

Social Media Literacy of Students in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Program and Its Impact on Critical Thinking Skills

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: December 14, 2025 Accepted: March 23, 2026 Published: June 2, 2026 Keywords: Community service program Critical thinking skills PBSI students Social media literacy This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License © 2026 Bubungan Tinggi: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat	This Community Service Program aimed to improve social media literacy and critical thinking skills among students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Program in Makassar. The program involved 62 students from three higher education institutions and was implemented through structured training, guided discussions, fact-checking exercises, digital content analysis, and workshop-based mentoring. The program evaluation employed a pre-test and post-test design to identify changes in participants' abilities before and after the intervention. The results showed an improvement in social media literacy indicators, particularly in the ability to assess source credibility, understand the context of digital messages, recognize information bias, and evaluate social media content more analytically. Improvement was also found in critical thinking skills, especially in argument analysis, evidence evaluation, and logical inference. These findings indicate that a PKM program integrating social media literacy with critical thinking training is effective in strengthening students' digital literacy culture in higher education settings.
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INTRODUCTION

Students in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Program (PBSI) in Makassar City are active social media users for both academic and non-academic activities. Based on initial observations conducted by the PKM team and discussions with partner lecturers from three higher education institutions, students utilize social media as a source of references for assignments, a space for discussion, and a medium for literacy expression. However, the intensity of usage has not been accompanied by adequate media literacy skills. Students still tend to accept information instantly without verifying sources, are not yet able to distinguish between facts and opinions, and are not accustomed to critically evaluating digital messages. This condition is in line with findings by [Andriani \(2021\)](#), [Khusna et al. \(2023\)](#), and [Dzakirah et al. \(2024\)](#), who state that students tend to rely on the popularity of posts and social networks in determining the truth of information rather than conducting systematic verification processes.

This problem becomes more significant in the context of information overload in the digital era, where misinformation and disinformation spread easily across social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp. Initial mapping results from partners indicate that PBSI students have fairly good technical skills in operating

platforms but are weak in analytical aspects such as assessing source credibility, recognizing bias, and understanding ideological interests behind content. These findings align with studies by [Yanti et al. \(2021\)](#), [Nafilah and Pramudyo \(2024\)](#), and [Hidayati \(2025\)](#), which conclude that Indonesian students' media literacy remains at a moderate level and tends to stop at operational skills, without fully reaching evaluative and reflective dimensions.

This condition becomes increasingly crucial considering that PBSI students are prepared as future educators of language and literature who will guide the literacy development of younger generations. Weak social media literacy skills will directly impact the quality of students' critical thinking, particularly in analyzing arguments, evaluating evidence, and drawing logical conclusions from the information they consume. Various studies show that digital literacy is closely related to critical and higher-order thinking skills. Students with strong digital literacy are more capable of evaluating messages, assessing the validity of claims, and making data-driven decisions responsibly ([Ali, 2025](#); [Bakti et al., 2025](#); [Sudianto et al., 2025](#)).

However, there is a gap between the competency needs of PBSI students and the actual conditions in the field. On the one hand, students are expected to possess strong digital literacy and critical-thinking skills as part of their professional competence in the digital era. On the other hand, higher education learning has not fully provided systematic, structured, and case-based media literacy practice experiences. [Rahayu et al. \(2024\)](#), [Syabaruddin and Imamudin \(2022\)](#), and [Oktaviani et al. \(2022\)](#) emphasize that effective media literacy development requires direct experience through digital content analysis, reflective discussions, and continuous fact-checking exercises.

Based on the partners' actual conditions, the problems faced, and the gap between needs and existing learning practices, this Community Service Program (PKM) was designed as a strategic solution to improve social media literacy among PBSI students in Makassar City. The program was implemented through structured training, interactive discussions, mentoring, and digital content analysis-based projects. This approach was designed to build students' abilities to identify source credibility, evaluate digital messages, understand argument structures, and apply critical thinking principles in both consuming and producing social media content.

The main objective of this PKM activity is to enhance the social media literacy and critical thinking skills of PBSI students, who are prospective language and literature educators in the digital era. Within this framework, social media literacy is not merely a technical ability to access and use digital platforms but also the capacity to select information, assess source credibility, recognize message bias, understand communication contexts, and reflect on the ethical impacts of media practices. These abilities serve as an essential foundation for the development of critical thinking skills. Students trained to read media analytically tend to be better at examining arguments, evaluating evidence, distinguishing facts from opinions, and drawing logical conclusions. Thus, the relationship between social media literacy and critical thinking in this PKM activity is understood through a clearer pathway: training interventions, reflective discussions, fact-checking exercises, and digital content analysis projects serve as triggers that strengthen social media literacy, which in turn enhances students' critical thinking.

Based on this framework, this article emphasizes an integrative conceptual model in which the PKM intervention influences students through several stages. First, training and mentoring strengthen the dimensions of social media literacy, particularly in access, analysis, evaluation, and content production. Second, this strengthening fosters intellectual habits such as verifying information, critically reading digital messages, and being aware of media bias. Third, these intellectual habits contribute to improving critical thinking

skills, especially in argument analysis, evidence evaluation, inference, and reflective reasoning. As a result, the impact of the program is not only reflected in increased conceptual knowledge but also in changes in attitudes and media practices that are more critical, reflective, ethical, and responsible. In a broader context, this PKM is expected to contribute to the development of a culture of digital literacy in higher education and strengthen the role of PBSI students as literacy agents capable of fostering healthier media practices in society.

METHODS

This community service program was implemented at three partner universities in Makassar City, involving 62 students from the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Program. Participants were selected purposively based on the criteria of being active students, regularly using at least two social media platforms, and being willing to participate in the entire series of activities. The diversity of participants' academic backgrounds and the intensity of their social media use served as the basis for designing a training program that was adaptive and contextual to the partners' needs. However, this intervention was conducted within a relatively limited duration; therefore, the evaluation focused primarily on immediate outcomes following the program. As a result, the sustainability of behavioral changes in media usage, including the long-term consistency in applying critical thinking skills, cannot yet be adequately ensured and remains an important area for follow-up in future activities.

The approach used in this program was Participatory Action Research (PAR) with a participatory service model. This approach was chosen because it positions partners as active subjects in the change process through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, thereby enabling continuous capacity development. In this PKM context, students were not only training participants but were also involved in identifying media literacy problems, designing solutions, implementing activities, and evaluating the program. The PAR approach is considered relevant for developing social media literacy and critical thinking skills, as both competencies grow through direct experience and continuous reflection.

The implementation stages of the PKM began with mapping partner needs through focus group discussions and the distribution of initial questionnaires to identify patterns in social media use, levels of media literacy, and students' critical-thinking abilities. The action phase was realized through social media literacy and critical thinking training delivered via workshops and mentoring. The training was designed in four main sessions: (1) introduction to social media literacy concepts, digital ethics, and the risks of misinformation; (2) digital content analysis training to identify source credibility, message structure, as well as bias and persuasive techniques; (3) strengthening critical thinking skills through case discussions, argument evaluation, and fact-checking exercises; and (4) group projects involving in-depth analysis of social media content and the production of educational content based on media literacy and critical thinking principles.

The instruments used in this program consisted of both quantitative and qualitative tools. The social media literacy instrument was developed by adapting the Individual Competence Framework and Hobbs' media literacy model, covering the dimensions of access, analysis, evaluation, and digital content creation. The critical thinking skills instrument was developed based on Facione's critical thinking indicators, including analysis, evaluation, inference, and reflective reasoning. Both instruments were designed as Likert-scale questionnaires and case-based tests that require students to analyze social media content, evaluate arguments, and draw evidence-based conclusions. In addition, qualitative instruments included participatory observation sheets, semi-structured

interview guidelines, and digital content project assessment rubrics to evaluate the depth of participants' analysis. All instruments were validated for content through expert discussions with PBSI lecturers and digital literacy practitioners prior to their use in the program.

The effectiveness of the program was evaluated through pre-tests and post-tests to measure improvements in students' social media literacy and critical thinking skills. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores, percentages, and gain scores, to determine the level of improvement in participants' competencies. Meanwhile, qualitative data from observations, interviews, and project documentation were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques through coding, categorization, and theme development. This combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the PKM program in improving social media literacy and critical thinking skills among PBSI students in Makassar City, covering cognitive achievement, attitudinal changes, and media practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service participants consisted of 62 students from the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Program across three universities in Makassar City. Based on the initial survey, most students were active social media users, with an average usage time of 3 to 5 hours per day. The most frequently used platforms included Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp, which were utilized for various purposes such as accessing up-to-date information, academic needs, entertainment, and building social networks. The high intensity of use indicates that students have broad access to various forms of digital information; however, this is not always accompanied by the ability to critically evaluate its quality and accuracy.

Initial mapping results showed that students had relatively good technical skills, such as operating platforms, uploading content, and using specific features. However, in analytical aspects—such as evaluating source credibility, identifying bias, and understanding the social and ideological context of posts—students still demonstrated limited abilities. These findings are consistent with [Prayego \(2023\)](#), who stated that students' digital literacy often remains at a basic level and does not significantly strengthen more complex academic skills, including the completion of final projects. This condition is also aligned with [Rahmadani and Purwaningtyas \(2025\)](#), who found that students tend to use social media as an information source without adequate verification processes. Students often rely on post popularity, the number of likes, or recommendations from their social networks rather than checking source credibility or engaging in in-depth reading. Such patterns of information consumption may make students more vulnerable to manipulative, provocative, or inaccurate content.

More broadly, this pattern reflects the general condition of digital literacy among Indonesian students. [Yanti et al. \(2021\)](#) found that students' digital literacy levels remain moderate, particularly in evaluative and reflective aspects. Students are capable of accessing and understanding information but lack the skills to critically assess its validity as a basis for decision-making. Similarly, [Nafilah and Pramudyo \(2024\)](#) showed that students often experience bias in evaluating digital information due to their tendency to trust appealing content, even when it is not supported by credible sources.

These findings highlight the importance of PKM-based interventions to improve social media literacy among PBSI students. The participant profile—strong in technical skills but weak in critical abilities—indicates a literacy gap that requires systematic training focused on digital content analysis. This PKM activity aims not only to provide conceptual

understanding of media literacy but also to build evaluative habits that help students become more critical, reflective, and responsible social media users within the digital information ecosystem.

Implementation of the Social Media Literacy PKM Program

The implementation of the social media literacy PKM program was designed as an educational intervention aimed not only at improving students' conceptual understanding but also at fostering critical awareness and social responsibility in the use of digital media. The activities began with an orientation and initial reflection to explore students' information-consumption patterns and their perceptions of truth in digital spaces. At this stage, it was identified that most students still relied on the popularity of posts and recommendations from social networks as the basis for trusting information. This reflection became the starting point for change, as students began to realize the risks of misinformation and the social impacts of spreading unverified content, both in academic contexts and in society.

During the social media literacy introduction session, students not only gained an understanding of digital information structures, social media algorithms, and media ethics but were also guided to comprehend the social implications of irresponsible media practices. Case discussions on educational hoaxes, public opinion manipulation, and provocative content raised students' awareness that social media is not merely a space for entertainment but also a platform for producing public discourse that can influence attitudes, opinions, and societal behavior. In line with [Oktaviani et al. \(2022\)](#), strengthening media literacy based on an understanding of the social context of media can foster students' sensitivity toward the quality of information they consume and disseminate. The educational impact of this session was reflected in the shift in students' perspectives regarding their role as literacy agents within their social environments.

The digital content analysis session further enhanced students' ability to interpret social realities shaped by media. Through group work and collaborative discussions, students learned to identify bias, framing, and ideological interests behind a post. This activity not only trained cognitive skills but also fostered critical awareness of how social reality is constructed in digital spaces. Students began to understand that information is never neutral and always carries certain interests. The educational impact of this session was evident in students' ability to connect social media content with broader social issues such as opinion polarization, information commercialization, and public image construction. These findings support [Syabaruddin and Imamudin \(2022\)](#), who argue that practice-based digital literacy can cultivate students' critical awareness of communication dynamics in society.

The strengthening of critical thinking skills through case discussions and fact-checking had a significant impact on students' cognitive patterns in interpreting digital information. Students no longer accepted content passively but began to develop intellectual habits such as verification, source comparison, and argument evaluation. This practice directly contributed to the development of reflective and responsible academic character. In a social context, this fact-checking habit has the potential to reduce the spread of misinformation within student communities, as students begin to act as information filters before sharing content with others.

Group projects involving content analysis and the production of educational content based on media literacy became a platform for students to actualize their social roles as agents of change. Students not only critiqued existing content but also produced alternative content that was educational, argumentative, and data-driven. This activity had an important educational impact, as it trained students to integrate media literacy with public communication skills. In the context of language and literature education, this project

strengthened students' ability to construct logical, persuasive, and responsible discourse. In line with [Oktaviani et al. \(2022\)](#), project-based learning has been shown to enhance learning motivation while also strengthening students' sensitivity to the quality of public information.

Overall, the implementation of this community service program demonstrates that social media literacy not only enhances students' technical knowledge but also fosters social awareness, media ethics, and intellectual responsibility. Students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Program are no longer positioned merely as information consumers but as active subjects capable of critically analyzing, producing, and disseminating information responsibly. The social impact of this activity is reflected in the growing awareness among students of becoming literacy agents within both the campus and society, while the educational impact is evident in the development of analytical, reflective, and argumentative thinking patterns that are essential for future language and literature educators in the digital era.

Improvement of Students' Social Media Literacy

The increase in students' social media literacy is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Improvement of students' social media literacy

The post-test results and qualitative analysis indicate that the PKM activities had a significant positive impact on students' social media literacy. At the initial stage, most participants assessed information primarily based on visual appearance or the popularity of posts. However, after participating in the training series, students' ability to understand, critique, and evaluate digital content showed consistent improvement across almost all measured indicators.

This improvement is clearly observed in three main dimensions: knowledge, attitude, and practice. In the knowledge dimension, students began to understand fundamental concepts of media literacy, such as source credibility, content bias, information framing, and message structures commonly used in social media posts. Prior to the program, some students admitted they had never systematically verified information sources; however, after the training, they demonstrated the ability to identify elements of bias and the communicative intentions behind content. This pattern aligns with [Pane et al. \(2023\)](#), who emphasize that direct analytical experience can strengthen students' awareness of misinformation risks and the need for critical evaluation in digital information consumption.

In the attitude dimension, there was a noticeable shift in students' perceptions of social media. They became more cautious in accepting and sharing information and more aware

of the potential social impact of unverified content. This cautious attitude was further reinforced through analysis of hoaxes and manipulated digital messages. This awareness aligns with the media literacy framework proposed by [Sulasari et al. \(2020\)](#), which highlights the importance of reflection and a critical attitude as integral components of information literacy. In several discussion sessions, students actively inquired about how to distinguish informative content from opinion or propaganda, indicating that the training successfully stimulated their interest in applying media literacy principles in daily life.

In the practice dimension, students showed the most visible improvement. They were not only able to conduct more structured content analysis but also demonstrated these skills in group projects requiring them to assess information accuracy, verify sources, and construct critical analyses. In these projects, students were able to identify elements of visual manipulation, compare sources, and analyze persuasive language aimed at influencing public opinion. This improvement is consistent with [Hidayatullah et al. \(2024\)](#), who found that engagement in structured digital literacy tasks enhances students' ability to process data-driven information.

The improvement in social media literacy cannot be separated from the use of hands-on learning strategies and interactive discussions applied in the PKM. These methods provided opportunities for students to explore real examples, ask questions, and discuss their understanding collaboratively. This process reinforces [Syabaruddin and Imamudin \(2022\)](#), who argue that effective digital literacy implementation requires interaction, guidance, and direct experience in evaluating information.

Overall, the results indicate that students not only understand media literacy conceptually but also apply it in their daily digital activities. This improvement confirms that practice-based training and analytical project approaches are effective in developing students' social media literacy, especially when implemented in a structured and sustained manner.

Impact on Critical Thinking Skills

The results of the PKM implementation show that improvements in social media literacy directly impact the development of students' critical thinking skills. Initially, most participants tended to accept digital information at face value without examining sources, context, or message intent. They often focused only on surface-level content without connecting it to its informational background. After the training, significant changes were observed in students' thinking patterns. They became capable of recognizing argument structures, evaluating the validity of claims, and distinguishing between facts, opinions, and assumptions in social media content.

This change is reflected in improved post-test scores in critical thinking across nearly all indicators, particularly in argument analysis and evidence evaluation. During discussions, participants demonstrated a greater ability to question the logic of posts, identify potential bias from content creators, and provide more systematic, evidence-based responses. These findings support [Mirmoadi and Satwika \(2022\)](#), who argue that digital literacy plays an important role in developing students' self-regulation when processing information, preventing them from being easily influenced by persuasive yet unverified digital content.

The enhancement of critical thinking skills was also evident in group-based fact-checking tasks. Previously, students tended to rely on a single source when verifying information. After the training, they began using multiple comparative sources such as journal articles, credible news portals, official documents, and independent reports. This practice indicates that students not only understood verification concepts but also applied them consistently. This finding is consistent with Ali (2025), who emphasizes that digital

literacy is closely linked to higher-order thinking skills, as understanding digital information requires complex and systematic reasoning ([Ali, 2025](#)).

Additionally, the PKM results recorded important changes in students' communication patterns. In group discussions, they became more capable of expressing arguments and considering alternative perspectives before drawing conclusions. This shift reflects the development of a more reflective and analytical intellectual attitude. This is supported by [Hidayati et al. \(2024\)](#), who explain that critical thinking skills are a significant factor in shaping digital literacy. The higher an individual's critical thinking ability, the more mature their approach to understanding and evaluating digital information.

The impact of improved media literacy on critical thinking is also consistent with [Mayasari et al. \(2025\)](#), who found a positive relationship between digital literacy and students' critical thinking skills in the Society 5.0 era. Their study highlights that critical thinking skills can be substantially enhanced through structured digital literacy training, especially in dynamic digital environments filled with potentially misleading information.

Overall, this PKM activity successfully contributed to the development of students' critical thinking skills in cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral aspects of social media use. The improvement in reasoning, analysis, and evaluation demonstrates the effectiveness of the experiential learning approach applied in the training. This transformation confirms that social media literacy not only enhances technical knowledge but also fosters reflective and systematic thinking patterns essential for PBSI students as future language and literature educators in the digital era.

Discussion: Social Media Literacy, PBSI, and the Strengthening of Critical Thinking

The findings of this PKM highlight that improving social media literacy is a strategic way to develop critical thinking skills among PBSI students. In general, students demonstrated noticeable progress in deconstructing digital information structures, identifying bias in messages, and verifying sources before drawing conclusions. This shift confirms that media literacy is not limited to technical understanding of digital platforms but also involves complex cognitive abilities such as analysis, evaluation, and reflection. This perspective aligns with [Limilia and Aristi \(2019\)](#), who emphasize that digital literacy is a multidimensional skill requiring users to critically interpret information, rather than merely access or consume content.

In the context of PBSI, social media literacy becomes increasingly relevant as students are not only information consumers but also future educators responsible for developing students' literacy competencies. Critical thinking is essential in this process, as educators in the digital era face challenges such as misinformation, hoaxes, and opinion framed as fact. The PKM findings show that trained students demonstrated more systematic thinking patterns, such as identifying claims before evaluating arguments and examining context before sharing information. This reflects that social media literacy can serve as a pedagogical tool to strengthen students' logic and reasoning.

This relevance is reinforced by [Rahmadani and Purwaningtyas \(2025\)](#), who note that students often face difficulties when using social media as a learning resource due to limited critical evaluation skills. The improvements observed in this PKM demonstrate that structured interventions, such as content analysis-based training, can be practical solutions to help students develop information filtering skills. Furthermore, [Nafilah and Pramudyo \(2024\)](#) highlight that low information selection ability is often influenced by reliance on content popularity, and such training helps shift students' focus from superficial aspects to information quality.

From the perspective of PBSI competency development, strengthening social media literacy has direct implications for language and literature learning. Digital text analysis,

critical reading of media narratives, and the production of literacy-based educational content align with the core objectives of PBSI—to produce educators and language practitioners capable of understanding contemporary discourse. Strong media literacy enables students to analyze linguistic phenomena on social media, such as shifts in language style, public communication patterns, and dynamics of digital rhetoric. These skills are essential for future educators who will engage with digitally immersed learners.

Beyond academic competence, this PKM also demonstrates that social media literacy fosters students' intellectual character development. By habitually verifying sources, questioning claims, and avoiding the spread of dubious information, students develop positive academic habits, particularly epistemic caution. This habit is crucial for PBSI students, as the teaching profession is closely linked to information integrity.

Overall, this discussion shows that social media literacy is strongly connected to the enhancement of critical thinking skills in higher education. The PKM implementation demonstrates that training approaches that combine content analysis, argument evaluation, and educational content production can effectively improve both literacy skills and critical-thinking patterns among PBSI students. However, participant responses were not entirely uniform. Some students showed rapid progress, particularly in source verification and bias identification, while others required more intensive guidance, especially in constructing evidence-based arguments and engaging in consistent critical reflection. Several challenges were also identified, including differences in initial readiness, variations in the intensity of social media use, and a tendency among some students to provide socially desirable responses on evaluation instruments. This condition suggests the possibility of social desirability bias, meaning the results should be interpreted cautiously and not assumed to represent fully stable changes. Therefore, these findings not only support the urgency of integrating media literacy into the PBSI curriculum but also emphasize the importance of follow-up programs, continuous evaluation, and more adaptive mentoring designs to ensure that this PKM model can be effectively replicated across different study programs and institutional contexts.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the social media literacy PKM for students in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Program in Makassar demonstrates that digital literacy and critical thinking skills can be significantly improved through structured, interactive, and content-analysis-based training approaches. The initial profile of participants showed that although students were highly active on social media, their evaluative and analytical abilities remained at a moderate level. Through a series of workshops, guided discussions, fact-checking exercises, and content analysis projects, students improved their ability to assess source credibility, understand the context of digital messages, identify information bias, and construct data-based arguments.

In addition, participants' critical thinking skills developed noticeably, particularly in aspects of argument analysis, evidence evaluation, and drawing logical inferences. This PKM activity demonstrates that integrating social media literacy with critical thinking training not only deepens students' understanding of digital information dynamics but also fosters reflective thinking patterns and intellectual responsibility, which are essential for them as future language and literature educators.

As a follow-up, this program will be developed into three forms of sustainable activities: (1) the establishment of a PBSI student media literacy community as a platform for discussion, mentoring, and the production of educational content; (2) the integration of social media literacy and critical thinking materials into language skills and digital literacy courses within the PBSI program; and (3) the development of project-based media literacy

training modules that can be replicated in other universities. Through these follow-up efforts, the PKM is not limited to improving individual student competencies but is directed toward building a sustainable digital literacy ecosystem in higher education and society.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

The author contribution statement for this community service article is as follows: Conceptualization, MHA; methodology, MHA; formal analysis, MHA; investigation, MHA in collaboration with Komunitas Salam Makassar; community service activity implementation, MHA in collaboration with Komunitas Salam Makassar; writing—preparation of the original draft, MHA; writing—review and editing, MHA. Komunitas Salam Makassar, as a student extracurricular organization engaged in the field of Indonesian language, contributed as a collaborative partner in supporting the implementation of the community service activities. Authorship is limited to MHA, who contributed substantially to the reported work.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author used ChatGPT to draft, construct sentences, and clean the language throughout this work. Using this tool, the author reviewed, verified, and adjusted the content as required. The author is responsible for the publication's content, accuracy, originality, and suitability. Artificial intelligence, as the author states, provided only technical assistance with writing and language editing. It did not replace the author's role in developing ideas, analysis, interpretation, or conclusions.

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