

Sustainable Practice in Fashion Supply Chains—A Case of Two Companies

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Abstract. This study focuses on the roadmap for sustainable fashion supply chain management and examines the specific measures adopted by luxury fashion brands to achieve sustainability in their supply chain management. The findings of this study may offer valuable insights and guidance for other brands looking to implement sustainable supply chain management practices.

Keywords. Sustainable practices, supply chain management, luxury, case study

1. Introduction

The fashion industry has been criticized by the public for exploiting workers, destroying ecosystems and the environment, accelerating the depletion of natural resources and increasing textile waste[1]. Sustainability has become a common concern in the fashion industry[2]. In the way of sustainable development, enterprises are faced with various challenges, such as the increase of costs and technological innovation[3].

Given the importance sustainable practices play in illuminating progress towards achieving sustainability goals, this study makes noteworthy contributions in the literature in better understanding fashion brands' priorities and to identify what could be improved in the supply chains(SC).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sustainable Challenges for Luxury Enterprises

Luxury can be broadly defined as products that can obtain higher prices than other products with comparable tangible functions[4]. Compared with non-luxury goods, luxury goods are synonymous with excellent quality, uniqueness and enterprising spirit[5]. The production of luxury goods involves complex SC that extends globally and includes numerous participants, including a large number of small, highly skilled suppliers who are closely monitored by the brand owners[6]. Many luxury SC now go far beyond the origin country of the brand to include countries with lower labor costs[7]. The extension of sustainable behavior from key companies through their supply

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networks has become one of the most complex business challenges as globalization has created a situation where suppliers are scattered around the world and thus need to comply with different environmental and social regulations[8]. Globalization has presented luxury companies with unprecedented challenges, including the increasing consumer demands for sustainability and transparency[6]. Therefore, luxury groups now have to prioritize sustainability and equity in their operations[9].

In recent years, there has been a growing trend of luxury companies adopting sustainable practices in their SC[10]. However, it has been found that for some luxury fashion companies, the primary motivation behind sustainable development is to reduce the negative impact of their operations on the environment, such as reducing water and energy usage, which is more about cost reduction than environmental concerns[10]. Sustainable luxury still face challenges, including conflicting views on traditional luxury market segments and occasional resistance from the supply side[7]. This paper response to the calls of previous scholars to explores the sustainable measures of the two luxury groups in supply chain management, so as to provide suggestions for sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) for other luxury companies.

2.2. Content Analysis and Research Process

Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research method for investigating the sustainability reports in recent years[11]. It interprets meaning from the content of text data and follows the naturalistic paradigm. Content analysis is applied to make reproducible and effective inference from text to its context of use[12]. In this study, content analysis is applied to analyze the annual or sustainability reports issued by the companies and summarize their sustainability practices along their SC in accordance with the theoretical framework[11,13].

We followed a qualitative codification process[14]. First, texts (sentences, paragraphs, and sections) related with the company's overall supply chain management approach were recorded on a separate sheet from the main reports for further analysis. In the next step, sentences that included these 5 sub-codes were identified and assessed as to whether they are actually used in accordance with the developed framework and how they are articulated and practiced by the company. That is, the coding process aimed to provide both quantitative and qualitative information about the on-going SSCM approach of the two groups. In doing so, while the existence and frequency of each category was measured throughout the texts[15]. The new categories were also identified to explore new trends and changes in SSCM. In order to ensure the reliability of the coding process, each text was investigated independently by two researchers. In the case of disagreement during this process, the dispute was resolved through the involvement of a third researcher[12].

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Roadmap towards sustainability can help achieve alignment of organizational and operational practices within companies[16]. Previous studies have presents different kinds of roadmaps as a useful tool for implementing sustainable practices in fashion industry[17, 18]. The roadmap developed by Antonella Moretto et al (2018) is adopted

in this study as it is well build with a supply chain perspective, considering both environmental and social practices[19]. The roadmap is made up of five levels, each consisting of specific sustainability operational practices and objectives.

To make the roadmap more suitable for this study, we expanded upon the original roadmap developed by Antonella Moretto et al. (2018) in several ways. While the original roadmap focused on social and environmental sustainable practices, we added the description of economic sustainable measures, as there is a consensus that sustainable development is determined by a dynamic balance between the economic, social, and environmental pillars[20]. Specifically, we added "local economic development" and "fair procurement price" from Turker and Altuntas (2014) in the second and third levels, respectively[1, 19]. We also clarified and supplemented the practices in the roadmap to better identify sustainable practices of focal companies. For example, we divided "supplier collaboration" in the fourth step into "supplier cooperation and communication" and "supplier improvement," with the latter identified as providing support for suppliers, such as expert consultants, financial support, and supplier empowerment[1]. In addition, we added "establishing a network and long-term relationships with suppliers" to "supplier cooperation and communication," as it is increasingly recognized that competitive advantages come from SC, not just companies, and efficient SC can be achieved through closer relationships with key suppliers[1]. Overall, our study enriched the sustainability roadmap by identifying 8 sustainable practices in level 1, 14 practices in level 2, and 4 practices in both level 3 and level 4. Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of the implementation of the sustainability roadmap with five levels represented vertically and various practices shown horizontally.

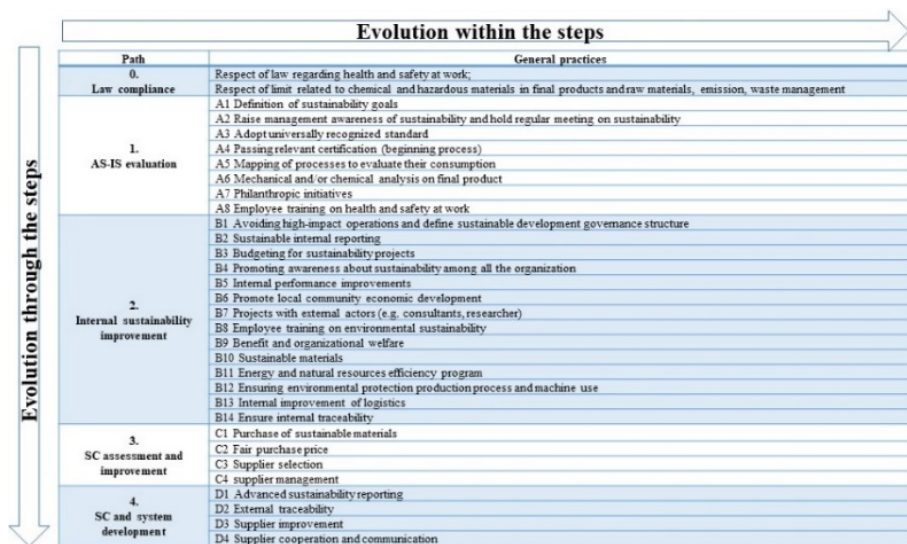


Figure 1. The Detail evolutionary process of implementing the sustainability roadmap

3.2. Sample Selection and Data Collection

Acknowledging the responsibility of focal companies as key agents for creating sustainable value in global and intricate SC[21], this study focuses on the sustainability reports or corporate social responsibility reports of two prominent luxury groups: LVMH

and PRADA[22, 23]. These reports are mostly prepared following the guidelines set out in "the Sustainability Report Guide" by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) [24]. Activities reported by each company towards sustainability, as described in their annual and sustainability reports, have been summarized for analysis. Table 1 provides basic information about the sample companies.

Table 1. Basic information of the sample companies

Company Headquarter		Title of report	Period	Supplier definition	Number of suppliers
PRADA	Milan, Italy	Social Responsibility Report	2020	Long-established partners	670 material suppliers; 370 manufacturing suppliers
LVMH	Paris, France	Social and Environmental Responsibility Report	2020	Partners, key links in the value chain	1071 suppliers and subcontractors

4. Research Results

The SSCM framework adopted in this study has been modified to be an action-oriented disclosure framework, comprising five levels and 30 detailed practices identified as key to sustainability. The sustainability measures of the two luxury groups at different stages in accordance with this framework were presented as follows.

4.1. Level 0--Law Compliance

As law compliance is the basis for the company to trade and an important driver for sustainability, both PRADA and LVMH attach great importance to comply with laws and avoid negative effects.

4.2. Level 1--AS-IS Evaluation

AS-IS evaluation aims to help companies assess sustainability potential and promote awareness about sustainability among managers including eight operational and organizational practices in fashion industry:

① Definition of sustainability goals

Sustainability goals are defined in the annual reports or sustainability reports of the two groups. Specifically, PRADA emphasized that sustainability goals is to provide customers with delicate, high-grade and high-quality products that embody PRADA integrity and reputation, while LVMH clarified that the goal is to develop talent and skills, constant attention to working conditions, preventing all forms of discrimination while respecting individuality, and community engagement to help local populations. As can be seen from these objectives, PRADA focus more on the product dimension in implementing sustainability initiatives while LVMH emphasize social responsibility.

② Raise management awareness of sustainability and hold regular meetings on sustainability

As regards to the training of managers in sustainable knowledge, LVMH mentioned that their newly hired managers will be systematically trained in CSR. With regard to internal meetings on sustainability, the main members of the LVMH corporate social responsibility team meet regularly two to three times a year. However, PRADA do not mention any regular arrangements in the report.

③ Adopt universally recognized standard

The universally recognized standard include: LCA (Life cycle assessment), EMAS (European Eco-Management and Audit Scheme), UNGC (United Nations Global Compact), ILO (International Labor Organization), OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), ISO 26000 and else. It is reported that LVMH is a member of UNGC and the ILO. In addition, LVMH implemented product life-cycle assessments (LCA) and adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, Prada did not report relevant data in its sustainability report.

④ Passing relevant certification

Passing relevant certification are strong evidence that enterprises implement sustainable measures. Through the daily monitoring, annual audit and management review unique to the certification system, the enterprise can find the problems existing in the management in time to meet the requirements of continuous improvement. Both PRADA and LVMH have LEED gold grade certified stores, it shows that these two groups attach importance to the construction of green buildings. Regarding other certifications, LVMH has passed the certification of ISO14001 and OHSAS18001.

⑤ Mapping of processes to evaluate their consumption

Environmental protection is the basic goal of sustainable development. For enterprises, environmental protection needs to review the internal energy use, water consumption and air pollution. Perhaps because the luxury group's products are mostly manufactured in developed countries in Europe, where the equipment is advanced and the impact of the production process on the environment is relatively small. They did not report relevant information.

⑥ Mechanical and/or chemical analysis on final product

The luxury groups did not directly mention the inspection process of its final product, but PRADA described it as “the highest quality product”.

⑦ Philanthropic initiatives

In terms of participation in philanthropic initiatives, businesses are sustainable mainly from supporting local communities and supporting specific projects. To support local communities, LVMH provided skills training for farmers, donation of goods to communities, provision of volunteer services, etc., while PRADA did not mention supporting activities. With regard to support for specific activities, the LVMH specifically describes the relevant activities it supports, including support for start-ups, empowerment of women, support for vulnerable children, the establishment of internal carbon funds, etc., while PRADA established PRADA Foundation to organize activities in the field of arts and culture. What's more, Prada converted the Torgiano plant in Umbria, Italy, to produce personal protective equipment and scrubs to donate to hospitals and employees. Prada also supported scientific research on the novel coronavirus and made more donations.

⑧ Employee training on health and safety at work

Employee health and safety is the basis of enterprise operation and operation. Both the two groups trained employees on safety and health. In addition, the luxury groups count the personnel involved in the training to ensure the progress of training implementation.

4.3. Level 2--Internal Sustainability Improvement

The main objectives of the second level are to raise awareness of sustainability throughout the organization and to improve internal logistics. There are 14 general

practices, which can be divided into two parts, the first part is mainly focus on human and the second part is concentrated on material.

- People-oriented sustainability improvement

① Avoiding high-impact operations and define sustainable development governance structure

To effectively address sustainable problems, enterprises should identify a sustainable development governance structure and key personnel responsible for implementing policies and measures while avoiding high-impact operations. In 2016, PRADA and LVMH established the Commission on Sustainable Development, with the PRADA committee responsible for discussing the group's social responsibility issues with various departments and determining its strategic direction. The board of directors is responsible for setting up the group's sustainability strategy and ensuring appropriate and effective risk management and internal control systems are in place.

② Sustainable internal reporting

For internal sustainability reports, PRADA group published its first Social Responsibility Report in 2013, while the LVMH began to prepare internal environmental reports in 2001.

③ Budgeting for sustainability projects

The budgeting for sustainable projects typically includes specific small internal budgets as well as fixed annual budgets. In January 2020, the PRADA Group signed a new Sustainability Linked Term Loan with the leading global Japanese bank, Mizuho, with a five-year term. However, the other group did not specify any relevant measures in the report.

④ Promoting awareness about sustainability among all the organization

When establishing a sustainable ambassador, LVMH HR will appoint a head and an auditor for each company to check the data in employee reports. However, the other roles were not mentioned. In 2007, PRADA implemented specific guidelines to enhance staff awareness of sustainable development and "translate sustainability into everyday action." In 2019, the company established the Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Council. Similarly, LVMH provides sustainable training materials for employees and facilitates discussion of employee management issues through networks.

⑤ Internal performance improvements

Providing economic incentives or compensation to managers and employees based on sustainable goals can be an effective way to improve internal performance. However, neither group mentioned any specific incentive methods in their public reports.

⑥ Promote local community economic development

PRADA proposes that local communities can receive 1% of the total income of group holders to promote their economic development. In contrast, LVMH supports local communities through procurement policies and provides training to livestock farmers on sustainable farming techniques. Both luxury groups aim to promote the development of local communities through their initiatives.

⑦ Projects with external actors (e.g. consultants, researcher)

External communication by both groups is primarily carried out through expert meetings. PRADA organized a conference called "Shaping the Creative Future" with over 300 attendees, including students, professors, professionals, entrepreneurs, and journalists to explore new opportunities for creative and sustainable development. LVMH holds an annual sustainable meeting, where participants include members of non-profit organizations, professionals, academics, and students from cooperative institutions. Additionally, LVMH held three expert meetings on environmental sustainability.

⑧ Employee training on environmental sustainability

Employee training on environmental sustainability typically includes two aspects: introducing green construction solutions and introducing ecological building solutions to improve the environment. PRADA provides training for its employees with a focus on "reasonable electricity." On the other hand, LVMH did not mention any relevant training for its employees in its public reports.

⑨ Benefit and organizational welfare

Organizational welfare typically includes medical benefits, flexible work systems, and other related aspects. In terms of medical benefits, only PRADA mentioned providing additional medical funds to purchase medical insurance for immediate metals. Regarding flexible work, PRADA emphasizes that it makes work more efficient, while LVMH provides various subsidies and allows for work on weekends and nights. LVMH is also committed to reducing work stress and providing psychological counseling services to employees. Overall, luxury groups offer significant organizational benefits, with PRADA emphasizing flexible working and medical benefits, and LVMH providing a wider range of benefits.

• Sustainability Improvement Based on Material

① Sustainable materials

Sustainable materials at this stage mainly refer to environmental packaging and shopping bags. Both PRADA and LVMH clarified the use of green packaging.

② Energy and natural resources efficiency program

The implementation of the energy and natural resources efficiency program consists of two main components: improving energy efficiency and using renewable energy. For improving energy efficiency, PRADA provides low-power LED lighting and has expanded "the Replacement of Lighting Systems project" to industrial bases, resulting in a 55% reduction in energy consumption. LVMH uses LED and organic light-emitting diodes, as well as increasing natural lighting, to reduce energy consumption. For the use of renewable energy, PRADA purchases electricity from certified renewable energy suppliers and focuses on photovoltaic business projects while using authentic energy whenever possible. In 2020, the PRADA Group ensured that 100% of the electricity for all its Italian offices was supplied by sustainable sources with Guarantees of Origin.

③ Ensuring environmental protection production process and machine use

Measures to ensure environmentally friendly production processes and machine use include the use of new, clean technologies to conserve water and minimize air pollution, implementing energy efficiency projects, and upgrading production machinery to improve efficiency and reduce energy consumption. For implementing energy efficiency projects, PRADA collaborates with energy conservation companies to evaluate potential projects, install digital multimeters to monitor and optimize electricity consumption, and gradually replace less-efficient air conditioners with newer, energy-efficient models. They also install converters on motors that don't have them. In contrast, LVMH provides financial support for sustainable projects through partnerships with colleges and universities, develops new designs and materials, and builds factories and warehouses with the highest energy-saving standards in mind. LVMH has constructed about 30 eco-friendly buildings over the past decade.

④ Internal improvement of logistics

Logistics improvement involves both internal improvement of logistics and redesigning logistics networks to improve the environment. Transportation is a fundamental aspect of logistics management and plays a crucial role in connecting the different nodes of the supply chain. Both LVMH and PRADA have taken action to

redesign their logistics networks to improve the environment, with PRADA completing the second part of its new logistics hub by the end of 2017. However, luxury groups, in general, prioritize the overall improvement of their logistics networks.

⑤ Ensure internal traceability

Ensuring internal traceability refers to ensuring the traceability of information between different processes such as workplace use, personnel operation, information transfer and so on within a limited range. The information sharing of supply chain system is the basis of resource scheduling. Since the companies has special purchasing, production, sales and other departments, internal traceability is an important way for each department to understand the information of product production, which should belong to the necessary measures in the supply chain of these two groups.

4.4. Level 3--SC Assessment and Improvement

The objective of the third level is to analyze sustainable practice performance at the supply chain level. Mainly includes purchase of sustainable materials, fair purchase price, supplier selection and upplier management.

① Purchase of sustainable materials

The purchase of sustainable materials involves procuring environmentally friendly and certified materials, as well as recovering raw materials. PRADA ensures the highest quality and reduces raw material consumption by procuring such materials, while also introducing innovative and sustainable materials in its fashion collections. LVMH prioritizes natural materials and designs reusable packaging to reduce waste and save resources. Both companies also focus on the procurement and use of recyclable raw materials, with PRADA using recyclable bags that are properly recycled by specialized companies.

② Fair purchase price

Purchasing price justice plays an important role in maintaining market trade balance and promoting sustainable economic development. PRADA did not mention their procurement policy, while LVMH emphasizes the importance of fair and transparent procurement and is willing to pay market-independent prices for raw materials to ensure responsible procurement. In terms of fair purchase prices, both luxury groups prioritize the quality and sustainability of raw materials.

③ Supplier selection

Supplier selection is based on environmental and social indicators, supplier certifications, and geographical location, while also complying with the requirements of the Restricted Substances List (RSL) or the Manufacturing Restricted Substances List (MRSL). To ensure high-quality materials, luxury companies carefully select suppliers based on environmental and social indicators, certification, and compliance with restricted substance lists. LVMH requires its suppliers to have Sedex certification and comply with the Supplier Code of Conduct, while PRADA requires its suppliers to sign a code of ethics and follow a list of qualified suppliers, with a focus on sustainable development. PRADA's suppliers also have received RSL from the company. Both companies prioritize quality over price in supplier selection, and have a complex evaluation process.

Of the two groups, only LVMH clearly states the required supplier certifications, while the other group does not specify their supplier selection criteria. For PRADA, the basic condition for supplier cooperation is the signing of a code of ethics, along with the implementation of a list of qualified suppliers procedure. PRADA generally sources its

suppliers from regions that produce high-quality leather raw materials while focusing on sustainable development. In contrast, LVMH requires its suppliers to meet the Sedex certification and Supplier Code of Conduct requirements. PRADA updated its list of restricted substances in 2014, and its suppliers have received RSL from the group. However, LVMH did not mention any restricted substance list requirements.

④ Supplier management

Supplier management is a crucial component of supply chain management, encompassing supplier audit, supervision, code of conduct extension, and sanctions. Luxury groups typically take a two-pronged approach to supplier sanctions, starting with corrective actions to address any violations before implementing long-term management strategies. If the consequences of the violations are serious, such as breaches of legal, ethical, or sustainability standards, luxury goods groups may opt to terminate the contract with the supplier immediately.

By adopting a comprehensive approach to supplier management, luxury groups can maintain high standards and uphold their reputation for quality and sustainability. PRADA conducts supplier audits by collecting relevant documentation, certifications, and self-declarations to ensure that suppliers meet cooperation requirements. In supplier supervision, PRADA technicians regularly visit the manufacturing sites of raw material suppliers and subcontractors, evaluate production schedules, assess the quality of goods and overall workplace environment, and systematically update and check data for authenticity and consistency. PRADA has a policy in place for suppliers who violate regulations. If the violation can be corrected, the supplier may be required to temporarily suspend work, but if the violation is deemed serious, including violations of moral, technical, or economic requirements, termination may occur immediately.

Both PRADA and LVMH extend their code of conduct to suppliers, with PRADA stipulating that a code of ethics is a prerequisite for all contractual relationships, and LVMH requiring suppliers to adhere to the Supplier Code of Conduct, which prohibits forced labor, child labor, harassment, discrimination and excessive working hours.

4.5. Level 4--SC and System Development

The goal of the fifth stage (Level 4) is to redesign the network and guarantee the development of new technologies, new processes, new materials at the supply chain level. The fifth stage includes general practices such as increased sustainable reporting, external traceability, supplier improvement and supplier cooperation and communication.

① Advanced sustainability reporting

Advanced sustainability reporting typically includes two specific components: guidelines for the preparation of sustainable development reports, and external communication through websites, public reports, and advertising. Since the sample is based on the group report prepared by GRI-G4, both two groups have implemented measures for components. For external communication, each of the two groups has established a sustainability column on their official website to help consumers understand their sustainability efforts. By providing transparent and accessible information, these groups demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and engage stakeholders in their efforts.

② External traceability

External traceability refers to the ability to trace the status of a product from the purchase of raw materials to the stages of processing, distribution, and sales. Currently, this information can be primarily obtained from the product tag, and both two groups

have implemented this measure. LVMH has emphasized the importance of material traceability and compliance in their product manufacturing.

③ Supplier improvement

There are two specific practices involved in supplier improvement: supplier training and providing support activities for suppliers. Supplier training involves sharing knowledge with suppliers and actors of the supply chain. LVMH provides sustainable training to suppliers, including responsible procurement and knowledge related to the EU Chemicals Regulations (REACH). Since 2014, LVMH has organized an annual supplier sustainable development day. In terms of supplier support activities, PRADA employs around 291 technicians, each with at least 10 years of experience, to provide technical support to suppliers. On the other hand, LVMH provides technical support for environmental protection to suppliers. They also provide expert consultants, financial support, and empower suppliers.

④ Supplier cooperation and communication

Cooperation and communication between core enterprises and suppliers involve three specific measures. The first is to develop new processes and technologies with suppliers and supply chain participants. Neither of the two companies mentioned this measure. The second measure is to participate in development projects aimed at improving sustainability practices. PRADA did not mention this measure, while LVMH is committed to sustainable digital transformation and has established the LVMH Innovation Award. The third measure is to establish a network and long-term relationship with suppliers by signing relevant contracts with all companies in the supply chain to clarify the role of trade alliance. Both companies have not mentioned this measure specifically in the reports.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The paper compiles a list of parameters on the sustainability aspects of the supply chain and examines them against the published reports of two luxury groups. The analysis shows that both enterprises have good sustainable measures at Level 0. At Level 1, four indicators have been observed by both enterprises. However, only LVMH has adopted the two parameters of raising management awareness of sustainability and adopting universally recognized standards. Furthermore, the two indicators of mapping processes to evaluate consumption and conducting mechanical and/or chemical analysis on the final product are not well followed or reported by either group. In Level 2, both enterprises have well-observed seven indicators in people-oriented sustainability improvement. Only Prada has specified relevant measures for budgeting sustainability projects, and neither enterprise mentioned measures for internal performance improvements. Regarding sustainability improvement based on materials, both enterprises have clarified the five parameters. In Level 3, both companies have well-implemented measures except for Prada's failure to mention measures related to fair purchase prices. At Level 4, both companies have clarified advanced sustainability reporting, external traceability, and supplier improvement. However, only LVMH has undertaken to participate in projects aimed at improving sustainability practices related to supplier cooperation and communication. Overall, the two luxury companies have followed most of the sustainability parameters, but there is still room for improvement.

The research findings on SSCM in the luxury fashion industry have provided some insights on sustainability but it is limited by the sample size. Therefore, better cross

examination and validity of the parameters could be considered if it is extended to more brands in the future research.

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