

Tourism Challenges and Solutions during the Covid-19 Pandemic at Balkondes Tuksongo Magelang: A Communication Perspective

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Abstract: For more than a year, Covid-19's impact on Indonesia made various sectors live in a crisis. One of them is the tourism sector. The impact was seen by the number of tourists visiting, and it felt by local people, particularly on their economic factor. One of the tourist destinations that has experienced the impact of the pandemic is the Village Economic Center (Balkondes) Tuksongo. It is located in Borobudur District, Magelang. Balkondes is a program formed by BUMN to provide tourism support in Indonesia. Balkondes Tuksongo is a tourist village that combines digital technology with a unique rural atmosphere with cultural, artistic, educational, and agrotourism activities, which have involved residents as managers. At the beginning of the pandemic, Balkondes Tuksongo had closed for several months and experienced a significant decrease in visitors. However, in the face of this pandemic, the manager immediately implemented a strategy to rise amid a pandemic with new regulations that must be obeyed. This study aims to find out the strategy carried out by Balkondes Tuksongo in facing the challenges of this pandemic and how the solution is to be able to rise again. This research uses a qualitative approach and analyses a descriptive method using SWOT and mix marketing communication theory. The data collection used in-depth interviews and observation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has hit Indonesia since early March 2020; the impact has not subsided. The cases are increasing day by day. As of July 23, 2021, Indonesia has reported 3,082,410 positive cases, ranking first in Southeast Asia. In terms of mortality, Indonesia ranks third in Asia, with 80,598 deaths (Nugrahani, 2021). Seeing the pandemic conditions from day to day, the government has made various responses, including imposing Large-Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB) in 2020. Then there is another policy in 2021, namely the Enforcement of Restrictions on Community Activities (PPKM), focused on the Java and Bali islands (Ramadhan, 2021). The impact of the pandemic was felt by all circles and all sectors within society, including the tourism sector. The impact of the pandemic is felt by all circles and all sectors of life, including the tourism sector. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a travel ban and an appeal for the closure of tourist attractions. One of the areas that have felt the impact of the pandemic on the tourism sector in Magelang Regency, Central Java, based on the circular letter of

the Magelang Regent Number 440/064/05/2020 (Rachma, 2020). Magelang Regency is known to have quite a lot of tourist destinations, both historical, natural and cultural. One of the tourist destinations known to foreign countries is the Borobudur Temple. Judging from the Magelang Regency BPS data table below, from 2017-2019, it shows an increase in the number of visitors every year (BPS Magelang, 2020).

Because Borobudur Temple is crowded every year, it helps the development of tourism in the vicinity, namely the Village Economic Center, commonly abbreviated as Balkondes. Around the Borobudur Temple, there are 20 thematic Balkondes which were established in 2017. The Balkondes is a village cooperation project with State-Owned Enterprises (BUMN) to develop three Indonesian tourist destinations, namely Borobudur, Lake Toba, and Mandalika.

The impact of the pandemic was experienced by Magelang Regency, with a decrease in the number of tourist visits. Based on data from the Department of Tourism, Youth and Sports (Disparpora), the number of visits during 2020 only reached 1.456.289 tourists, with details of foreign visits of 37.681 tourists and

local visits of 1.418.608 tourists. This number sees a significant decline when compared to 2019, where the number of visits reached 6.523.582 tourists, with details of foreign visits of 361.727 tourists and local visits of 6.161.855 tourists (Ginting, 2021). The Head of the Magelang Regency Disparpora, Slamet Ahmad Husein, added that the decline in tourist visits was due to the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic which began to enter Indonesia in March last year, and the decline in tourist visits was very significant at 80 per cent in 2020 compared to 2019 (Ginting, 2021). Thus, in a pandemic situation, the sector of tourism is in challenging conditions.

Table 1: Borobudur Tample Visitor Data.

Bulan	Pengunjung Candi Borobudur					
	Domestik			Mancanegara		
	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
Januari	400.191	321.853	341.685	13.483	11.732	13.402
Februari	197.361	226.303	247.731	12.759	14.089	16.888
Maret	281.972	291.425	262.877	14.701	15.292	16.949
April	326.316	323.325	357.108	16.078	14.552	17.699
Mei	339.867	237.315	111.921	18.722	13.265	16.225
Juni	272.389	440.194	565.032	11.529	9.031	14.331
Juli	359.235	291.732	330.191	29.879	27.470	34.247
Agustus	164.359	176.248	198.159	35.409	30.169	38.500
September	175.155	198.782	169.998	24.292	20.843	27.183
Oktober	208.957	204.249	238.847	20.598	14.289	21.290
November	202.795	250.412	274.059	13.982	10.811	14.665
Desember	645.031	692.178	664.149	15.138	10.599	10.747
Kabupaten Magelang	3.951.326	3.863.054	3.747.757	224.473	192.231	242.082

Tourist visits to Borobudur Temple itself in 2020 also experienced a significant decline. There were only 996.000 tourists and only 31 thousand foreign tourists. The rest were local or archipelago tourists. Compared to 2019, visits reached 4.39 million tourists. As conveyed by I Gusti Putu Ngurah Sedana, as General Manager of the Borobudur Temple Tourism Park, Borobudur Temple was closed for four months at the beginning of the pandemic. At the beginning of its opening on June 25, 2020, on a per land basis, there was an increase in the quota given until now; only four thousand visitors per day are allowed to enter Borobudur Temple (Susanto, 2021). The decrease in tourists visiting Magelang Regency, notably the Borobudur Temple, will also impact Balkondes in the Borobudur District area, such as Taksongo. Taksongo offers contemporary tourism, namely a travel experience based on innovative digital technology, without leaving the original rural tourism by showing views of the Menoreh hill and the Borobudur Stupa. So far, Balkondes Taksongo has held many events as one of the tourism services offered in addition to homestays, agro-tourism, and arts. Balkondes Taksongo was later developed into a tourist village. As a tourist village, Balkondes Taksongo offers art tours, handicraft tours, educational tours, culinary tours, and nature tours. More specifically, Balkondes Taksongo is planned to become a digital-based tourism village. Visitors who

come to Balkondes Taksongo can already enjoy digital-based services through booking travel tickets and paying online.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Balkondes Taksongo was closed for four months. In fact, according to the pre-research interview, according to Andi Akhmad, one of the managers, they could not pay their employees' salaries because there was no income during the pandemic. Until July 2020, Balkondes Taksongo began to reopen. Although it has not recovered 100 per cent, there have been several visits from tourists. Moreover, with the implementation of PSBB and PPKM, which aim to reduce the number of Covid-19 cases, of course, it will impact people's daily activities. One of the tightenings of community activities is the closure of public facilities (public areas, public parks, public tourist attractions, and other public areas) temporarily closed. Of course, this is a challenge for the manager of Balkondes Taksongo to survive during the pandemic. Research objectives are what are the challenges and solutions to tourism during the pandemic at Balkondes Taksongo from a communication perspective? Like knowing the marketing communication strategy carried out by Balkondes Taksongo.

This article discusses the challenges and solutions carried out by Balkondes Taksongo during the Covid-19 pandemic from a communication perspective. First, the author discusses marketing strategy and marketing communications. For consumers, marketing communications can determine how and why a product is used, by what kind of people, and where and when. Marketing communication is a means by which companies try to inform, persuade, and remind consumers directly or indirectly about the products and brands being sold (Shimp, 2003). Marketing communications represent the "voice" of the company and its brand and are a means by which companies can develop dialogue and build relationships with their customers.

Marketing itself can not be separated from the marketing mix. The four components or elements in a marketing strategy are called the 4Ps: Product, Promotion, Price, and Place (Kotler dan Keller, 2012). These four elements are the main foundation of a marketing plan. In other words, these four elements are the framework that will be used to support the marketing plan. The product discussed the strategy related to the product, serves to define the product, and determine who is targeted, and what benefits will be offered to consumers. Promotion, the promotional element of the marketing mix, consists of two-way communication used to inform, persuade, and remind

consumers. The price really must be considered because it involves the product's affordability, the level of profit that can be achieved, and comparisons with competing products. Placement is often known as distribution and refers to how to deliver a product or service to a consumer or how a consumer can obtain the product. In marketing communications, implementing a marketing strategy program, namely the stages of the process or steps to market a product so that it is right on target.

Regarding effective and efficient promotional activities, they can be included as part of the marketing communication mix. The marketing communication mix combines five modes of marketing communication, namely advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, and direct selling (Kennedy dan Soemanagara, 2006). In addition, communication itself has eight main models: advertising, sales promotion, events and experiences, public relations and publicity, direct marketing, interactive marketing, word of mouth marketing, and personnel sales (Kotler dan Keller, 2012).

One of the analyses used in marketing communication activities is the SWOT analysis. SWOT analysis is an acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It is an analysis based on analytical techniques developed by Albert Humphrey, who led a research project at Stanford University in the 1960s and 1970s using data from Fortune 500 (Jogiyanto, 2005). Some experts say that SWOT analysis is a classical strategic planning instrument that provides a simple way to determine a strategy. Strengths is a factor that specific or superior competence is contained in the organization itself. A weakness is a condition or anything that is a weakness or deficiency. Opportunities are conditions that are beneficial for the organization, and threats are the opposite of opportunities, namely conditions that can disrupt the smooth running of an organization (David, 2006).

2 METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach to understand what is experienced by the subject/research actor, such as behavior, perception, motivation, action, etc. (Creswell, 2014). The specific method used was a case study. A case study is a series of scientific activities carried out intensively, in detail, and in-depth about a program, event, or activity, either at the individual level or by a group of people, institutions, or organizations, to gain in-depth

knowledge about the event (Moleong, 2016).

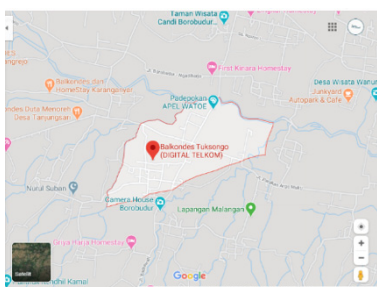
The primary data in this study was obtained by conducting in-depth interviews and observations. Observations and interviews were conducted with the manager of Balkondes Tuksongo, Magelang Regency. Secondary data was used in the form of searching for information through books, journals, related official documents, websites, and social media.

3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Judging from its history, Tuksongo was taken from the pseudonym of Kyai Ahmad Abdussalam of the Surakarta Palace family. Balkondes Tuksongo is located in the Borobudur Temple area, established in 2017, located 2 KM from the Borobudur Temple complex, a world tourist magnet. Balkondes Tuksongo stands on an area of 18,000 m².

Currently, Balkondes Tuksongo is commanded by Andi Akhmad as a supervisor who oversees 12 employees and helps manage them. Both the supervisors and employees at Balkondes Tuksongo are local people. This is in line with the initial goal of establishing Balkondes, namely to strengthen the regional economy. Therefore, its establishment, planning and management are centered on ideas and contributions from the surrounding community.

The superior product of Balkondes Tuksongo is paintings that display the work in the form of painted t-shirts, painted caps or canvas paintings. Visitors who come to Balkondes Tuksongo can also feel the sensation of painting itself. Moreover, there is also the art of bamboo sculpture. Once again, visitors who come can make their piggy bank or bamboo lamp. Another art form is the flagship product of Balkondes Tuksongo, which is the art of iron masks. Just like other superior art products galleries in Balkondes, visitors can also learn how to forge iron into masks with animal faces. In addition to art, Balkondes Tuksongo also has processed products that they excel at. The products are Soun Noodles and Onggok Flour. The concept of Balkondes Tuksongo, which also offers educational tours, allows visitors to try the sensation of producing these superior products. After being tired of trying to make superior products on offer, Balkondes Tuksongo also offers restaurants and homestays that visitors can enjoy.



Source: Screenshot from <https://www.google.com/maps>

Figure 1: Tuksono Balkondes Area.

3.1 SWOT Analysis of Balkondes Teksongo

SWOT analysis is a process carried out by an organization to identify internal and external obstacles to improving performance so that controllable factors can be assessed and actions can be decided on these factors [16]. Balkondes Teksongo's marketing communication strategy in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic will be explained shortly. Firstly, the position of Balkondes Teksongo using a SWOT analysis as follows:

Table 2: SWOT Analysis of Balkondes Teksongo.

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate facilities for holding major events at Balkondes Teksongo. • The cooperation that has been formed with the community. • Good support for Indonesian SOEs in the development of the first year. • Target visitors who have been in accordance with the initial planning, such as facilitation of large events. • The manager consistently implements strict health protocols for every event that takes place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information media owned by Balkondes Teksongo is not yet centralized. • Some scheduled activities had to be canceled due to the pandemic. • Budget patterns became difficult to implement during the pandemic. • There is no in-depth analysis by the manager to see market trends.
OPPORTUNITY	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The location is close to Borobudur Temple, which is an international tourist spot. • The development of tourism trends that lead to natural tourism allows Balkondes Teksongo to develop further. • Much potential can still be developed in Balkondes Teksongo. • Decree of The Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia No. HK.01.07/Menkes/382/2020 concerning Protocols for Public Health in Public Places and Facilities for the Prevention and Control of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Regulation that prohibits indoor gatherings.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of Balkondes in the area of Kampung Borobudur. • After one year of construction, Balkondes must find support from other sources of funds. • A prolonged pandemic makes the plans that have been set uncertain.

3.2 The Marketing Communication Strategy of Balkondes Teksongo in the Pandemic Period

Using a Marketing Communication Strategy, based on the strengths and opportunities of Balkondes Teksongo, the marketing strategy of Balkondes Teksongo in dealing with the pandemic is described as follows:

3.2.1 Product

Balkondes Teksongo focuses on developing a Wedding Organizer (will be referred to as WO). At the beginning of its establishment, Balkondes Teksongo collaborated with WO to procure wedding events held at Balkondes Teksongo. However, during the beginning of the pandemic, Balkondes Teksongo developed Songo Wedding. Songo Wedding is one of Balkondes Teksongo, which is engaged and developing in the field of WO.

At the beginning of the establishment of Balkondes Tuksongo, they were still working with other WO. Balkondes Tuksongo only facilitates the place, but in development during the pandemic, the manager of Balkondes Tuksongo took the initiative to manage their own WO; hence 100% of the profits they get-go to Balkondes Tuksongo.

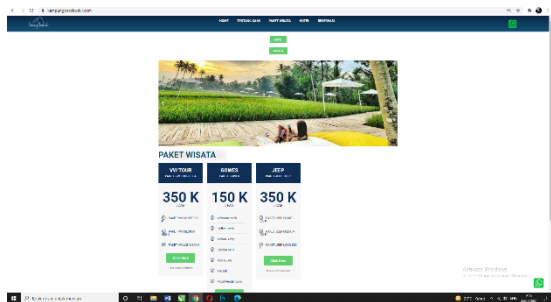


Source: Screenshot from https://www.instagram.com/songo_weddingorganizer/

Figure 2: Songo Wedding Organizer.

3.2.2 Price

Balkondes Tuksongo prioritizes digital-based tourism, so the manager applies for easy payments. Tourists can make payments online and place orders through parties who have collaborated with Balkondes Tuksongo. Examples of digital-based separation and payments can be seen on the Agoda page: <https://bit.ly/3y4OpV7>, [lodging.net: https://bit.ly/3x4epim](https://bit.ly/3x4epim), and [traveloka.com: https://bit.ly/3zBs95C](https://bit.ly/3zBs95C). Balkondes Tuksongo also provides affordable prices for both local and foreign tourists. As reported on the www.kampungborobudur.com page, information was obtained that Balkondes Tuksongo provides tour packages that tourists can enjoy.



Source: Screenshot from <https://kampungborobudur.com/paket-wisata/>

Figure 3. Tour Packages at Balkondes Tuksongo.

3.2.3 Place

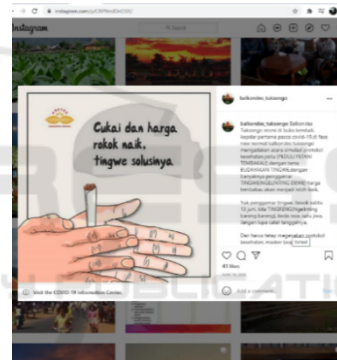
Balkondes Tuksongo was built to be a tourist village. Its location, which is only 2 KM from Borobudur

Temple, makes Balkondes Tuksongo easy to access. As we know, the position of Kampung Borobudur is in the highlands; hence Balkondes Tuksongo has beautiful scenery to offer. This is also the priority offered. With a view of Menoreh Hill and the Borobudur Stupa, it becomes an added value to the development of WO with an outdoor concept.

3.2.4 Promotion

Balkondes Tuksongo uses promotional media, namely social media. Some examples of promotional media used by Balkondes Tuksongo are:

- https://www.instagram.com/songo_weddingorganizer/,
- https://www.instagram.com/balkondes_tuksongo/,
- <http://jadesta.com/desa/23787>,
- <https://kampungborobudur.com/>,
- and
- <http://balkondesborobudur.com/desa-wisata/tuksongo/>.



Source: Screenshot from <https://www.instagram.com/p/CBPNmJDnOSY/>

Figure 4. An Example of Event Promotion via Instagram Balkondes Tuksongo.

Discussing about promotion, it cannot be separated from marketing communication (marketing communication mix). From the existing marketing communication mix, what Balkondes Tuksongo does is:

Advertising. Balkondes Tuksongo installed billboards on the main route, one of which is Jalan Raya Magelang Yogyakarta.



Source: Author's documentation

Figure 5. Billboard on Jalan Raya Magelang Yogyakarta.

Sales Promotion. At the beginning of the Tuksongo Balkondes reopening their services in July 2020, they tried to provide special discounts for staying at homestays. The purpose of this discount itself is to boost the interest of tourists to come and visit.

Public Relations and Publicity. In July 2020, Balkondes Tuksongo made a release published in Indonesian newspapers and news in online mass media. In June 2021, Balkondes Tuksongo became attractive and visited by many artists due to its beautiful scenery. This was then published at <https://radarsemarang.jawapos.com/berita/jateng/magelang/2021/06/23/sering-diunjungi-artis-balkondes-tuksongo-tawarkan-pemandangan-empat-gunung/>. In addition, in the same month, the event held by Balkondes Tuksongo was also published in the online newspaper <http://www.kabarmagelang.com/2021/05/ratusan-bonsai-magelang-diikuti.html?m=1>. In this way, Balkondes Tuksongo uses a publicity strategy to maintain its existence.

Word of Mouth Communication. Balkondes Tuksongo also prioritizes word of mouth promotion. As stated by the manager, "Usually if we have an event, then people will know too, maybe by getok tular," (Andi Akhmad Interview, July 10 2021). During this pandemic, Balkondes Tuksongo prioritizes promotions via the internet and word of mouth. In addition to promoting the event, the manager of Balkondes Tuksongo also created a narration that is also disseminated through word of mouth. The narrative showed the friendliness of the employees of Balkondes Tuksongo. "There is one thing that we are proud of and that is different from other tourist attractions. In other places, there are rarely employees who invite guests to talk. At Balkondes Tuksongo, guests must know at least one employee. Why is it that we talk to each other if the service is finished in another place and then leaves,

Ms. If you are at Balkondes Tuksongo, you must first chat with him." (Interview with Andi Akhmad, July 10 2021). This hospitality was later developed into their word-of-mouth promotional narrative.

The Challenges and Solutions of Balkondes Tuksongo in Facing the Pandemic from the Perspective of Communication. The ongoing pandemic has undoubtedly had a significant impact on the Balkondes Tuksongo's ability to continue to exist. The effort to pay employees is the most felt challenge. "At the beginning, it was difficult to even buy cigarettes" (interview with Andi Akhmad, July 10, 2021). The initial outbreak of COVID-19 in Indonesia caused the tourism sector in Central Java Province to be closed to 100%, aiming to reduce the spread of Covid-19. Of course, this causes Balkondes Tuksongo to have no income at all. Another challenge faced by managers was the effort not to terminate employment (PHK) for their employees. In order to survive, managers must think of strategies to maintain their existence during the pandemic. Another challenge was the information media that is not yet centralized. There are several websites with different names that show information about Balkondes Tuksongo. This, of course, makes tourists who are looking for information confused. Then some activities that have been scheduled have to be postponed for an indefinite time or even cancelled. The postponement and cancellation of these activities have an impact on declining income. The absence of activities during the closing of Balkondes Tuksongo affected the development of the existence of the place itself. After one year, BUMN no longer assists Balkondes Tuksongo in its development. As explained earlier, the purpose of establishing Balkondes is to create business opportunities for the surrounding community; thus, the SOEs that have been appointed will not always provide funds for them. The changing budget pattern without the support of SOEs adds to the challenges for Balkondes Tuksongo during this pandemic.

With these challenges, the manager of Balkondes Tuksongo has a solution based on the strengths and opportunities that exist. The solution was to carry out promotions by maximizing the existing marketing communication mix, including advertising, sales promotion, public relations and publicity, and word of mouth communication. The manager of Balkondes Tuksongo also holds wedding activities in accordance with strict government regulations, such as performing antigen swabs on all staff every time they start holding activities, wearing masks during the activity, checking body temperature and placement.

In addition, last May, Balkondes Tuksongo also collaborated with several parties, such as artists, in carrying out bonsai exhibition activities (Hidayat, 2020). Collaborating was one of the solutions taken by Balkondes Tuksongo to increase tourist interest. In addition, to invite bonsai lovers, relatives and acquaintances of the artists will come, so that the number of visitors who come will increase. The natural beauty of Menoreh Hill is undeniable and has become a good potential development. The Songo Wedding business is a solution developed by Balkondes Tuksongo to increase income and respond to challenges during this pandemic.

Trying to catch the Decree of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia No. HK.01.07/Menkes/382/2020 concerning the Health Protocol for the Community in Public Places and Facilities in the Context of Prevention and Control of Corona Virus Disease 2019 regarding the regulation of restrictions on indoor activities, Balkondes Tuksongo promotes activities that can be held in their environment. The Minister of Health's decision itself is one of the solutions for Balkondes Tuksongo because, of course, many activities can be carried out in their environment that prioritize natural and open nuances.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Balkondes Tuksongo is the government's effort to improve the economy of the community around Borobudur Temple. On the path, Balkondes Tuskono showed an excellent direction of development. Balkondes Tuskono is a tourist spot famous for its beautiful scenery, thus attracting tourists to come and do activities in that place. However, since Covid-19 arrived in Indonesia, all sectors have been impacted. In plain sight, tourism is a sector that has been severely harmed. In just four months, the Tuksongo Balkondes closed following government policy to inhibit the spread of Covid-19, causing them to find it difficult to pay employees. To avoid layoffs, the postponement and even cancellation of activities that should have been carried out at Balkondes Tuksongo became an unavoidable challenge.

In facing these challenges, Balkondes Tuksongo tried to innovate by doing promotions as part of their marketing communication. The marketing communications they used were advertising, sales promotion, public relations and publicity, as well as word-of-mouth communication. In addition, in seeking solutions to existing challenges, the manager of Balkondes Tuksongo developed a Wedding

Organizer (WO) as a subsidiary. This is an effort to face the challenges that came during the pandemic and maximize the potential of Balkondes Tuksongo, which has a beautiful natural view of Menoreh Hill. All activities carried out at Balkondes Tuksongo itself used strict health protocols to increase tourist confidence and maintain the health of the tourists and the staff on duty. To increase the number of tourists, the manager of Balkondes Tuksongo also collaborated with artists to hold a bonsai exhibition. Unexpectedly, the Decree of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia No. HK.01.07/Menkes/382/2020 became one of the solutions where the government asked for activities to be carried out outdoors. For Balkondes Tuksongo, which has an outdoor concept from the start, this is undoubtedly an effort that can help them increase tourist interest.

Suggestions that can be given in seeing the challenges and solutions to tourism that occurred are that the district and provincial governments should be more involved in the sustainability of Balkondes Tuksongo. Assistance with the correct budget pattern can certainly help Balkondes Tuksongo to survive this pandemic period.

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