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THE CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENT ACTIVISM IMAGES IN SOUTH KALIMANTAN'S LOCAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the construction of student imagery in local media coverage in South Kalimantan during the 2019–2024 period. The primary focus is directed at how students are represented in the context of demonstrations through online media jejakrekam.com and langkar.id. A total of 157 articles were analyzed using instruments based on three main dimensions: Language/Tone, Content Focus, and Content Visibility. This study uses a quantitative-descriptive approach combined with qualitative reading, and is analyzed using the theoretical framework of Agenda Setting, Framing, Social Construction of Reality, and Communication Influence. The results show that both media do not construct the image of students as moral actors or symbols of change as is common in the historical narrative of the Indonesian student movement. The representation of students is mostly neutral and administrative, without strong symbolic content. The media tend to convey the reasons for the demonstrations informatively, but do not highlight the narrative of the impact or sustainability of the student struggle. Although the demonstrations are routinely covered and accompanied by multimedia elements, the distribution of content on social media is relatively low. These findings indicate a tendency towards depoliticization of narratives about students in local media, which has resulted in a weakening of the symbolic and political construction of students in the contemporary public sphere.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout Indonesia's history, students have played a pivotal role in the country's political transformation. This can be seen in at least three milestones in Indonesian history: first, the Youth Pledge in 1928, known as the initial sign of the emergence of Indonesian nationalism; second, the student movement in 1966 that articulated Tritura, or Three Demands of the People, which coincided with the end of the Old Order and the birth of the New Order; and third, the student movement in 1998, which marked the end of the New Order and the beginning of the Reformation era (Sastramidjaja, 2019). The central role of students in Indonesia's political dynamics resonates with similar student movements in other countries. Researchers have observed similar events in different countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where students played key roles in anti-colonial and nation-building movements (Aspinall, 2012; Weiss & Aspinall, 2012).

Therefore, it is not surprising that students—and young people in general—have become the focus of political scholars due to their significant role in every major change that occurs in every country. Specifically for Indonesia, Edward Aspinall (2012) wrote that: "*of the countries of East Asia, Indonesia is one where student mobilization has been most prominent and most politically consequential*."

Furthermore, these Indonesianists identified a crucial characteristic in the study of the student movement in Indonesia: the assumption that students are political actors, free from practical political interests, and act solely based on noble morality to "save" the country. Public expectations of students often involve the view that they are an intellectual group that becomes the nation's hope when the country is in a state of crisis (Aspinall, 2012; Haekal et al., 2023; Sastramidjaja, 2019). This is precisely what happened in the three major political events in Indonesian history, as mentioned earlier.

However, the presence of students as moral actors in Indonesian politics raises several important questions that warrant further investigation. One central question is: what role will they assume when, say, the "struggle" against tyranny is over, and the country has emerged from its critical period and entered the era of democracy? Aspinall offers an interesting analysis. He argues that democracy actually "kills" the student movement in national politics. This is a direct consequence of their role as moral actors, which is only needed in critical situations. Democracy relocates the student-led "street parliament" to a formal parliament, represented by the House of Representatives (DPR) and the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) (Sastramidjaja, 2019; Weiss & Aspinall, 2012).

This diminished role of students correlates with the perception that the image of students in the reform era has also undergone a shift. The impression is emerging that post-reform students are closely associated with hedonistic, apathetic political attitudes, rendering them irrelevant as moral actors. Even when students do demonstrate, they are often accused of being pawns exploited by other political actors, meaning they no longer possess agency as independent political entities (Aspinall, 2020; Espia, 2023). This impression is further reinforced by national media coverage and social media conversations about the large-scale student demonstrations in 2019 and 2020, in which students protested the irregularities in the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) Law and the Job Creation Law. Accusations began to emerge that the student protests were exploited by political actors opposing the government and that the students themselves lacked a clear understanding of what they were fighting for (Lengauer, 2024; Nowak, 2021; Sastramidjaja, 2024; Sinaga et al., 2022).

Is this shift in student image really happening? This is the core of this research. The focus will be on identifying the portrayal of students in local media in South Kalimantan. Media coverage of students is an appropriate indicator for determining the image captured and constructed by the media. Research on the image itself is a crucial focus in communication science, particularly in the context of political communication (Assa & Harahap, 2025; Maharani & Pratiwi, 2024). There are at least four theories/concepts relevant in discussing this student image: (1) Agenda Setting Theory; (2) Framing Theory; (3) Social Construction of Reality; and (4) Communication Influence (Berger & Luckmann, 2023; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Gamson et al., 1992; M. E. McCombs et al., 2018). Together, these four concepts/theories will help explain how an issue can come to the surface, how it is perceived, how the “reality” about the problem is formed, and how the diffusion of that “reality” occurs.

This research aims to fill the gap in the topic of student image in Indonesia. Numerous studies have been conducted on student image in Indonesia, as previously mentioned (Espia, 2023; Setiawan & Tomsa, 2022; Weiss & Aspinall, 2012). One of the studies most relevant to this research is the paper by Haekal et al. (2023), which describes Yogyakarta students' views on the image of moral actors inherent in them. The difference with this research lies in its location in South Kalimantan and its contribution to thinking that addresses the topic of students outside Java.

2. METHOD

To investigate whether there has been a shift in the image of students in local media coverage in South Kalimantan, this research was conducted in several stages. The first step was a literature review, which served as a basis for thinking and identifying relevant theories/concepts to address the research question (Levy & Ellis, 2006). At this stage, analytical tools were found that could be used to identify the construction of students' images in Communication Science: Agenda Setting Theory; Framing Theory; Social Construction of Reality; and Communication Influence (Berger & Luckmann, 2023; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Gamson et al., 1992; M. E. McCombs et al., 2018; Treviño et al., 2000).

The second stage involved selecting relevant local media outlets in South Kalimantan. The

selection focused on local online media outlets based in South Kalimantan. Two local media outlets were selected for this stage: langkar.id and jejakrekam.com. These two local media outlets were selected due to their broad reach and established networks within the local online media landscape. This stage also involved data mining on news related to the student protests on these two local news portals from 2019 to 2024.

The third stage is the development of an instrument synthesized from previous literature and the calculation of scores for the student news reporting data obtained. This instrument consists of three dimensions: (1) Language/Tone used; (2) Content Focus; and (3) Content Visibility.

For the language/tone dimension used, the first indicator scores positively if the word choice is supportive of students, such as "brave" and "heroic," and so on. A neutral score if the words used are balanced. A negative score is given if the word choice is antipathetic, such as 'anarchist', 'destroyer', and so on. The second indicator scores positively if the depiction of students is: idealistic, responsible, and similar. A neutral score if the depiction is without judgment. A negative score if the depiction of students is characterized as individuals, manipulative, and others. For the third indicator, a positive score indicates the depiction of the government as a repressive party. A neutral score if the depiction is objective. A negative score is the depiction of the government as the maintainer of order.

Table 1.

Research Instrument (Source: Synthesized from Berger & Luckmann, 2023; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Gamson et al., 1992; McCombs et al., 2018; Treviño et al., 2000)

No	Dimensions	Indicators
1	Language/Tone used	Word Choice
		Portrayal of students
		Portrayal of the government
2	Content Focus	Explanation of the reasons for the student action
		A depiction of how student action took place
		Depiction of the impact of student action
3	Content Visibility	Quantity of news coverage
		Use of multimedia elements
		Multiplatform metrics

In the second dimension of Content Focus, for the first indicator, a positive score is given if the reasons for the student action are fully explained. A neutral score is given if only a brief explanation is given. A negative score is given if the reasons for the action are not explained at all. For the second indicator, a positive score is given if the emphasis is on peaceful action. A neutral score is given if the description is brief. A negative score is given if the emphasis is on the destructive aspects of the action. For the third indicator, a positive score is given if the results of the action are linked to constructive change. A neutral score is given if no results are mentioned. A negative score is given if the results of the action emphasize the damage/riots that occurred.

The third dimension of Content Visibility, for the first indicator, a high score is given if the coverage is presented comprehensively. A medium score is given if the coverage is general. A low score is given if the coverage contains only a little information. For the second indicator, a high score is given if multimedia (photos/videos) are used to increase the clarity of the information. A medium score is given if the use of multimedia does not add information/is irrelevant. A low score is given if no multimedia is used. For the third indicator, a high score is given if the content is widely shared or trending. A medium score is given if the content is visible but not trending. A low score is given if the content is shared low (low social media sharing).

The third stage is analyzing the results of the scoring of the research instruments used. Qualitative analysis is conducted to describe the findings and relate them to relevant concepts and theories.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzed 157 news articles about student protests published by two local online media outlets in South Kalimantan between 2019 and 2024: 134 articles from jejakrekam.com and 23 articles from langkar.id. Each article was coded using an instrument comprising three main dimensions—Language/Tone, Content Focus, and Content Visibility—derived from a synthesis of four theoretical frameworks: Agenda Setting, Framing, Social Construction of Reality, and Communication Influence. Scores for each indicator illustrate the media's tendency to represent students, the government, the reasons and dynamics of the protests, and the level of coverage visibility. The scoring results were then analyzed descriptively and further explored through qualitative reading to understand how the image of students was constructed, directed, and influenced by the reporting strategies of the two media outlets.

1. Dimension 1: Language/Tone used

The first dimension of this analysis covers how the media chose words, portrayed students, and portrayed the government in the context of reporting on the student protests. The three leading indicators within this dimension—word choice, portrayal of students, and portrayal of the government—aim to capture the narrative nuances and tone of the reporting that shape public perceptions of the actors involved.

Based on the scoring results of 134 articles on jejakrekam.com and 23 articles on langkar.id, it was found that both media outlets generally showed a neutral to slightly negative tendency towards students. In terms of word choice, the average score in both media tended to be neutral (close to zero on average), but jejakrekam.com showed a more varied use of diction, while langkar.id was relatively consistent in using more straightforward and descriptive language.

Figure 1. Example of a Negative Portrayal of the Government on jejakrekam.com



MASSA turun ke jalan mengusung tiga tuntutan. Yakni, masalah pengesahan Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana (KUHP) baru oleh DPR RI dan pemerintah, penolakan perpanjangan masa jabatan kepala desa (kades) serta masalah lingkungan yang melanda wilayah Provinsi Kalsel. Di antaranya, kelanjutan penyelesaian jalan negara yang amblas di Satui, Tanah Bumbu akibat dampak pertambangan batubara.

Mengenakan jaket almamater masing-masing kampus, mahasiswa pun menggelar long march berjalan kaki dari RTH Kamboja. Jalan Adenansi menuju gedung dewan di pusat kota Banjarmasin.

Begitu tiba di Jalan Lambung Mangkurat, depan Rumah Banjar (sebutan Gedung DPRD Kalsel), para orator BEM Seka pun bergantian berorasi di hadapan massa yang duduk di aspal jalan.

BACA : HMI Banjarmasin Minta Petinggi Kampus Jangan Intervensi Mahasiswa Ketika Demo

Mereka juga membentangkan spanduk dan poster berisi tuntutan serta sentilan soal pekerjaan rumah (PR) Kalsel yang belum selesai. Sayangnya, massa lintas kampus harus menelan kekecewaan. Ternyata, para wakil rakyat yang hendak ditemui di Rumah Banjar, tak satu pun mau menghadapi pengunjuk rasa.

Regarding the depiction of students, the majority of articles in both media outlets presented a neutral representation. The very low average score—approaching zero—indicates that students are often positioned as entities without prominent moral or ideological judgments. They are rarely portrayed as heroic, idealistic, or responsible actors, but they are also not explicitly constructed negatively. This indicates a depoliticization of student narratives, where reporting no longer positions them as central subjects in the flow of social change.

The third indicator, reflecting the portrayal of the government, shows a more pronounced pattern. Jejakrekam.com's score tends to be hostile toward the government (average score -0.39), indicating that this media outlet relatively frequently highlights government actions as repressive, unaccommodating, or unresponsive to student demands. Meanwhile, langkar.id displays a more neutral tendency, with a less dominant or explicit portrayal of the government in its news narratives.

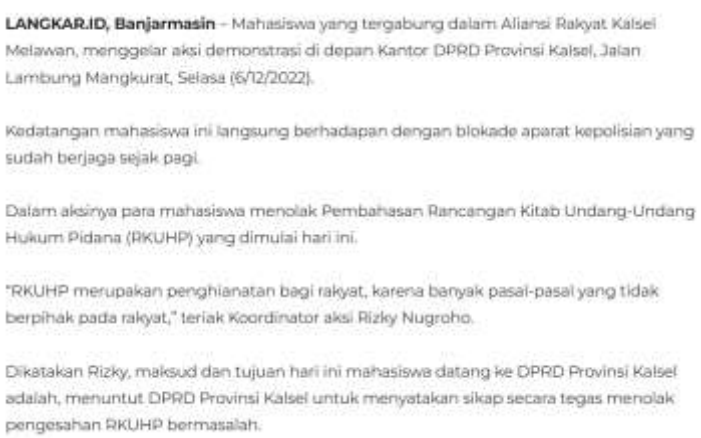
This finding can be interpreted within the framework of Framing Theory, where the choice of language and representation of actors can form a frame for public interpretation of an event (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Scheufele, 1999). When students aren't explicitly portrayed as positive entities, and the government is often portrayed negatively, the resulting image isn't a moral struggle between idealism and power, but rather a flat, polarizing narrative. This suggests that local media in South Kalimantan tend to frame student protests as purely factual events, with no intention of constructing symbolic images of the actors involved.

2. Dimension 2: Content Focus

The second dimension of this analysis focuses on the substantial content of media coverage of student protests. This dimension includes three leading indicators: (1) explanations of the reasons for the protests, (2) depictions of the protests' progress, and (3) narratives about the impact of the protests. This dimension reflects how the media responded to and assessed the significance of student protests as a form of political participation and public expression.

Based on the scoring results of 134 articles from jejakrekam.com and 23 articles from langkar.id, it was found that the indicator explaining the reasons for the protests received a relatively high average score in both media outlets. This indicates that most articles provided a reasonably comprehensive explanation of the background of the protests, including the issues surrounding the rejection of the Corruption Eradication Commission Law, the Job Creation Law, and various other controversial policies. This finding reflects the media's efforts to convey the root causes behind the protests, which, from the perspective of Agenda Setting Theory, play a role in elevating specific issues to the public sphere.

Figure 2. Example of a Description of the Reasons for Student Actions on langkar.id



LANGKAR.ID, Banjarmasin – Mahasiswa yang tergabung dalam Aliansi Rakyat Kalsel Melawan, menggelar aksi demonstrasi di depan Kantor DPRD Provinsi Kalsel, Jalan Lambung Mangkurat, Selasa (6/12/2022).

Kedatangan mahasiswa ini langsung berhadapan dengan blokade aparat kepolisian yang sudah berjaga sejak pagi.

Dalam aksinya para mahasiswa menolak Pembahasan Rancangan Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana (RKUHP) yang dimulai hari ini.

"RKUHP merupakan penghianatan bagi rakyat, karena banyak pasal-pasal yang tidak berpihak pada rakyat," teriak Koordinator aksi Rizky Nugroho.

Dikatakan Rizky, maksud dan tujuan hari ini mahasiswa datang ke DPRD Provinsi Kalsel adalah, menuntut DPRD Provinsi Kalsel untuk menyatakan sikap secara tegas menolak pengesahan RKUHP bermasalah.

Regarding the demonstration's progress, both media outlets showed a neutral to positive trend. Positive scores emerged when the demonstration was portrayed as peaceful, orderly, or accompanied by dialogue with authorities. Conversely, negative narratives—depicting chaos or clashes—were rare. This suggests that local media did not perpetuate the damaging stigma surrounding student demonstrations. In the context of Framing Theory, this means the press did not provide a frame that emphasized the riots, but rather the democratic process of conveying aspirations (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

Meanwhile, the third indicator, the impact of the action, showed mixed results. In some articles, the effect of the action was described as constructive, such as creating a space for dialogue or attracting government attention. However, many articles failed to mention the impact at all or emphasized that the action was completed without tangible results. This suggests that the visibility of the action is not always accompanied by a clear articulation of its concrete impact on policy. From a Social Construction of Reality perspective, the absence of an impact narrative can cloud public perception of the effectiveness

of student action and reinforce the impression that the action is merely a symbolic ritual without substantive implications (Berger & Luckmann, 2023; Gamson et al., 1992).

It could be said that the content focus dimension shows that both media outlets still provide space for articulating the issues and context of student protests. However, this space is more informative than argumentative. In other words, the media present the background and process of the protests descriptively, but rarely link them to narratives that support or question the legitimacy of the student movement in depth.

3. Dimension 3: Content Visibility

The third dimension of this analysis focuses on the visibility aspect of content, specifically the extent to which the media presents student action as a significant issue deserving of public attention. Three indicators analyzed in this dimension include: (1) quantity of news coverage, (2) use of multimedia elements, and (3) virality or distribution of content through social media.

The analysis reveals that, in terms of the quantity of news coverage, both media outlets tended to feature student protests with a relatively high level of intensity. This is evident from the relatively consistent frequency of coverage over the past five years. Jejakrekam.com, a more quantitatively productive media outlet with 134 articles, indicates that issues related to student protests continue to receive consistent coverage. All articles obtained the maximum score for this indicator. This suggests that local media outlets consider this issue to be highly relevant and warrant ongoing public attention.

Figure 3. Multimedia Elements and Content Distribution Options on jejakrekam.com



In terms of multimedia element usage, both jejakrekam.com and langkar.I've achieved consistently high scores. Nearly all articles were supported by photos and, in some cases, videos. The presence of these visual elements enhances the media's role in conveying information in a more

immersive and credible manner. Within the Communication Influence framework, the use of multimedia can increase the appeal and reach of a message, as well as strengthen the audience's impression of the covered event (Treviño et al., 2000).

However, regarding the virality indicator, which measures content dissemination through social media, most articles from both media outlets received low scores.. The data show that, although these articles were published online, they rarely achieved high levels of sharing or became trending topics on social media platforms. This indicates limitations in message diffusion, resulting in one-sided news coverage of the student protests that fails to generate widespread discussion in the digital public sphere. These findings suggest that local media's exposure to student protests is intense in terms of quantity and visual representation, but weak in terms of interactivity and virality. From the perspective of Agenda Setting Theory, this suggests that while the media has given space to student issues, they have not succeeded in transforming them into a dominant public agenda or sparking widespread citizen participation(M. McCombs, 2005; M. E. McCombs et al., 2018). The lack of virality can also be interpreted as a form of limited influence of local media in building digital resonance amidst a media ecosystem dominated by national platforms and global social media algorithms.

4. Comparison of jejakrekam.com and langkar.id

An analysis of two local media outlets in South Kalimantan—jejakrekam.com and langkar.id—shows distinct differences in how each media outlet frames the student protests, both in terms of narrative and exposure. These differences relate not only to the number of articles produced, but also to their representational approach to the actors, events, and their impact on the public sphere.

In terms of quantity, jejakrekam.com was significantly more productive, with a total of 134 articles, compared to langkar.id's 23. This reflects jejakrekam.com's greater editorial capacity in highlighting local issues, including the dynamics of the student movement. The high number of articles also reflects the media's consistent portrayal of student protests as a significant event in South Kalimantan.

In terms of language and tone, jejakrekam.com tends to be bolder in presenting narratives critical of the government. A negative score on the government portrayal indicator indicates that this media outlet does not hesitate to highlight the repressive aspects of the apparatus or officials in their response to student protests. Meanwhile, langkar.id is more moderate in its reporting style. The narratives it presents are more neutral and tend to position students and the government equally without explicit sentiment. In other words, langkar.id acts as an information provider with a more conventional and descriptive journalistic approach.

In terms of content focus, both media outlets focused on the substance of the issues raised by the students. However, jejakrekam.com tended to provide a more detailed background to the demonstration and provided space for a narrative about the movement's continuity. Langkar.id, while more concise, still conveyed the reasons for the demonstration and how it unfolded, but did not thoroughly explore the political impact or consequences of the action. This may indicate a difference in editorial strategy between media outlets oriented toward progressive reporting and more conservative outlets in their exploration of contested issues.

Finally, in terms of content visibility, both featured articles were enriched with multimedia elements, but were less successful in building virality or broad digital resonance. The fact that both scored low on the social media dissemination indicator indicates their limited influence in shaping broader public opinion through the digital ecosystem. This also demonstrates that local media still face significant challenges in reaching a wider audience amid competition from national media outlets and social media algorithms.

In general, jejakrekam.com appears more active, critical, and expansive in its coverage of student issues, while langkar.id is more cautious and informative. These differences in approach reflect the plurality of the local media landscape in South Kalimantan, while also highlighting the complexity of constructing student imagery in the digital news sphere.

5. Student Image Construction: Strengthening or Weakening?

The analysis of these three dimensions reveals that the construction of student images by local media in South Kalimantan occurs within a complex, layered, and heterogeneous news landscape. Within the context of Agenda Setting Theory, both local media outlets explicitly provided space for student issues to surface. By placing student actions as part of recurring news coverage—particularly on jejakrekam.com—the media indirectly shaped the public's perception that these actions were necessary to pay attention to. However, this agenda tended to be temporary and reactive, not continuing in the form of in-depth coverage or media advocacy for the issues raised by students.

From a Framing Theory perspective, the media does not frame students as dominant moral actors, as is often the case in narratives of student movements in previous decades. There is no strong framing that portrays students as idealistic champions or agents of change. Instead, students often appear within descriptive, neutral, or even characterless narratives. The narratives that are formed are technical and informative, without an emphasis on heroism, resistance, or political exemplarity. This suggests that the media's framing of students does not create a strong or symbolic collective image, but weakens their position as meaningful political actors.

Furthermore, within the framework of the Social Construction of Reality, it can be seen that the reality of the student movement is discursively shaped through language choices, visual elements, and frequency of reporting. When reporting fails to provide narrative space about the impact of the action or the importance of the student role, the resulting social construction is one of students as mere accompaniments to events, rather than the primary subjects of change. Inconsistent and less prominent representations contribute to the public perception that the student role has diminished in relevance, or even lost its once-strong moral and ideological characteristics.

In the context of Communication Influence, local media had limited influence in driving broader public discourse on the student protests. Despite routine coverage and multimedia elements, the content's low virality suggests that the news did not resonate strongly in the digital public sphere. This indicates that the local media's ability to influence public opinion remains hindered by broader information distribution structures, including the dominance of national press, algorithmic social media platforms, and shifting information consumption patterns among younger generations.

The four theories used in this study reveal a familiar pattern: that the image of students in local media is not shaped by grand, powerful narratives, but rather by sporadic, neutral narratives with limited reach. Rather than constructing an image of students as drivers of socio-political change, local media tend to portray them as more administrative and passive. This shift is a significant reflection on the dynamics of the relationship between media, social movements, and symbolic power in local democracy.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study aims to identify and analyze how local media in South Kalimantan construct the image of students in reporting demonstrations during the 2019–2024 period. By using an instrument that covers three main dimensions—Language/Tone, Content Focus, and Content Visibility—and based on four theoretical frameworks: Agenda Setting, Framing, Social Construction of Reality, and Communication Influence, it was found that the representation of students in local media occurs in a pattern that tends to be neutral, fragmentary, and has limited reach.

In general, the two media outlets analyzed—jejakrekam.com and langkar.id—did not frame students as moral actors or symbols of change, as was the dominant narrative of the previous student movement. Students were more often portrayed in descriptive news reports, lacking strong symbolic content or ideological values. While the reasons for the actions were often well-explained, narratives about their impact were rare, and depictions of both students and the government tended to be neutral or flat.

In terms of visibility, coverage of the student protests was consistent, particularly by jejakrekam.com, but it failed to generate resonance on social media. This demonstrates the limited

influence of local media in shaping broader public opinion, particularly in an era of increasingly centralized information flows through national media and global digital platforms.

These findings suggest a tendency to depoliticize narratives about student movements at the local level. When the media no longer frames students as subjects of change, the symbolic space that once strengthened their position in national politics tends to weaken. This poses a unique challenge for local democracy, particularly in ensuring that critical voices and aspirations of the younger generation retain space in an increasingly dense and competitive public information flow.

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