



Intermedia Agenda-Setting Dynamics in Digital Media Reporting on AI Ethics

Ridwan Nasution^{1*}, Febry Ichwan Butsi², Junedi Singarimbun³, Nanang Arianto⁴

^{1,2,3}Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

⁴STAIN Mandailing Natal, Indonesia

Email : ridwan.nasution@fisip.uisu.ac.id *

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) has generated growing ethical concerns related to governance, accountability, human rights, and social risk. In Indonesia, these concerns increasingly emerge within a complex media environment characterized by interactions between mainstream online news media and social media platforms. This study examines how AI ethics discourse is constructed and circulated through intermedia agenda-setting processes. The study uses a quantitative content analysis paired with intermedia agenda-setting approaches to examine AI ethical coverage in mainstream online news media and social media over a specific period. The findings show that mainstream online news media maintains agenda leadership in affecting the relevance and timeliness of AI ethical debate, notably through governance- and regulation-focused framing. This study enhances intermedia agenda-setting theory by applying it to AI ethics and provides empirical insights into the media's influence on ethical communication and regulation of emerging technologies in Indonesia.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence Ethics; Indonesia; Intermedia Agenda Setting; Online News Media; Social Media

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INTRODUCTION

The advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has profoundly altered several areas in Indonesia, including the economy, administration, education, and media (Khan, 2024). The Indonesian government is developing a National Artificial Intelligence Roadmap to serve as a strategic framework for expediting AI adoption and investment, while simultaneously drawing foreign investment amid global technical rivalry (Aziz et al., 2025). This initiative indicates that AI has become a national priority within the country's technological and digital economic development agenda. Nevertheless, the expansion of AI also raises a range of social, legal, and ethical challenges that require serious attention from both policymakers and the public (Zaenal & Astuti, 2025). Public debates surrounding AI are no longer confined to technical or economic considerations. Government entities and principal players have begun addressing ethical issues by formulating preliminary regulatory frameworks. The Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs, for example, has emphasized the development of AI-related rules that highlight ethical and security considerations as part of a larger national legal framework (Zuiderwijk et al., 2021). Furthermore, ethical standards for AI usage have been established in the form of official circulars, emphasizing concepts such as inclusion, openness, responsibility, and data protection (Maria & Riswadi, 2024). These activities indicate rising institutional understanding of the societal hazards and ethical considerations inherent in the deployment of AI technology (Oktaviani, 2024).

AI discussions in Indonesia have expanded beyond policy and industry practices to include mainstream and social media platforms (Revolusi & Febriandy, 2025). Indonesian mass media have an important role in molding public perceptions of AI; yet, empirical research reveals that media coverage is still significantly biased toward industrial and economic themes (Sonni et al., 2025). A survey of 777 AI-related news stories from five major Indonesian online news channels discovered that approximately 59% of the coverage focused on AI industrial advancements, while talks on societal impacts, ethical issues, and regulatory concerns were somewhat underrepresented. The study also found that business sources dominated, indicating possible bias that might restrict public exposure to AI's ethical and social implications. Other research exploring media narratives about AI in Indonesia have shown three prevailing framing tendencies: technical optimism, cautious realism, and dystopian pessimism (Zhou et al., 2024). Among them, technical optimism reigns supreme, with a significant amount of media material promoting AI as a solution to numerous informational and societal concerns (Denia, 2025). This hopeful narrative continues despite low levels of public digital literacy, which may limit critical engagement with the larger ramifications of AI adoption (Sánchez et al., 2025).

Research into Indonesian journalists' opinions on the use of AI in newsroom operations reveals additional ethical obstacles, such as data bias, transparency in AI-generated material, privacy concerns, and copyright issues. Although most journalists recognize the productivity improvements provided by AI in news creation, these studies show a lack of comprehensive training programs, institutional initiatives, and formal regulatory frameworks to assure the ethical use of AI in journalism. This gap emphasizes the need for more scholarly research into how AI ethics is mediated inside media institutions. Collectively, our data show that both mainstream and social media in Indonesia play an important role in molding public opinions of AI. However, the ethical dimension of AI discourse is still heavily impacted by industrial narratives and traditional news agendas. This condition reveals an important gap in existing scholarship regarding how AI ethics agendas circulate across media platforms from mainstream news media to social media and vice



versa and how these interactions shape broader public agendas. While international literature on intermedia agenda setting has shown that media agendas one another dynamically depending on issue characteristics and platform affordances, empirical studies applying this framework to AI ethics in the Indonesian context remain scarce.

This research gap is particularly significant because debates on AI ethics extend beyond technical considerations and enter political, social, and cultural domains that affect how societies envision technological futures. This study seeks to address this gap by mapping the intermedia agenda-setting dynamics between mainstream online media and social media in Indonesia concerning AI ethics coverage, with the aim of identifying agenda leadership and patterns of frame transfer across platforms. The study's goal is to gain a better understanding of the role of mainstream media and social media in creating public agendas related to AI ethics by evaluating temporal trends and dominating frames over a certain time period. Aside from its theoretical contribution to extending intermedia agenda-setting research into the domain of emerging technologies, this study also addresses a practical need to understand how ethical information about AI is communicated and interpreted by the public in a rapidly changing digital media landscape. This research is unique in that it combines temporal intermedia agenda analysis with a specific ethical framing method within the Indonesian setting, providing insights into the role of media in the construction of ethical and responsible AI discourse.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative content analysis and an intermedia agenda-setting technique to investigate the dynamics of AI ethical coverage across mainstream online news media and social media in Indonesia (Ghanad, 2023). The research design was chosen to capture both the distribution of issues and frames as well as the temporal relationships that indicate agenda leadership between media platforms (Kotronoulas et al., 2023). Individual news items published by mainstream online news agencies, as well as individual messages made on social media platforms, were used to analyze artificial intelligence in regard to ethical, social, legal, or governance problems. Mainstream online news outlets were chosen based on their audience reach, institutional reputation, and significance in shaping national public debate. Social media platforms were chosen because of their high degree of public interaction and growing effect on news agendas and policy discussions in Indonesia (Disman et al., 2017).

Data was collected throughout a specific observation period to record heightened public conversation on AI ethics, notably during policy announcements, regulatory debates, or public concerns around AI usage (Ghanad, 2023). Keyword-based searches were used to collect news items, which included phrases like "artificial intelligence," "AI ethics," "ethical AI," "algorithmic bias," "data privacy," and their Indonesian-language counterparts. To ensure cross-platform comparability, social media data was collected using the same keyword method. The dataset removed duplicate content, irrelevant remarks, and purely technical AI debates that had no ethical implications. All collected items were coded using a structured coding scheme developed from prior intermedia agenda-setting and framing studies. The coding instrument was designed to identify issue salience and ethical framing. Issue salience was operationalized by tracking the frequency and prominence of AI ethical concerns in each medium across time. Ethical frameworks were classified into theme characteristics typically seen in the AI ethics literature, such as governance and regulation, risk and damage, human rights and justice, transparency and accountability, economic



and labor implications, and technological optimism. Each item might have many frames, but the dominant frame was determined depending on emphasis and narrative focus.

To guarantee dependability, coder training was provided prior to the primary coding procedure. A trial coding phase was carried out on a portion of the data to improve category definitions and coding instructions. Cohen's kappa coefficient was used to examine intercoder reliability, and reliability values above the typically recognized minimal threshold in communication research, showing a high level of coding consistency. Intermedia agenda-setting study was carried out by looking at the temporal link between AI ethical coverage in online news media and social media. Time-series statistics were generated by aggregating the frequency of AI ethical elements by media over consistent time periods. A cross-lagged correlation analysis was used to see if changes in agenda salience. Changes in one media preceded changes in the other, showing agenda leadership or followership. This method enabled the detection of directional effects rather than simply correlation.

In addition to agenda salience, frame transfer between media was investigated by determining if dominating ethical frames presented in one medium surfaced in another with a measurable time lag. This investigation shed light on how ethical narratives about AI spread across platforms and which media actors influenced the conceptualization of AI ethics. Ethical concerns were resolved by examining only publicly available media information. No personal or private information was gathered, and all social media data was anonymised to focus on speech patterns rather than individual individuals. The study followed ethical research guidelines in communication and media studies. By integrating content analysis with intermedia agenda-setting approaches, this methodological approach allowed for a systematic assessment of how AI ethical agendas and frames are produced, disseminated, and negotiated throughout Indonesia's modern media landscape. This strategy provides empirical rigor while allowing the findings to make a significant contribution to both intermedia communication theory and applied concerns about ethical AI governance.

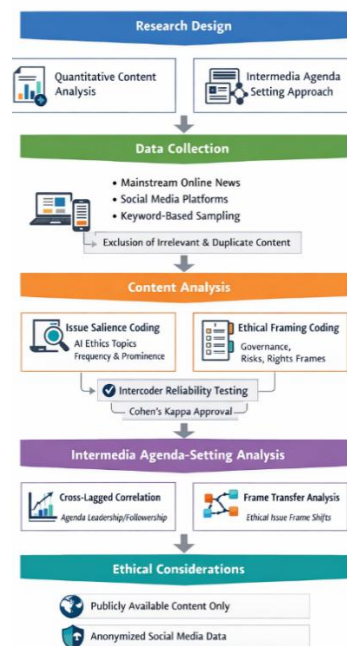


Figure 1. Methodological Flowchart of Intermedia Agenda-Setting Analysis of AI Ethics Coverage in Mainstream Online and Social Media



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings of the study on intermedia agenda-setting dynamics in AI ethics coverage across mainstream online news media and social media in Indonesia (Kermani et al., 2025). The analysis focuses on issue distribution, agenda salience, ethical framing, intermedia agenda leadership, and frame transfer patterns to provide a comprehensive understanding of how AI ethics discourse is constructed and circulated in the contemporary media ecosystem.

Distribution of AI Ethics Coverage

The first analysis examines the overall distribution of AI ethics related content across mainstream online news media and social media platforms. This distribution provides an initial indication of which media play a dominant role in sustaining public discourse on AI ethics.

Table 1. Distribution of AI Ethics Content by Media Type

Media Type	Number of Items	Percentage
Mainstream Online News Media	412	58.6%
Social Media Platforms	291	41.4%
Total	703	100%

Compared to social media platforms, major online news media cover AI ethics at a higher percentage, as Table 1 illustrates. This result implies that the major sources of consistent and organized discussion on AI ethics in Indonesia continue to be institutional media. The ethical aspects of AI, such as legislation, governance frameworks, and social effect, are frequently covered by news organizations in-depth stories, policy assessments, expert interviews, and explanatory pieces (Nenno, 2025). Social media material, on the other hand, is typically more fragmented and episodic while having a significant volume. Rather than being a part of an ongoing ethical conversation, social media debates frequently start in response to certain news events, disputes, or viral examples. This trend reflects social media's reactive and participative character, where algorithmic amplification, emotional resonance, and immediacy rather than editorial planning shape public attention. As a result, the distribution shows an unequal but complimentary connection between the two media types, with social media serving as forums for public discussion and amplification and mainstream media serving as agenda initiators.

Salience of AI Ethics Issues

The study analyzed problem salience based on the frequency and temporal consistency of AI ethical coverage across media channels in order to further evaluate agenda strength. In agenda-setting research, salience is essential because it captures both the existence of a problem and its perceived significance over time (Shi & Wang, 2023).

Table 2. Salience of AI Ethics Issues Across Media

Media Type	Mean Weekly Frequency	Standard Deviation
Online News Media	19.6	4.3
Social Media	13.1	6.8

When compared to social media, Table 2 shows that mainstream online news sources exhibit higher and more consistent issue salience. Regardless of transient shifts in public interest, the very low standard deviation for online news indicates a steady editorial commitment to AI ethics. Agenda-setting power is characterized by its consistency, which enables news outlets to keep AI ethics a hot subject in the public conversation. Social media, on the other hand, has far greater



diversity but a lower average frequency. Sharp increases and decreases in attention are indicated by the greater standard deviation, which frequently correlates with significant announcements, scandals, or emotionally charged stories. The event-driven logic of social media platforms, where attention is ephemeral and greatly impacted by trending processes, is reflected in this volatility. These results support the idea that conventional media are better at maintaining long-term agenda prominence for complicated ethical concerns, even though social media can shape public attention in the short term.

Ethical Framing Patterns

Beyond problem salience, this study looked at how AI ethics is portrayed across media channels. Framing analysis exposes the interpretative lenses through which AI ethics is presented to the public, as well as distinctions in narrative focus between institutional and participatory media (Listiyoningsih et al., 2025).

Table 3. Dominant Ethical Frames in AI Coverage

Ethical Frame	Online News (%)	Social Media (%)
Governance and Regulation	34.2	18.6
Risk and Harm	21.8	31.9
Human Rights and Fairness	17.4	22.7
Transparency and Accountability	15.6	14.1
Economic and Labor Impact	7.1	9.8
Technological Optimism	3.9	2.9
Total	100	100

The results in Table 3 reveal a clear framing difference between mainstream and social media. The majority of online news media coverage on AI ethics focuses on governance and regulation, stressing legal frameworks, governmental responsibility, expert opinions, and institutional accountability. This framing is consistent with journalistic standards that value authoritative sources and policy relevance, supporting mainstream media's position as intermediaries between technical advancement and public governance. In contrast, social media prioritizes risk and damage framing, emphasizing possible threats such as monitoring, prejudice, job loss, and the abuse of AI technology. These frameworks frequently stem from personal experiences, activist narratives, and public worry, expressing the lived and emotional components of ethical concern. The increased appearance of human rights and justice frameworks on social media demonstrates widespread concern about concerns of discrimination and inequality produced by algorithmic systems. This disparity shows that ethical meaning-making around AI varies across media platforms, with mainstream media stressing structural solutions and social media emphasizing experiential and moral issues.



Intermedia Agenda-Setting Relationships

To determine agenda leadership, an intermedia agenda-setting study was performed across time utilizing cross-lagged correlations between online news media and social media.

Table 4. Cross-Lagged Correlation Results

Direction of Influence	Lag (Weeks)	Correlation (r)
Online News Media → Social Media	+1	0.62
Online News Media → Social Media	+2	0.54
Social Media News → Online News	+1	0.28
Social Media News → Online News	+2	0.21

The findings show that mainstream online news media has a considerable agenda-setting impact on social media, especially with one- to two-week time delays. This trend indicates that news coverage of AI ethics typically precedes and spurs discussion on social media platforms. In other words, even in a mixed media environment, mainstream media continues to set the agenda. The smaller associations in the other direction show that social media debates occasionally impact news agendas, but this influence is limited and selective. (Elhajjar & Yacoub, 2024). Social media influences news coverage largely when topics receive great prominence or public pressure, such as viral scandals or moral panics (Elhajjar & Yacoub, 2024). These data support the concept that intermedia agenda framing in Indonesia is still lopsided, with institutional media maintaining structural dominance (Chani & Olugbara, 2025).

Frame Transfer Between Media

The final analysis examined frame transfer to understand how specific ethical narratives move between media platforms.

Table 5. Direction of Ethical Frame Transfer

Ethical Frame	Primary Source Medium	Secondary Medium
Governance and Regulation	Online News Media	Social Media
Transparency and Accountability	Online News Media	Social Media
Risk and Harm	Social Media	Online News Media
Human Rights and Fairness	Both (Hybrid)	Both

Table 5 depicts an asymmetrical yet dynamic frame transfer procedure. Institutional frameworks for governance and accountability are generally developed in mainstream media and then embraced in social media conversations. In contrast, risk and damage frames frequently originate from social media and, when sufficiently magnified, are integrated into journalistic narratives. The hybrid character of human rights and fairness frameworks implies a shared ethical arena where both media kinds participate concurrently. (Yan & Kroon, 2025). This research suggests that ethical discourse around AI is co-produced through intermedia interaction rather than being dominated by a single media actor. Taken together, the data show that the AI ethical discourse in Indonesia is formed by a multifaceted intermedia process. Mainstream online news media sustain agenda leadership by defining problem salience and institutional framing, while social media enriches the debate with public concern, moral urgency, and experience narratives. (Schaller et al.,



2024). This interaction exemplifies a negotiated agenda-setting paradigm in which authority is divided unevenly yet dynamically among platforms.

Intermedia Agenda Leadership and the Preservation of Institutional Power

This study's findings give strong empirical evidence for the ongoing relevance of intermedia agenda-setting theory in the digital media era, particularly in the context of complicated and normatively charged problems like AI ethics. Despite the development of social media platforms and the decentralization of content production, conventional online news media in Indonesia continue to play a prominent role in shaping the agenda for AI ethical debate. The substantial cross-lagged correlations between online news and social media suggest that institutional media continue to set the agenda, determining not just what is discussed but also when ethical concerns about AI become evident in public debate. The durability of institutional agenda leadership may be explained using the lenses of media authority and epistemic legitimacy.

AI ethics is a highly abstract and technical issue that frequently needs expert interpretation, regulatory context, and policy-making tools, all of which mainstream media is structurally equipped to provide. Journalistic procedures like as citing official sources, conducting expert interviews, and publishing policy papers enable news organizations to convey AI ethics as a public issue requiring governance and control. In contrast, social media typically employs journalistic cues to determine the importance of an issue before engaging in public discourse. This dynamic suggests that agenda-setting authority is not evenly distributed across platforms, but rather remains rooted inside institutional media institutions, even in a hybrid media context. At the same time, the findings challenge technologically determinist assumptions that digital platforms inevitably democratize agenda production. Instead, they propose for a relational view of media power, in which mainstream media retains symbolic authority by legitimizing emerging ethical issues. This has far-reaching implications for how the public views AI ethics, as institutional media serve as gatekeepers, filtering, prioritizing, and contextualizing ethical issues within wider policy and governance frameworks.

Ethical Framing and Media Logics Pertinent to Platforms

The disparity in ethical framing between mainstream online media and social media reflects fundamentally different media logics operating inside each platform. The mainstream media's focus on governance, regulation, and accountability frameworks indicates a normative approach to institutional problem solving and social order. By presenting AI ethics primarily as a regulatory and supervisory concern, news coverage tends to assign ethical responsibility to political institutions, technical businesses, and formal governance mechanisms. This framing implicitly depicts ethical AI as a problem to be handled by legal frameworks and expert-led solutions.

However, social media prioritizes risk, suffering, and human rights framing that highlight the lived and emotive elements of AI's influence on society. These frameworks are frequently derived from bottom-up narratives, such as personal experiences, activist rhetoric, and moral criticisms of technology power. The prevalence of risk-oriented frameworks on social media indicates widespread skepticism against simply technical solutions, as well as larger concerns about monitoring, algorithmic prejudice, and economic precarity. This difference demonstrates that ethical meaning-making around AI is scattered across media platforms, with each medium prioritizing various ideals, actors, and interpretative lenses. Analytically, this fragmentation highlights the significance of expanding beyond single-platform investigations in AI communication research. Ethical discourse is not limited to one media domain, but rather emerges from the interaction of



institutional and participatory narratives. While mainstream media may legitimize AI ethics as a policy problem, social media keeps ethical arguments anchored in real-world concerns and moral judgment. Together, these findings imply that AI ethics discourse is formed by a dialectical process in which institutional rationality and public morality coexist and occasionally collide.

Negotiated Frame Transfer and Hybrid Agenda Construction

The observed patterns of frame transfer highlight the negotiated nature of intermedia agenda shaping in AI ethical debate. The uneven shift of governance and accountability framing from mainstream media to social media demonstrates institutional narratives' persistent impact in molding public discourse. When news organizations establish regulatory or policy-oriented frameworks, they can gain popularity on social media as references for public discussion, critique, or endorsement. This demonstrates that mainstream media not only sets the agenda, but also provides discursive tools that shape future public interaction. In contrast, the shift of risk and damage frameworks from social media to mainstream news emphasizes the conditional effect of participatory media. Social media-driven frameworks typically enter journalistic discourse after achieving sufficient prominence, emotional resonance, or political importance.

This selective reception shows that social media impact is generated through amplification rather than inception. However, if included into news coverage, these frameworks have the potential to influence institutional narratives by requiring journalists to address public concern and moral debate. The prevalence of hybrid frames, particularly those on human rights and justice, suggests that ethical discourse is co-produced across platforms. These frameworks represent common normative commitments that are consistent with both institutional principles and public moral concerns. From a theoretical viewpoint, this hybridization supports the idea that agenda building in digital contexts evolves through iterative negotiation between media players with uneven power, rather than being totally top-down or completely bottom-up.

Implications for Ethical AI Communication and Governance

The conclusions of this study have important implications for ethical AI communication, media practice, and governance in Indonesia. From a media standpoint, the continuous agenda leadership of major internet news media highlights journalists' ethical duty in molding public perception of AI. Overreliance on governance frameworks may unintentionally marginalize public concerns and lived experiences, whilst an overreliance on risk narratives may promote moral panic. To promote informed and inclusive public discourse, balanced ethical communication necessitates the integration of institutional viewpoints and grassroots voices. For policymakers, the intermedia dynamics observed in this study indicate that effective AI governance is dependent not just on legal frameworks, but also on strategic communication across media platforms. Policy proposals addressing AI ethics are more likely to obtain legitimacy and public acceptability when presented through mainstream media and supported by substantial social media interaction. Ignoring participatory media risks generating a schism between policy discourse and public feeling, which might undermine faith in AI governance.

More generally, this research adds to existing discussions regarding the societal governance of developing technology. AI ethics is more than just a technological or legal concern; it is a communication process by which societies negotiate values, dangers, and obligations. By illustrating how ethical agendas are produced through intermedia interaction, this study emphasizes the importance of media in influencing the moral imagination of technological futures. In doing so, it emphasizes the significance of communication study in comprehending and leading ethical reactions to technological development.



CONCLUSION

This study sought to investigate how AI ethical discourse is impacted by intermedia agenda-setting dynamics between major online news media and social media in Indonesia. The findings show that AI ethics is not created inside a single media space, but rather evolves from continual interactions between institutional and participatory media. Mainstream internet news media continues to set the agenda by establishing the importance of issues, giving interpretative frameworks, and legitimizing AI ethics as a public and policy-relevant problem. This leadership is most seen in the prevalence of governance, regulation, and accountability framing in news coverage. At the same time, social media platforms play an important role in enhancing and challenging ethical discourse by emphasizing public fear, moral appraisal, and lived experiences with AI technology. The risk, damage, and human rights framing that circulate on social media represent larger public concerns that institutional narratives may not completely address. Although social media has a lower agenda-setting impact in terms of timeliness and salience, its ability to highlight ethical concerns allows them to alter journalistic framing under specific situations, notably when topics gain emotional resonance or political sensitivity.

The intermedia interaction observed in this study is best described as unbalanced yet participatory. Agenda development is not wholly centralized or completely decentralized; rather, it is negotiated across media platforms with uneven power and authority. By using intermedia agenda-setting analysis to the topic of AI ethics, this work advances communication theory by illustrating how new technology challenges are socially formed through media interaction. Substantively, the findings emphasize the critical role of media in developing public knowledge of ethical AI, as well as the necessity of inclusive, impartial, and reflective media practices in promoting responsible AI governance in Indonesia. Despite its merits, this study has certain drawbacks that should be noted. First, the research focuses on a few prominent online news publications and social media platforms, which may not accurately reflect the variety of Indonesia's media ecosystem. Alternative media, regional sources, and messaging-based platforms like as WhatsApp were not included, despite the fact that they might play an important role in conveying ethical narratives about AI. Second, the study uses quantitative content analysis and temporal correlation to discover intermedia agenda-setting linkages. While this method is ideal for studying agenda salience and frame transfer, it does not account for the motivations, intents, or professional judgments of journalists, politicians, or social media users.

Future study should supplement intermedia analysis with qualitative interviews or anthropological methodologies to further understand the decision-making processes that underpin ethical framing. Third, the study looks into AI ethical conversation within a certain observation time. As AI technology and regulatory discussions advance swiftly, longitudinal research spanning longer time periods would give more insight into how ethical agendas emerge and stabilize over time. Comparative research across nations or regions may also shed light on how cultural, political, and regulatory factors influence intermedia interactions in various ways. Future study may investigate the impact of algorithms, platform governance, and influencer networks in developing AI ethical agendas. Investigating audience reception and public perception of ethical frameworks might also help us understand how intermedia discourse influences public opinion and policy support. By overcoming these limitations, future research can expand on this study's results to increase scholarly and practical knowledge of ethical communication in the age of artificial intelligence.



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