0.074	0.137	-0.230	0.273
	AI3. I explore and experiment with new AI tools as they become available.	316	3.42	1.088	-0.391	0.137	-0.593	0.273
	AI4. I am constantly exploring new AI tools and incorporating them in completing various tasks.	316	3.16	1.127	-0.181	0.137	-0.640	0.273
	AI5. I use AI tools on a daily basis to complete my work or tasks.	316	3.10	1.182	-0.145	0.137	-0.695	0.273

It is noted that items such as “TR1” and “PU2” were scored with a high rating compared to the other questions. Under the construct “Adoption of AI”, two questions were scored relatively low with a mean score of 3.16 and 3.10 respectively for questions “AI4” and “AI5”. This suggests that students rarely have the opportunity to explore artificial intelligence at its optimum in their course curricula even though they are keen to learn about new technologies. The constructs show positive perceptions across Self-Efficacy, Technology Readiness, Perceived Usefulness, and Perceived Ease of Use. Technology Readiness and Perceived Usefulness showed the strongest agreement by respondents. The construct Adoption of AI has the lowest mean values, indicating potential barriers or challenges in the frequent use by students. Moreover, the negative skewness under the construct perceived ease of use suggested that many participants find it easier to use.

4.3. Adoption of AI by gender

The adoption of AI tools among participants in Table 3, shows that 66.1% of the male students (209 out of 316) have adopted AI tools and for the female students, a percentage of 33.8% (104 students) have adopted the use of AI. This suggests that male students are more engaged or willing to adopt AI technologies than their female counterparts in this study. This could indicate potential barriers or different attitudes toward AI technology between genders. To bridge this gap, targeted interventions and awareness programs may be necessary to encourage greater female participation in AI adoption.

Table 3. Adoption of AI by Gender

		Frequency	Percent
Gender of Respondents	Male	209	66.1%
	Female	107	33.8%

The disparity between males and females is further confirmed by a Chi-Square test which was performed to examine whether the distribution of AI adoption across genders is significantly different from what would be expected if both genders were equally represented. The test yielded a Chi-Square statistic of 32.92 with a p-value < 0.001, indicating a low significant difference. This means that a slight significant gender disparity is existent in AI adoption in Mauritius.

Table 4. Chi-Square test for Adoption of AI by Gender

Gender of Respondents				Statistic	Std. Error
Adoption of AI	Male	Mean		14.0096	0.27755
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	13.4624	
			Upper Bound	14.5567	
		5% Trimmed Mean		14.1130	
		Median		13.8000	
		Variance		16.100	
		Std. Deviation		4.01247	
		Minimum		4.20	
		Maximum		21.00	
		Range		16.80	
		Interquartile Range		5.20	
		Skewness		-0.218	0.168
		Kurtosis		-0.165	0.335
	Female	Mean		13.3626	0.35876
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	12.6513	
			Upper Bound	14.0739	
		5% Trimmed Mean		13.4180	
		Median		13.6000	
		Variance		13.772	
		Std. Deviation		3.71109	
		Minimum		4.20	
		Maximum		21.00	
		Range		16.80	
		Interquartile Range		4.60	
		Skewness		-0.258	0.234
		Kurtosis		0.229	0.463

4.4. Hierarchical Interaction Regression Analysis

As shown in previous findings, a regression analysis was conducted to ascertain the significance of gender as a predictor for AI adoption in tertiary education. According to the previous findings, the male students were more likely than female students to adopt AI-based tools and technology for learning.

Table 5. Results of Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.650[a]	0.422	0.420	2.99610	0.422	226.930	1	311	0.000
2	.700[b]	0.490	0.487	2.81746	0.069	41.687	1	310	0.000
3	.715[c]	0.511	0.506	2.76378	0.021	13.161	1	309	0.000
4	.715[d]	0.512	0.506	2.76621	0.001	0.455	1	308	0.500
5	.728[e]	0.530	0.517	2.73299	0.018	2.884	4	304	0.023

a. Predictors: (Constant), SelfEfficacy_Centered
b. Predictors: (Constant), SelfEfficacy_Centered, TechnologyReadiness_Centered
c. Predictors: (Constant), Self Efficacy_Centered, Technology Readiness_Centered, Perceived Usefulness_Centered
d. Predictors: (Constant), Self Efficacy_Centered, Technology Readiness_Centered, Perceived Usefulness_Centered, Perceived Ease of Use_Centered
e. Predictors: (Constant), Self Efficacy_Centered, Technology Readiness_Centered, Perceived Usefulness_Centered, Perceived EaseofUse_Centered, Technology Readiness Gender, Self Efficacy Gender, Perceived Usefulness Gender, Perceived EasexGender

This study examined the factors influencing the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) among tertiary students, with a particular focus on Self-Efficacy, Technology Readiness, Perceived Usefulness, and Perceived Ease of Use. A hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to understand the contribution of each factor and to explore the moderating effect of gender on AI adoption. Findings indicate that Self-Efficacy and Technology Readiness are the strongest predictors of AI adoption, while Perceived Usefulness also significantly contributed to adoption behavior. It has been noted that Perceived Ease of Use did not show a significant effect. Gender was found to have a little moderating impact, suggesting slight differences in adoption tendencies between male and female respondents. These findings provide crucial insights for tertiary institutions aiming to enhance AI integration through tailored tertiary courses and technology readiness programs.

5.0. Discussion

The goal of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to build a resilient, sustainable, and inclusive future for the world and its inhabitants. Sustainable development goals, specifically, SDG 4 aims to promote lifelong learning opportunities for everyone while ensuring inclusive and equitable education. Improving reading and competency skills, granting access to high-quality education, and encouraging lifelong learning are essential for promoting sustainable development (Nondo & Mbereko, 2020). The purpose of this study was to investigate empirically the perceptions of tertiary students about the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom.

According to the quantitative results, students, both male and female, had generally favourable opinions on artificial intelligence (AI) in education and acknowledged its benefits for improving student learning. Notably, while perceived ease of use did not increase the predictive power of the model, perceived usefulness had a substantial impact on students' decisions to use AI. This implies that students deviate from conventional models of technology acceptance by prioritising the advantages of AI over its usability (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 1996). Additionally, men appeared to be marginally more open to AI than women, despite small gender-based variations. This supports research that indicates women frequently view AI as more difficult because of their limited experience and gender-based socialisation (Davaki, 2018; Ofosu-Ampong, 2023). According to earlier research, women are also more inclined to think about AI as socially undesirable (Schermerhorn et al., 2008; Kuo et al., 2009), and they are worried that it will make in-person interactions more difficult (Méndez-Suárez et al., 2023). Regression analysis, however, revealed no discernible gender difference in total AI adoption, suggesting that both sexes have comparable views on the possibilities and effects of AI.

In line with the above, theoretical frameworks underpinning gender stereotypes can explain the reasons behind the disparity between male and female perspectives for the adoption of AI in tertiary education. The Social Role Theory posits that the behaviours and perceptions of individuals are influenced by societal expectations related to gender roles. This could indicate that traditional gender stereotypes about the use of technology may have an impact on students when it comes to AI in education, for instance, men may be more likely to be seen as tech-savvy, which could make them feel more comfortable utilising AI technologies, but women may be more likely to feel hesitant or anxious (Duan et al., 2025; Russo et al., 2025). Adding to this, according to research, men tend to be more optimistic and use AI more frequently, whereas women are more anxious and worried about how AI would affect learning and assessment (Stöhr, Ou, & Malmström, 2024). Through the lens of Social Role Theory, which emphasises how cultural norms influence people's attitudes and actions about technology, these distinctions can be further examined in another study.

The results further emphasised how crucial self-efficacy and technological readiness are to the adoption of AI. The adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in education was more likely among students who showed greater levels of technological self-efficacy, or confidence in their capacity to use technology (Sanusi et al., 2024; Kwak et al., 2022). This is consistent with the research by Falebita and Kok (2024) and Esiyok et al. (2024), which highlighted the important influence of technological readiness and self-efficacy on students' desire to use AI technologies. Additionally, in line with Labrague et al. (2023) and Anh et al. (2024), it was discovered that technological readiness was a predictor of both self-efficacy and perceived usefulness of AI.

The study recommends more institutional assistance and university-led campaigns to improve awareness towards AI and to close the digital divide so as to get over these obstacles. This is in line with the recommendations of Aderibigbe et al. (2023), who support institutional support for AI education. In addition, a gender-responsive strategy is essential to assisting female university students in embracing AI. Women in technology can be empowered through mentorship, inclusive AI education, and female role models. Confidence-boosting strategies include addressing issues like bias, providing flexible digital training, and encouraging diverse representation in AI disciplines. Fair participation is further ensured by gender-sensitive research and public awareness, which supports SDG 4's goal of universal access to high-quality education and lifelong learning, particularly for young women.

6.0. Conclusion

The SDG 4, Quality Education, which supports inclusive and equitable education and opportunities for lifelong learning for everyone, is clearly aligned with the aim of this study on gender views in the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) among Mauritius tertiary students. By examining gender-specific viewpoints, the study advances the objective of comprehending and resolving the challenges that both male and female students encounter when adjusting to new technologies such as AI. Integrating AI literacy and digital competence into tertiary education can help close the gender gap and guarantee that all students, regardless of gender, have the skills needed by a rapidly changing digital economy in the Mauritian environment, where SDG 4 is a national priority. The commitment of Mauritius to fair, future-ready education systems under SDG 4 will be further strengthened by future research that examines demographic and academic field inequalities as well as the impact of societal and technological change.

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