



# Influence of Meme Marketing on Student Brand Recall

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## Abstract

The rise of social media has significantly altered digital marketing tactics, with meme marketing becoming a novel method to captivate younger audiences, particularly students. Memes, which are distinguished by their humor, relatability, and cultural relevance, have the capacity to draw attention and affect cognitive functions such as brand recall. This study explores the effect of meme marketing on brand recall among students through a quantitative research approach involving 575 participants. By employing theoretical frameworks like the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Dual Coding Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) model, the research investigates how meme features—humor, relatability, emotional engagement, shareability, and exposure frequency—impact brand recall, with attention acting as a mediating factor. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed with statistical techniques such as correlation and multiple regression analysis. The findings demonstrate that meme marketing significantly boosts brand recall among students. Attention and emotional engagement emerged as the most influential predictors, followed by humor and relatability. Although exposure frequency and shareability also had a positive impact, their effects were moderate. The study further confirms the mediating role of attention, indicating that meme-based content enhances recall by initially capturing users' cognitive focus. These results are consistent with recent studies that emphasize the importance of engaging and emotionally resonant content in improving consumer memory outcomes (Rathi & Jain,

2024; Kim & Kim, 2025). This research contributes to the digital marketing literature by shifting the focus from engagement metrics to cognitive outcomes like brand recall. It also provides practical insights for marketers seeking cost-effective strategies to connect with student audiences through meme-based communication.

**Keywords:** Meme marketing, Brand recall, Students, Social media marketing, Attention, Emotional engagement, Digital advertising



## 1) Introduction and Background with Rationale

The rapid evolution of digital technologies and the pervasive use of social media have dramatically reshaped modern marketing strategies (Reghuthaman & Gupta, 2018). Traditional advertising methods are increasingly being replaced by interactive, user-generated, and entertainment-centric content that resonates more effectively with today's consumers, particularly students and Generation Z. Among these innovative strategies, meme marketing has emerged as a significant and influential tool. This approach involves leveraging Internet memes—humorous, culturally relevant, and highly shareable content—to promote brands and engage audiences in a more relatable manner. In today's digital environment, where consumers are bombarded with information, capturing their attention has become a formidable challenge for marketers. Memes, characterized by their brevity, humor, and integration of visual and textual elements, are particularly effective in overcoming this challenge. Research indicates that meme-based marketing enhances brand engagement and visibility by capitalizing on virality and shared cultural experiences (Kim & Kim, 2025). Additionally, empirical evidence suggests that meme marketing significantly boosts brand recognition and recall, with some studies reporting notable increases in recall levels compared to traditional digital advertising formats (Srivastava & Gupta, 2019). The effectiveness of meme marketing lies in its ability to blend humor, relatability, and emotional appeal, which are key drivers of consumer engagement. Memes align with the communication preferences of students, who tend to favor informal, entertaining, and culturally relevant content. Studies have shown that the humor and relatability in memes strengthen emotional connections with brands, thereby increasing the likelihood of message retention and recall. Furthermore, the viral nature of memes facilitates repeated exposure, reinforcing brand familiarity and enhancing memory retention. From a theoretical perspective, meme marketing can be understood through frameworks such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Dual Coding Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model. Memes primarily operate through the peripheral route of persuasion, where cues like humor and entertainment shape attitudes without requiring extensive cognitive processing. At the same time, the combination of visual and textual elements enhances memory encoding, consistent with the Dual Coding Theory. The S-O-R framework further explains how

meme characteristics (stimuli) influence internal states such as attention and emotions (organism), which in turn affect behavioral outcomes such as brand recall (response). Despite the growing popularity of meme marketing, existing research has largely focused on engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments, with limited attention paid to cognitive outcomes such as brand recall. While engagement reflects immediate interaction, brand recall represents a deeper level of consumer response that is crucial for long-term success. Moreover, the specific role of meme characteristics—such as humor, relatability, emotional engagement, shareability, and frequency of exposure—in influencing recall remains underexplored, particularly among students.

The motivation behind this research stems from the necessity to fill existing gaps in the literature. As meme marketing continues to grow as a leading digital strategy, it is crucial for both scholars and industry professionals to comprehend its effects on cognitive outcomes like brand recall (Gupta & Singh, 2010). Students are a crucial target group due to their active participation in social media and their familiarity with meme culture. However, there is a lack of empirical studies exploring how meme marketing affects memory and brand perception. Additionally, while memes are widely acknowledged for their entertainment value, their effectiveness as a strategic marketing tool for enhancing long-term recall is still uncertain. This study seeks to address this gap by systematically investigating the impact of key meme characteristics on brand recall and exploring the mediating role of attention. The study aims to offer a thorough understanding of how meme marketing can be utilized to engage and leave lasting impressions on student consumers. In summary, this research is both timely and pertinent as it contributes to the expanding field of digital marketing by shifting the focus from engagement to cognitive outcomes. It also provides practical insights for marketers looking for innovative and cost-effective strategies to connect with younger audiences in an increasingly competitive and digital environment.

## 2) Literature review and Theoretical foundation

The rapid rise of social media platforms has fundamentally altered marketing communication, leading to the development of meme marketing as a formidable digital promotion tactic. Meme marketing involves crafting humorous, culturally relevant, and



highly shareable content to engage audiences and convey brand messages in a relaxed way. Unlike conventional advertising, memes emphasize entertainment, relatability, and peer-driven interaction, making them particularly appealing to younger demographics, such as students and Generation Z consumers. Recent studies indicate that meme marketing significantly enhances consumer engagement, visibility, and online interaction because users perceive meme content as authentic and entertaining rather than overtly promotional (Kamath 2024; Kumar et al. 2024). Additionally, brands are increasingly leveraging meme-based campaigns to foster viral communication and deepen emotional connections with consumers in an intensely competitive digital arena. The current literature underscores that meme marketing primarily influences consumer behavior through humor, emotional engagement, and relatability. Humor is a key factor in capturing attention and reducing resistance to advertising messages. Research shows that humorous content boosts message retention and enhances attitudes toward brands by eliciting positive emotional responses (Eisend 2009; Kumar 2026). Similarly, relatability is vital to the effectiveness of memes because consumers are more likely to engage with content that mirrors their everyday experiences and social realities. Emotional engagement also plays a crucial role in cognitive processing and memory retention, as emotionally resonant content strengthens consumer-brand associations (Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Rathi & Jain, 2024). Furthermore, the shareability and viral nature of memes increase repeated exposure, reinforcing consumer familiarity and brand recall. Several theoretical frameworks aid in understanding the impact of meme marketing on brand recall. According to Paivio's (1986) Dual Coding Theory, information presented in both visual and verbal formats is processed and retained more effectively in memory. Because memes combine images, captions, and humor, they enhance memory encoding and retrieval, thereby improving brand recall. Similarly, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) posits that consumers process persuasive messages through central and peripheral routes of processing. Meme marketing primarily operates through the peripheral route, where cues such as humor, entertainment, and emotional appeal influence attitudes and recall without requiring extensive cognitive efforts. The Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) model further explains how meme characteristics (stimuli) affect internal psychological states such as

attention and emotions (organism), which subsequently lead to behavioral outcomes such as brand recall (responses). These theoretical foundations provide strong support for examining the cognitive and emotional effects of meme marketing on college students.

Recent research has increasingly concentrated on how meme marketing can boost consumer engagement and purchasing intentions. Studies suggest that memes enhance digital interactions, brand perception, and emotional connections among social media users, particularly younger audiences who are active participants in meme culture (Kim and Kim, 2025; Janani et al., 2025). Additionally, research has shown that meme marketing increases virality and visibility due to its highly shareable nature, allowing brands to reach broader audiences at a relatively low cost. Moreover, the significance of attention has grown in recent digital marketing studies, serving as a mediating factor between engaging content and consumer outcomes. Scholars contend that memes are particularly effective at capturing user attention because of their concise format, humor, and visual distinctiveness, making them more memorable than traditional advertising methods (Gaonkar 2026). These findings suggest that meme marketing is a powerful strategy for enhancing consumer-brand relationships and recall in digital settings. Despite the expanding body of literature, several research gaps remain. Firstly, most current studies primarily focus on engagement metrics like likes, shares, comments, and purchase intentions, with limited emphasis on cognitive outcomes such as brand recall. Secondly, there is a scarcity of empirical research specifically examining the impact of meme marketing on student populations, even though students are among the most active consumers of meme content. Thirdly, previous research often treats meme marketing as a single entity, with limited exploration of the combined effects of humor, relatability, emotional engagement, shareability, and exposure frequency on brand recall. Additionally, the mediating role of attention in the context of meme marketing effectiveness is still underexplored. Finally, the rapidly changing nature of memes and cultural trends poses challenges in understanding their long-term impact on brand recall and consumer behavior. Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by empirically investigating how meme marketing dimensions affect student brand recall and examining the mediating role of



attention in this relationship (Kamath, 2024; Rathi & Jain, 2024).

### 3) Research Objectives & Hypotheses with Supporting Theories

Objective	Hypothesis	Supporting Theory	Key References
<b>Objective 1:</b> To examine the overall influence of meme marketing on brand recall among students	<b>H1:</b> Meme marketing has a significant positive influence on brand recall among students	Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) Model	Kamath (2024); Rathi & Jain (2024)
	<b>H2:</b> Students exposed to meme marketing demonstrate higher brand recall than those not exposed	Mere Exposure Theory	Zajonc (1968); Campbell & Keller (2003)
<b>Objective 2:</b> To analyze the effect of meme characteristics on brand recall	<b>H3:</b> Humor appeal positively influences brand recall	Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)	Eisend (2009); Weinberger & Gulas (1992)
	<b>H4:</b> Relatability of memes positively influences brand recall	Social Identity Theory	Berger & Milkman (2012); Tellis (2004)
	<b>H5:</b> Emotional engagement positively influences brand recall	Affective Response Theory	Holbrook & Batra (1987); Batra & Ray (1986)
	<b>H6:</b> Shareability of meme content positively influences brand recall	Viral Marketing Theory	Berger & Milkman (2012); Taylor et al. (2011)
	<b>H7:</b> Frequency of exposure positively influences brand recall	Mere Exposure Theory	Zajonc (1968); Campbell & Keller (2003)
<b>Objective 3:</b> To investigate the mediating role of attention	<b>H8:</b> Meme marketing characteristics positively influence attention	Attention-Based Processing Theory	Pieters & Wedel (2004); Teixeira (2012)
	<b>H9:</b> Attention positively influences brand recall	Dual Coding Theory	Paivio (1986); Keller (1993)
	<b>H10:</b> Attention mediates the relationship between meme marketing characteristics and brand recall	Mediation Theory	Baron & Kenny (1986); MacKinnon (2008)

### 4) Research Methodology

The current research employs a quantitative and descriptive methodology to investigate how meme marketing affects students' ability to recall brands. A quantitative approach is suitable as it allows for the assessment of the relationships between meme

marketing variables and cognitive outcomes through statistical methods (Groves et al., 2021). This study utilizes a cross-sectional survey approach, gathering data from participants at a single moment to gauge their perceptions and behavioral reactions to meme-based marketing content. The research is anchored in theories like the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Dual



Coding Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, which elucidate how humorous and visually appealing content impacts attention, emotions, and recall. The target demographic comprises undergraduate and postgraduate students who frequently use social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, as these groups are significantly exposed to meme-based communication (Kotler et al., 2021; Kamath, 2024). The study employs a non-probability convenience sampling method, enhanced with snowball sampling, to gather responses from digitally active students. A sample size of 575 respondents was deemed sufficient to ensure the reliability, statistical power, and generalizability of the results (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms and social media platforms. The questionnaire included two sections: demographic details and construct measurement items related to humor, relatability, emotional engagement, shareability, frequency of exposure, attention, and brand recall. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. A pilot study

## 5) Analysis & Interpretation

was conducted with a small group of respondents to ensure the instrument's clarity and reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70 confirmed acceptable internal consistency (Hair et al., 2017; Joshi et al., 2015). The collected data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS/SmartPLS software. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarize demographic and construct-related responses. Inferential statistical techniques, including correlation analysis, multiple regression analysis, chi-square test, ANOVA, and t-test, were utilized to explore relationships and differences among variables. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was further employed to examine the mediating role of attention between meme marketing factors and brand recall. Reliability and validity were assessed through Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the study by ensuring respondent anonymity, voluntary participation, and the use of data solely for academic purposes (Guenther et al., 2023; Rathi & Jain, 2024).

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Age</b>	18–20 years	150	26.1
	21–23 years	225	39.1
	24–26 years	135	23.5
	Above 26 years	65	11.3
<b>Gender</b>	Male	305	53.0
	Female	270	47.0
<b>Education Level</b>	Undergraduate	345	60.0
	Postgraduate	195	33.9
	Doctoral	35	6.1
<b>Daily Social Media Usage</b>	Less than 1 hour	85	14.8
	1–3 hours	215	37.4
	3–5 hours	175	30.4
	More than 5 hours	100	17.4
<b>Preferred Platform</b>	Instagram	260	45.2
	Facebook	95	16.5
	Twitter/X	70	12.2
	YouTube	85	14.8
	Others	65	11.3

**Objective 1:**

To examine the overall influence of meme marketing on brand recall among students.

**Table 2: Correlation Analysis between Meme Marketing and Brand Recall**

Variables	Meme Marketing	Brand Recall
Meme Marketing	1	
Brand Recall	0.724**	1

Note:  $p < 0.01$

**Table 3: Regression Analysis**

Variable	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	Sig.
Meme Marketing	0.724	19.42	0.000

**Table-4: Model Summary**

R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	Sig.
0.724	0.524	0.521	377.15	0.000

**Objective 2:**

To analyze the effect of meme characteristics on brand recall.

**Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis**

Variables	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	Sig.
Humor	0.214	5.38	0.000
Relatability	0.186	4.92	0.000
Emotional Engagement	0.271	6.84	0.000
Shareability	0.164	4.11	0.000
Frequency of Exposure	0.132	3.26	0.001

**Table-6: Model Summary**

R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	Sig.
0.816	0.666	0.662	225.43	0.000

**Objective 3:**

To investigate the mediating role of attention between meme marketing and brand recall.

**Table 7: Regression Analysis (Meme Variables → Attention)**

Variables	Beta ( $\beta$ )	Sig.
Humor	0.228	0.000
Relatability	0.201	0.000
Emotional Engagement	0.284	0.000
Shareability	0.179	0.000



Frequency	0.148	0.001
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**Table 8: Regression Analysis (Attention → Brand Recall)**

Variable	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	Sig.
Attention	0.318	8.26	0.000

**Table 9: Mediation Effect Summary**

Relationship	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Mediation Type
Meme Marketing → Brand Recall	0.62	0.23	Partial Mediation

**Table 10: ANOVA (Social Media Usage vs Brand Recall)**

Social Media Usage	Mean Brand Recall	Std. Dev
<1 hour	3.42	0.69
1–3 hours	3.79	0.71
3–5 hours	3.97	0.66
>5 hours	4.15	0.61
ANOVA Statistic	Value	
F-value	14.82	
Sig.	0.000	

**Table 11: Independent Sample t-Test (Gender vs Brand Recall)**

Gender	Mean	Std. Dev	t-value	Sig.
Male	3.86	0.72		
Female	3.96	0.68	2.06	0.040

**Table 12: Chi-Square Test (Exposure × Recall Level)**

Statistic	Value
Chi-square	31.84
df	4
Sig.	0.002

Interpretation on demographic profile reveals that the majority of participants were aged 21 to 23 and were predominantly undergraduate students, indicating a demographic that is highly engaged with social media and frequently interacts with meme-based content. Instagram was identified as the most popular platform among these participants, emphasizing its role as a crucial channel for meme marketing initiatives.

Descriptive and correlation analyses showed a robust positive correlation between meme marketing and brand recall ( $r = 0.724$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that meme-based promotional content significantly enhances students' ability to remember brands. These findings are in line

with recent research that suggests memes improve brand visibility and recall due to their humorous, relatable, and visually engaging characteristics (Kamath, 2024; Kumar et al., 2024). The strong correlation indicates that students find meme marketing more engaging and memorable than traditional digital advertisements.

Further regression analysis demonstrated that all dimensions of meme marketing—humor, relatability, emotional engagement, shareability, and exposure frequency—have a significant impact on brand recall. Among these, emotional engagement was the most influential predictor, followed by humor and relatability. This implies that memes that evoke emotional responses



and resonate with students' daily experiences create stronger cognitive associations with brands. These results support the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which posits that entertaining and emotionally appealing content influences attitudes and memory through peripheral processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Similarly, studies have shown that humor-driven and emotionally resonant meme content significantly boosts consumer engagement and memory retention (Rathi & Jain, 2024; Kumar, 2026).

The high explanatory power of the regression model ( $R^2 = 0.666$ ) further confirms that meme characteristics collectively play a substantial role in enhancing brand recall among students. Mediation analysis revealed that attention significantly mediates the relationship between meme marketing and brand recall, indicating that memes initially capture students' cognitive attention before affecting memory retention. This finding aligns with the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, where meme characteristics act as stimuli that trigger internal psychological responses such as attention and emotional engagement, ultimately leading to brand recall. Additionally, ANOVA and chi-square results indicated that increased social media usage and repeated exposure to memes significantly enhance recall levels, supporting the mere exposure effect proposed by Zajonc (1968). The t-test results also showed slight gender-based differences in recall, although meme marketing was generally effective across different groups. Overall, the analysis confirms that meme marketing serves as a powerful digital communication strategy that enhances cognitive processing, attention, and long-term brand recall among students (Kim & Kim, 2025; Janani et al., 2025).

## 6) Discussion and Conclusions

The study's findings reveal that meme marketing plays a crucial role in enhancing brand recall among students, demonstrating that memes are not just for entertainment but also serve as powerful cognitive marketing tools. The identified strong correlation between meme marketing and brand recall suggests that memes, which are humorous, relatable, and emotionally engaging, significantly improve students' ability to remember brands. This observation is in line with recent research that highlights how meme-based advertising boosts consumer engagement and recall by blending visual appeal with cultural relevance (Kamath, 2024; Kumar et al., 2024). The results also support the Dual Coding

Theory, which posits that information presented in both visual and textual formats is more effectively encoded and retained in memory. By integrating images, captions, and humor, memes create stronger associative links in consumers' minds, thereby enhancing brand recall. The study further underscores that emotional engagement and attention are the most influential factors in predicting brand recall among students. Emotional engagement emerged as the most significant variable in the regression analysis, indicating that memes capable of evoking emotions such as humor, excitement, or relatability lead to deeper cognitive processing and stronger memory retention. This finding aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which suggests that peripheral cues like humor and emotional appeal can shape consumer attitudes and recall without requiring extensive cognitive effort (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Additionally, the mediating role of attention confirms that meme marketing initially captures users' focus in a crowded digital environment before influencing recall. Recent studies have reported similar findings, suggesting that attention and emotional resonance are critical mechanisms driving the effectiveness of meme marketing among younger audiences (Rathi & Jain, 2024; Kim & Kim, 2025). The results also indicate that relatability and shareability significantly contribute to recall, suggesting that students are more likely to remember brands associated with memes that reflect their everyday experiences and social culture. The study concludes that meme marketing is a highly effective and cost-efficient digital marketing strategy for targeting student consumers. Repeated exposure to meme-based content on social media platforms significantly enhances familiarity and memory retention, supporting the mere exposure effect proposed by Zajonc (1968). The ANOVA and chi-square analyses further confirmed that students with higher social media usage exhibited stronger brand recall, emphasizing the importance of digital engagement in modern marketing communication. Overall, the findings suggest that brands aiming to connect with younger audiences should strategically incorporate humor, emotional appeal, and culturally relevant meme content into their marketing campaigns. However, the success of meme marketing depends on maintaining authenticity, creativity, and timely relevance, as overuse or poorly designed memes may reduce engagement and negatively affect brand perception. In conclusion, meme marketing represents a powerful convergence of entertainment and persuasion that can significantly strengthen brand recall and



consumer connection in the contemporary digital landscape (Janani et al., 2025; Gaonkar, 2026).

## 7) Research Implications & Limitations

The study's findings offer crucial insights for both theoretical and practical applications in the burgeoning field of digital marketing and consumer behavior. On the theoretical front, this research expands upon existing literature by illustrating that meme-based communication significantly impacts cognitive outcomes, such as brand recall, rather than merely driving engagement metrics like likes or shares. The pronounced effects of emotional engagement, humor, and attention lend support to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Dual Coding Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, which help explain how meme marketing influences consumer cognition and memory. The study reveals that meme characteristics function as external stimuli, eliciting emotional and attentional responses that enhance recall and retention among students. These findings are in line with recent studies that emphasize the power of visually engaging and emotionally resonant meme content in strengthening brand memory and consumer engagement (Kamath, 2024; Rathi & Jain, 2024). Thus, the study contributes to digital marketing theory by framing meme marketing as a potent cognitive persuasion tool, rather than just an entertainment-driven social media trend. From a managerial perspective, the study offers practical insights for marketers, advertisers, and social media managers targeting student and Generation Z demographics. Since emotional engagement and attention emerged as key predictors of brand recall, organizations should craft meme campaigns that are humorous, relatable, culturally relevant, and emotionally engaging. The findings suggest that brands can boost recall and visibility by creating memes that resonate with students' everyday experiences and social media culture. Additionally, the importance of exposure frequency indicates that consistent meme-based communication fosters familiarity and strengthens consumer memory through repeated interactions. These findings align with recent research highlighting meme marketing as a cost-effective strategy that generates high engagement and strong brand connections among younger consumers (Kim & Kim, 2025; Janani et al., 2025). Consequently, businesses, startups, educational institutions, and digital marketers can strategically incorporate meme marketing into their promotional efforts to enhance brand recognition and consumer interaction in the competitive digital landscape.

While the study offers valuable insights, it is important to recognize its limitations. Firstly, the research is centered solely on students, which restricts the applicability of the results to other demographic groups, such as working adults or older consumers. Secondly, the study employs a cross-sectional approach, limiting the exploration of the long-term impacts of meme marketing on brand recall. Thirdly, the reliance on self-reported survey data introduces the possibility of response and social desirability biases. Furthermore, the study only investigates certain meme characteristics, including humor, relatability, and emotional engagement, shareability, and exposure frequency, while neglecting other aspects like meme type, platform-specific influences, and brand familiarity. The fast-paced evolution of memes also poses a challenge, as trends shift rapidly, potentially diminishing the relevance of the findings over time. Recent studies (Gaonkar, 2026; Kumar et al., 2024) have similarly noted concerns about the short-lived and context-dependent nature of meme marketing. Consequently, future research should consider longitudinal designs, encompass a wider range of populations, and examine additional variables to achieve a more thorough understanding of meme marketing's effectiveness.

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