

Influences of Social Norms towards Environmental Volunteering Participation among Youth

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Abstract

Volunteer dropout is a major issue for environmental volunteering organizations. Findings from previous studies have shown that social norms may be regarded as an external force that influences environmental volunteering. Therefore, this research explored the influences of social norms on Malay Muslim youths' participation in environmental volunteering activities. This study began with semi-structured interviews which were then followed by a survey. The interviews were conducted with 10 participants who were environmental volunteers. Data from the interview responses were analysed according to themes through the deductive – inductive – deductive approach. Based on the interview findings, a questionnaire was developed and distributed to 267 Malay Muslim environmental volunteers. The results revealed that the community's culture, support from school, university or employer, and social support influenced the Malay Muslim youths' participation in environmental volunteering activities. Therefore, the role of social norms should be considered in sustaining environmental volunteering participation among Malay Muslim youths.

Keywords: environmental volunteering, volunteers, social, norms, motivation

Introduction

Environmental volunteering is a rapidly growing that has proven to be a valuable tool for environmental conservation. Collaborative environmental volunteering has a greater impact towards environmental conservation (Measham & Barnett, 2008; Woosnam et al., 2019; Omoto & Packard, 2016). Based on previous research, environmental volunteering activities can enhance new social relationships, knowledge, physical health, mental health, and skills (Aydinli-Karakulak et al. 2016; Measham & Barnett, 2007; Molsher & Townsend 2016). Despite the multifaceted benefits of environmental volunteering, successful outcomes can only be achieved through an active and engaged population of volunteer participants. However, dropout of volunteers are major in environmental volunteering (Larson et al. 2020).

In order to address dropout of volunteers, previous research focused on volunteers' motivation (Measham & Barnett, 2008; Omoto & Packard, 2016; Sulaiman 2011; Woosnam et..al., 2019). Volunteer Process Model (VPM) by Omoto and Snyder (1995) proposed six (6) types of motivation volunteer motives i.e. values, opportunities, career, protective, social, and enhancement. However, Lim & Ibrahim (2020) add 3 more types of motivation i.e requirement recognition, and religion. However, past studies only took intrinsic motivational factors without regard to extrinsic motivation such as social and cultural influences that are also indirectly affecting engagement as environmental volunteers (Aydinli-Karakulak et al. 2016; Fang et al. 2017).

Based on theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 2006), subjective norms iaitu orang-orang yang terdekat such as parents, family, peer, local community and government support influencing a person's intention to engage in pro-environmental behavior. Friends are indeed important as they share sama interest, trait and social power that contribute and inspire to participate in environmental volunteering (Van Goethem et al. 2014). In addition, parents and family members are important as they provide the first socialization and as a role model (Van Goethem et al. 2014; Culiberg & Gambier, 2016; Law, Shek & Ma, 2013). However, very little literature has been devoted to social influence towards volunteerism (Law, Shek & Ma 2013).

In order to create environmental volunteering as norms, youth need to have good environmental values and develop a positive set of beliefs about environmental activities as theory of value-belief norms. (Stern et al. 2000). Norms and culture associated with higher levels of psychological well-being (Aydinli-Karakulak et al. 2016; Fang et al. 2017). Similarly, community norms which related to religion culture are poorly studied in the context of environmental volunteering (Jafarpour, 2017; Smith et al. 2012; Fang et al. 2017). Therefore, extrinsic motivations related to social influences and cultures need to be studied. In addition, previous studies show that there are differences in motivation to engage in environmental volunteer activities based on age. Skill acquisition, networking, and career development might be key motivators for younger volunteers, whereas older volunteers may be more interested in altruistic acts such as sharing information and teaching others (Asah et al. 2014). Youth are given focus in this study because they will play a role in governing the country in the future and youth is the most productive stage to contribute energy, time and money to engage in environmental volunteer activities.

By understanding how social and cultural influences influence the sustainability of youth involvement as environmental volunteers, interventions in creating a social environment that supports sustainable involvement in environmental volunteering can be developed. Therefore, this paper focus on how social norms had influenced on individual participation sustain as environmental volunteers among youth Muslim.

Literature Review

It is noteworthy that the study has investigated the type of motivation measure based on Schwartz values model i.e. egoistic, altruistic, and biospheric values. Egoistic values focus on self-oriented goals such as social power, wealth and personal success. Altruistic values focus on other people such as family members, friends and humanity in general while biospheric values focus on the well-being of all living things such as plants and animals (Torkar & Bognes, 2019; Schwartz, 2012; Stern 2000). Spirituality or religion has also been identified as a motivator in qualitative studies that have examined the motivator of volunteering (Chowdhury 2016). Schwartz (2012) argues that values or beliefs hold in relation to the culture that is common in society while norms are standards of behavior or rules that are already part of life and serve as a guide for how members of society should behave. Therefore, social norms and cultures also influence the environmental volunteering (Fang et al. 2017)

In terms of social norms, the close person such as parents, family, peers, teachers, community influence to take part in youth volunteerism (Law, Shek & Ma, 2013; Van Goethem et al., 2014). However, very little literature has been devoted to peer influence and adolescent volunteerism (Law, Shek & Ma, 2013). There are three approaches in understanding the perceived environmental influence, namely social learning approach, give-and-take reciprocity, and extrinsic influence. First, social learning approach emphasizes observations and modeling. Second, reciprocity is the social exchange between two people, which can be conveyed through invitation, support, and tutorage for a particular behavior and third, extrinsic influence, mainly consists of two groups, namely, reward and social coercion. Reward and coercion have no direct significant impacts to volunteering intention and volunteering behavior. In addition, extrinsic influence does not stand alone. It carries a positive relationship with family, school, and peer influence (Law, Shek & Ma 2013).

Research reveals that youth were more likely to volunteer when their best friend and parents volunteered frequently (Van Goethem et al., 2014). As adolescents grow older, they develop their own moral conscience and identity thus the importance of parents in volunteering participation could also increase. This also imply that parents have stronger influence on volunteering than friends as parents have more influence on long term issues such as morality, school and occupation (Smetana et.al 2006) while friends have more influence on present life situations like leisure time and friendship (Van Goethem et.al 2014). In addition, community neighbourhood fosters a sense of community belonging (Carpenter, 2016) and associated with altruistic values (Schwartz et al. 2012) that trigger motivation to engage in environmental voluntary activities.

Government also play a role in supporting the environmental volunteering through campaign, financial support and introduced environmental education in schools (Binder & Blankenberg, 2016; Law, Shek & Ma, 2013). In addition, social media helps to spread the information about environmental issues (Arbatani, Labafi & Robati, 2016) and affects environmental knowledge, awareness, attitudes and behavior (Carpenter et al. 2016).

Fang et al. (2017) indicates that environmental education can assist in fostering pro environmental behavior. The research by Smith et.al (2010) found that high levels of volunteerism among universities in five countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States which shown positive sign for educational institutions and governments that seek to promote volunteerism among students and youth. The universities involved in this study also have volunteer programs that also influence student involvement in volunteer activities by clubs, university clubs and sports and cultural organizations. Most of these organizations are based on campus activities, so they are easily accessible to students thus helped in fostering pro environmental activities such as volunteering. Therefore, social support and role models can serve to reinforce social norms in supporting pro-environmental activities such as volunteering.

Cultures also affect environmental volunteering (Fang et al. 2017). Aydinli-Karakulak et al. (2016) who studied the involvement of environmental volunteers in the context of Chinese culture in Hong Kong found that satisfaction related to cultural values fully mediated the link between volunteering motives and sustained volunteering (Aydinli-Karakulak et al. 2016). In context of Malaysia, Malaysians are known for helping each other or known as *Gotong-royong* (cooperation) making environmental volunteerism an important element in the local community. In addition, Islam is the official religion and the majority of the population is Muslim. Thus, the lifestyle and behavior of Muslims are subject to the teachings of Islam and obedience to the rules of Allah. In Islamic teachings, voluntariness is considered a religious obligation for a Muslim (Mangunjaya, 2010). Thus, volunteering is an important practice for Muslim. In the Qur'an, there are many verses that emphasise the bid to do good deeds. For a Muslim, volunteerism is considered a beautiful loan to Allah to which He promises a big reward (Sulaiman, 2011).

Research Methodology

The data were obtained from Muslim youth environmental volunteers in the Klang Valley. Youth volunteers was chosen because previous research showed that veterans are less likely to volunteer than non-veterans (Nesbit 2017). From another perspective, youths are the generation who have witnessed rapid damage of the ecosystem at the local and global level (Woosnam et al., 2019). Youths also are agents of change in the country, as they have reached maturity to participate in environmental conservation efforts. Participants were Muslim youths – i.e. age ranged between 15-30 years old, who had been involved in environmental volunteering activities. The types of environmental volunteering activities that the participants were involved in are diverse and are mostly related to conservation, education and sustainable living. In interview, ten participated in this study. Five of them are male and five participants are female. Data of this study were obtained through semi-structured interviews and questionnaire was distributed to 267 environmental volunteers of Muslim Malay using google form and instructed by research assistant. Interview data were deciphered using verbatim technique before analyzed thematically. Based on the interview findings, a questionnaire was self-developed and the level of influence of social norms towards environmental volunteering was determined.

Findings

i. *Influence of Social Norms towards Environmental Volunteering.*

Social norms in this paper consist of three (3) elements i. e. social influences, fulfil the university needs and cultures.

Social influences

The findings show that 6 of the study participants engaged in environmental volunteering as a result of friends influences. P2 is involved in environmental volunteer activities as a result of family recommendations. P7 is affected by the influence of friends and the support of family. The majority of the study which is 8 participants agreed that support from the government helps provide funds and promote volunteer activities or environmental campaigns. The role of teachers and lecturers were mentioned by P4, P6 and P9. The influence of social media has also led to the dissemination of information on environmental volunteering programs more broadly which 3 participants agreed on. Besides that, 8 out of 10 participants agreed that the cultures of helping each other in the community influenced them to join environmental volunteering activities meanwhile P2 mentioned about kindness in society that contribute to join in this activity.

a. Friends influences

6 out of 10 interviewees participated in environmental volunteerism said that friends influence them to join in this activity as can be seen from examples extracted from the interviews.

“...*friends influences*”(P1).

“...*started to get involved because my friends...*”(P3)

Making friendship were identified as one of the motivators which attracts volunteers to join environmental volunteering as can be seen in example below from P7.

“*The number one driving factor for me is friends. Friends, because I have a lot of friends nearby and when I have friends, it make any activities fun and even more to like these activities. So, yes friends.*” (P7).

Besides that, other people (friends) experiences might influence new participant to join environmental volunteering activity. This type of activity that emphasized social connections will be more valued by new volunteers. Environmental volunteers are often attracted to elements of the volunteering experience that are not specifically about the environment. This can include a desire to have fun, learn new things and friendship.

“*I started to get involved because of friends first. Because they say join the program because it will be fun and a lot of things to learn...*”(P3)

“*...influences by my peers. One of my friends is often interested, so it is fun to join this kind of volunteer program.*” (P9)

b. Family

Motivation due to environmental factors is important to drive an individual's involvement in volunteer activities. Thus, parental encouragement can motivate children to engage in environmental volunteerism. By volunteering, it offers vital help to help the environment and community but the benefits can be even greater to the participants involved like provide a sense of purpose and become more responsible individual. When parents consider community service to be important, children are more inclined to participate in such activity. For example, P2 and P7 stated that,

When parents consider community service to be important, their children are more inclined to participate (Wilson, 2000). These individuals placing a greater emphasis on the social function are likely to be more interested in socializing features afforded by OSNs than other individuals, because they are primarily interested in knowing what their friends think. Individuals with a higher frequency of reading others' status updates and commenting on others' posts will be associated with the social function.

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When parents consider community service to be important, their children are more inclined to participate

"Family factors play a role...." (P2)

"my family pushed me for my own responsibility by serving something to the community."(P7)

From the examples above, it can be seen that family also play certain roles in influencing the youth to participate in environmental volunteering activity. In family, children watch everything that parents do as example. So, motivation by family is indeed important for the individual to start involving in this type of activity.

c. Government support

There are two elements of the government support towards environmental volunteering participation in Malaysia which is through incentives and education. Then, through environmental education, values related to environmental ethics should be appreciated by everyone. Values should be nurtured from the beginning through environmental education. For example, P7 said on the interview,

"start nurtured from school. It has to do with education, programs at the school level, in a way it is the government that makes me join." (P7)

The government support the environmental volunteerism activity by giving funds and help in promoting this kind of activities can be seen from the interviews extracts shown below.

"...by publicity since recently we have seen many volunteer ads, asked to join volunteer" (P1)

"encourage the US to initiate action near Malaysia ..." (P2).

"in terms of funding to specific organizations for volunteer activities...." (P3)

"received good response from the ministry so this application is instantly approved..." (P6)

"... get some funding for our program at the beach" (P8)

"...give the programs funds. Many funds for example such trees are not free. But it's actually a fund from the government itself. The tools that we have for such things as shovels, steel, all come from government funds. Also, buses that used for the program are from the government itself..."(P9)

"...support financially to these NGOs to encourage them to be more involved in these volunteer activities." (P10)

Through the examples, the government has provided support through education and incentives that help to nurture volunteerism among the individual community. Volunteerism is a powerful mechanism that opens pathways for greater participation of people in the environmental sustainability in the communities. Thus, government should play certain roles to empower environmental volunteerism.

d. Teachers/lecturers

Majority of the young people attend school and universities. Therefore, the influence of the teacher or lecturers also plays a role. At school or university, there is a need to join environmental volunteer activities in the association club and in the study programs that need student to participate. The attitude of the school or university towards youth volunteers directly impact the future volunteer participation. For examples from the interviews,

"...Influence of lecturers and subject classes" (P4).

"from my main source which is my lecturer ..." (P6)

"I got this knowledge from the lecturer,..."(P9)

e. Social media

Youth often learn about volunteering efforts via social media and they see it as an effective way to seek information

regarding environmental volunteerism for example:

“...advertisement... social media like twitter, facebook...”(P1)

“...social media of both NGOs. Through facebook...” (p6)

“...petition, people always do around the internet...”(P9)

Interactivity and convenience are the key features of why social media is popular tool to learn about volunteering and raise awareness about environment. Social media can help in improving recognition of the volunteering organisation and help raising awareness of the core issues like promoting petition about serious issues that happen to the environment.

Fulfil the university needs

There are also participants who participate in environmental volunteering activities because of the support of the lecturers and the fulfillment of the university club or program. Programs that targeted student volunteering aimed to encourage civic behaviour among the youth. For examples,

“The program I joined before was organized by my own faculty...” (P3)

“... the university also recommends student to participate in such programs as it is made students to become active...” (P9)

“The organizer is the university itself. The University...”(P9)

The university as institution provide platform for their students to participate in volunteering activities. The benefits of volunteering during university times can lead to positive outcomes for the volunteers as they become more active and by this way, it can helps in boosting resume and improve job prospects because they are effectively standing out among other potential candidates when they applied for the open positions in the workforce.

Cultures

The culture of helping in the Malaysian community also contributes to the involvement of environmental volunteers. In addition, goodwill among the community contributes to the involvement of environmental volunteers.

a. Helping each other in the community

Helping cultures in the community also play a role in influencing the individual's involvement as environmental volunteers. This is because this practice has been practiced informally in people's lives. So, with the help among community can help the surrounding community have a better quality of life and sense of community exists within each individual. It can also avoid the selfishness and ignorance regarding of what happen to the community and environment. 8 out of 10 interviewees mentioned about the helping culture among community as can be seen in the interview below.

“... Helping the community nearby... it can help them to develop relationships”. (P3)

“... sense of community...” (P5)

“...living in a community that helps one another...”(P6)

“...a united society, help, cooperate...” (P7)

“...It can lighten the burden...will work together...”(P8)

“...gotong royong culture...”(P9)

“... really helps Malaysians by helping each other...” (P10)

b. Kindness in society

Good character in society is also a contributing factor to volunteering as an environmental volunteer. This is because, this good behavior influences the formation of individuals to collectively think about the things that affect the good of society. For example, P2 mentioned that kindness contribute for people to join volunteering as can be seen from the extracted interview below.

“...Malaysian is kind, gentle, polite culture. I think that kind of thing triggers people to join volunteering”(P2).

ii. Level of Social Norms towards Environmental Volunteering.

The results of the analysis of the overall of influences of social norms as shown in Table 3. Based on Table 3, the overall of influences of social norms was high. The highest mean score of social norms were cultures (mean = 4.593; sd = .584), followed by fulfil the university or employer needs (mean = 3.812; sd = .892) and social influences (mean = 3.622 ; sd = .841). Overall social norms with mean 3.901 and standard deviation .629. The findings of this study show that all the constructs studied were high because of the items developed in this study is based on the interviews conducted. Therefore, the questions contained in the questionnaire are the dominant factors contributing to the involvement of individual as environmental volunteers.

Table 4 Mean Score for Social Norms

	Interpretation
I participated in volunteerism because ...	
Social Influences	
Friends influence (c1)	High
Family recommendation (c2)	Moderate
Government support (c4)	Moderate
Influence from the organizers (c5)	High
Overall Social influences	Moderate
Overall Fulfil The School/ University/ Employer Needs	
Recommendations from teachers / lecturers / employers (c3)	Moderate
meet the needs of the club or association involved (c7)	
meet the needs of the school or work program (c8)	
Cultures	
Environmental awareness campaign (c6)	
It is a custom in the community to clean the area by joining <i>gotong royong</i> (c10)	
In line with the practice of helping the community (c11)	
the influence of good culture in the community to do good through environmental volunteering activities (c12)	
Bringing people closer together through environmental volunteering activities (c13)	
Feel part of the community to help clean up the area. (c14)	
Overall cultures	
Overall Social Norms	

Discussion

In these study, we sought to understand the influences of social norms among Malay Muslim youth towards participation in environmental volunteering activities. Norms can be examined at different levels: the individual, group, or broader sociocultural level (Culiberg & Gambier 2016). Environmental volunteering activity has great impact on individual well being as it involved engagement with other people and significantly improved positive elements and significantly decreased negative elements of participants' immediate well-being (Kragh, Stafford, Curtin & Diaz 2016). As for this research, the influences of social norms is emphasized such as social influences (friends influences, family, government support, role of lecturers and social media), fulfil university or employer needs and cultures (helping each other in community and kindness in society).

From the influence from closed person, friends influences is a major factor that cause youth to join environmental volunteering activities than parents or family. This findings contradict as argumentation by Van Goethem (2014) who argue that parents have stronger influence on volunteering than friends. This is because in terms of leisure time, friends are indeed important as they share the same interests, traits and social power that contribute to their participation in the activities (Van Goethem et.al 2014). In the environmental volunteering aspect, peer pressure or friends influences can be use in a good way to inspire and elicit pro-environmental behaviour such as volunteering through social interaction and engagement with other volunteers. Through positive peer pressure, thereby it representing a way of influencing the formation of social norms which lead to participation in environmental volunteerism.

Parents are important as they provide the first context for socialisation and adult role models (Van Goethem, 2014). When it comes to younger generation, family members especially parents constantly use norms to shape behaviour via role modelling or the provision of rules thus lead to the understanding the importance of environmental volunteering (Culiberg & Gambier 2016).

Role modelling through parenting is the strongest predictor for adolescent volunteerism that can continue throughout their life. Encouragement from parents can motivate adolescents to participate in the activities like volunteering (Law, Shek & Ma, 2013).

Government support is essential in promoting environmental volunteerism as it creates opportunities for youth to engage in environmental volunteer activities. For example the Ministry of the Environment is campaigning to save the river, Earth Hour, organizing “Environmental Friends” program and cooperating with environmental NGOs to increase the engagement with volunteers through such programs. In addition, the government also contributes financially to organizations such as environmental NGOs to encourage more volunteer participation. According to one of the volunteers interviewed, the beginning of his involvement in environmental volunteer activities began at the school level where education played a key role in influencing his involvement. The government has introduced environmental elements in education in Malaysia and therefore, the role of the government in increasing the number of environmental volunteers cannot be overlooked. Education is likely to play an important role here since it has been shown that higher education tends to be a prerequisite for environmental awareness (Binder & Blankenberg 2016).

In addition, lecturers play an important role in encouraging undergraduate youth to engage in environmental volunteer activities as one of the community services in line with student roles as change agents. Additionally, many adolescents attend schools and youth attend universities. The influence of close school and university personnel (teachers and lecturers) is also indispensable. The school attitude toward adolescent volunteerism directly affects the subsequent participation (Law, Shek & Ma, 2013). For example in live animal volunteering experience, educators consistently articulated the value of the animal (values), specific beliefs for care (beliefs), threats to the animal (awareness of the impacts), and suitable activities that could be executed by an individual or group (individual responsibility leading into behavioural norms) (Caplow 2018).

Social media makes the spread of information become fast and wide. Social media has quickly become an essential marketing and communication tool for private, public and non-governmental entities across the world to promote their organizational mission, daily events and publications. Many citizens use social media to post or share real time photos on a variety of environmental issues such as pollution or littering, forest fires, reported chemical spills in waterways, illegal dumping, and injured or deceased endangered animals (Arbatani, Labafi & Robati 2016). Social media messages can be more compelling in affecting environmental knowledge, attitude and behaviours among youth because they have grown up with the internet and access through their device and more likely to find information on their social media (Carpenter et.al 2016). This simple, yet effective action can result in prompt awareness of an environmental incident and timely response from various individuals, agencies, organizations and also government thus in a way can influencing new individual to become new volunteers (Arbatani, Labafi & Robati 2016).

Cultural influences such as helping and kindness have become the norm in the community to engage in environmental volunteer activities. Societal roles tend to indicate how an individual perceives themselves within a group. The community-building component of the community function provides a useful way for organizations like NGOs, club university associations or neighbourhood community to foster a sense of community (Carpenter 2016). Culture plays a large role in this and can be viewed by reflecting on the norms of the society. People generally often base their actions either on individualistic or collectivistic thinking without consciously knowing it (Gammoh et.al 2019). In this study, the respondents can be categorized into having collectivistic personality. Collectivistic individuals tend to be more influenced by group thought processed and focus on long term goals like what things that benefit the community and protection of the nature thus resulting their participation in environmental volunteerism (Gammoh et.al 2019).

The major environmental values are egoistic, altruistic and biospheric (Schwartz 1970) and spiritual values associated with religious values that has been identified as one of the motivation that contributed to participate in environmental volunteering (Chowdury 2016). Normative goal can be strengthened by increasing the level of endorsement of biospheric, altruistic and egoistic values (Steg, Lindenberg & Kaizer 2015). The higher level of engagement coupled with access to a supportive social environment has the potential to support more active forms of participation. This can increase participant’s loyalty to the program and improve the likelihood of participating in the preferred behaviour such as environmental volunteering.

Conclusion

This study provides insight to understand the influences of social norms in participation as environmental volunteers. Volunteerism is a powerful mechanism that opens pathways for greater participation of people in the environmental sustainability in the communities. The government needs to provide funding in the form of implementation various type of programs and environmental campaigns.

Besides that, fostering the environmental values among youth is important and government can take part in empowering environmental volunteerism because youth is current and future leaders must move towards more positive and effective maturity, ability and motivation in building a stronger commitment to environment.

Education institution such as universities and schools can take part by making environmental volunteering as one of the mandatory activities in the community service that involved with environment. Volunteers can get involved by working with NGOs and universities or environmental ministries. This can help in increasing the participation of environmental volunteers. Environmental education programs (formal and informal) at various levels (e.g university, school, community) also can be done by targeting independent of knowledge so that people can better understand the relationship between their behavior and the environment. This also can contribute towards attaining more sustainable pro-environmental behavior of becoming a socially responsible citizen and continue to participate in environmental volunteering.

Furthermore, the pressure to conform to the expectation and requirement of normative social influence can be seen positively as it is important to have continual efforts by enhancing awareness and more positive attitudes towards the environment. Therefore, norms need to be practiced in society on a regular basis and may be regarded as an external force in influencing environmental volunteering. Good social support is much needed to empower environmental volunteer activities and also good use of social media to advertise environmental volunteer activities should be deemed as important tool to spread information regarding the environment. Social media technologies are powerful tools but their effectiveness in sustainability is constrained with resources, individual perceptions, desire to engage with another volunteers and comfort level with the blurring boundaries between communicator and user (Carpenter et.al 2016). Nevertheless, social media should be fully utilized as tools to encourage the adoption of sustainability behaviours and the importance of environmental volunteering among youth. Identification factors that can create the environment that support environmental volunteering among youth should be considered in order to maximising environmental conservation efforts on a large scale.

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