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MORALITY BEFORE KNOWLEDGE

From convenience to consciousness: Environmental ethics in the consumptive lifestyles of urban university students

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ABSTRACT

Background: Daily lifestyles of urban university students are increasingly influenced by a consumption culture centered on convenience, often at the expense of environmental sustainability.This study aims to explore the environmental ethics paradigms of anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism underlying the consumptive behaviors of university students in Indonesia. Previous research has mostly emphasized technical aspects of waste management or quantitatively measured environmental attitudes, but rarely has it examined the moral values influencing individual consumption choices. The central hypothesis of this study is that students' consumptive behaviors are strongly shaped by normative value systems, rather than merely by environmental knowledge. **Methods:** This research adopts a qualitative case study approach, involving seven undergraduate students from Universitas Indonesia, Depok, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through four weeks of participant observation at major consumption points on campus and semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed thematically using Braun & Clarke's method, based on five consumption parameters: food packaging, drinking habits, online shopping behavior, waste management, and ethical awareness. **Findings:** Reveal that the majority of students still operate within a utilitarian-anthropocentric mindset, prioritizing practicality, price, and prevailing social norms. Only two participants consistently exhibited ecocentric behaviors, such as bringing reusable food containers and avoiding impulsive purchases. A clear knowledge-action gap was identified, reinforced by social norms, emotional dissonance, and the lack of structural support such as incentives or institutional role models. **Conclusion:** This study concludes that transitioning from a convenience-based to a conscious lifestyle requires value-based interventions through ethical education, sustainability-oriented incentives, and moral leadership within the campus environment. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** The main contribution of this study lies in its philosophical approach to understanding student consumption as a reflection of environmental ethical reasoning.

KEYWORDS: anthropocentrism; convenience; consciousness; ecocentrism.

1. Introduction

The current environmental crisis has become a tangible threat to human life and all other living beings. Phenomena such as climate change, depletion of natural resources, air and water pollution, and increasing waste generation serve as undeniable indicators of an imbalance between human activities and the Earth's carrying capacity (Dijoo & Khurshid, 2022). In practice, excessive consumption and a dependence on single-use products have become normalized in daily routines for many people, including those from highly educated backgrounds such as university students.

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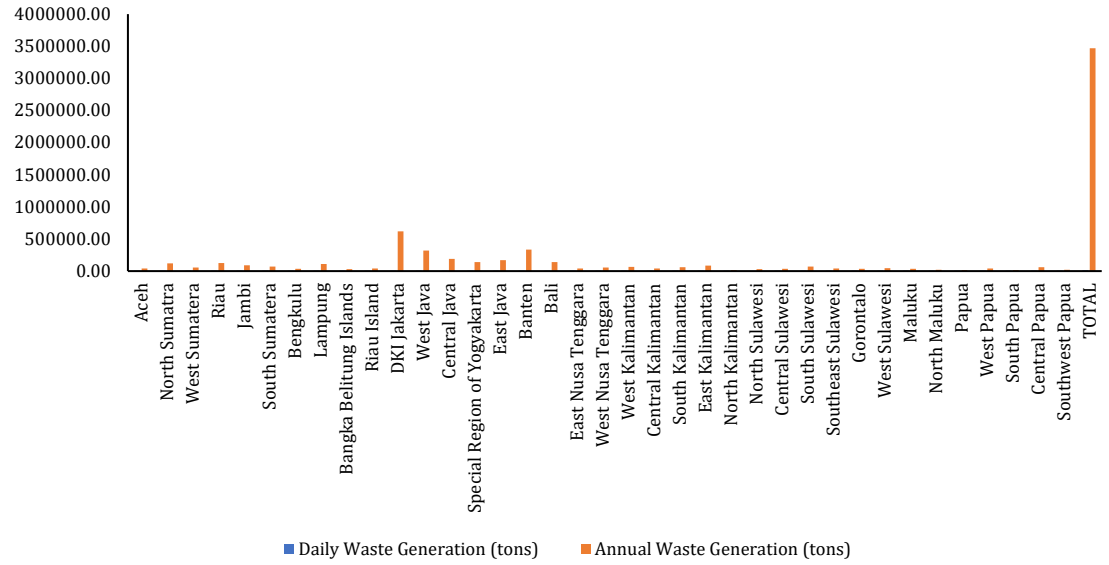

Fig. 1. National waste generation data 2024
(SIPSN, 2024)

In Indonesia, the waste problem has reached an alarming point. Based on the latest data from the National Waste Management Information System/*Sistem Informasi Pengelolaan Sampah Nasional* (SIPSN) (SIPSN, 2024), the total national waste generation in 2024 was recorded at 33.6 million tons. In a report by Mongabay citing a study by Syaharani, each student generates an average of 290.56 kg of solid waste per year, including more than 500 used plastic beverage bottles (Mongabay, 2020). Activities such as buying fast food in plastic packaging, carrying coffee in disposable cups, and ordering necessities via online shopping platforms have become part of students' daily consumption patterns (Guan et al., 2023; Sandhu et al., 2021). Students' consumptive lifestyle not only reflects social and cultural trends but also reveals a more fundamental issue, how humans perceive their relationship with nature. In this context, environmental ethics becomes a crucial conceptual framework. Three main paradigms in environmental ethics are anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. Anthropocentrism holds that the highest moral value lies in humans, so nature is seen as a means to fulfill human needs and desires. In this paradigm, human actions toward nature are considered good insofar as they benefit humankind. The third paradigm, ecocentrism, broadens the moral horizon by placing the entire ecological system as an object of value.

These three paradigms offer different lenses to understand human actions toward the environment. For example, students who bring their own food and drink containers to campus may be seen as aligning with ecocentric values, since their actions take into account the ecological impact of personal consumption. Conversely, repeated use of disposable products without considering their environmental impact indicates a utilitarian-anthropocentric tendency. The problem is that although discourse on sustainability and eco-friendly lifestyles has been widely promoted through media and educational institutions, actual practice shows that ecological awareness among students remains low (Begum et al., 2021; Handayani et al., 2024). Research conducted by Orais & Ishida (2024) shows that ethical consumption behavior is strongly influenced by values internalized early in life. These values are shaped by family environment, education, and popular culture. In many cases, students grow up in social systems that emphasize comfort, efficiency, and economics, without much consideration for the ecological dimension of consumption. Therefore, even if students have access to environmental information, it does not necessarily lead to significant behavioral change. Most existing research still focuses on the technical aspects of waste management, the effectiveness of environmental campaigns, or quantitative behavioral studies (Ozanne et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Yet, a deeper

understanding of the philosophical and moral foundations of consumption behavior is essential for designing more effective and sustainable intervention strategies. A philosophical approach through environmental ethics allows us to see consumption not merely as an economic activity, but as a reflection of value systems and moral responsibility toward nature (Cafaro & Primack, 2024).

This research aims to fill that gap by exploring the environmental ethics paradigms underlying the consumptive behavior of urban university students, particularly within the environment of Universitas Indonesia, Depok. This campus was selected because it represents an urban academic community with high levels of consumption activity, as well as a complex campus infrastructure and culture, including canteens, shopping centers, coffee shops, and public spaces that serve as student gathering points. Universitas Indonesia, as a leading national educational institution, is also known for its commitment to sustainable development, such as through the UI GreenMetric program, which measures campus environmental sustainability (UI GreenMetric, 2023). Therefore, it is important to assess the extent to which students on this campus internalize environmental ethical values in their daily lives. As a visual illustration of the research location, the following is a map of the Universitas Indonesia, Depok Campus, showing the distribution of student consumption activity areas such as canteens, dormitories, the UI train station, and shopping centers.

By understanding the relationship between environmental ethics paradigms and students' consumptive behavior, this study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the field of applied environmental ethics, as well as a practical contribution in designing more effective educational programs and green campus policies. This research also invites students, as members of the academic community and future leaders, to reflect on their position in the human–nature relationship and to take part in the collective effort to safeguard the sustainability of our planet. In doing so, the transformation from a lifestyle of "convenience" to one of "consciousness" becomes not merely a slogan, but a genuine commitment embodied in everyday actions.

2. Methods

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design using a single-case study approach to explore how environmental ethics paradigms specifically anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. As emphasized by Creswell & Poth (2018), qualitative research is best suited to understanding complex human experiences and social phenomena that cannot be captured through numerical representation alone. The rationale for selecting a case study lies in its ability to provide context-rich, holistic insights into a bounded system in this case, the student population of UI, Depok campus. According to Yin (2014), a case study is particularly effective when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and when multiple sources of evidence are required. The study was conducted over a two-month period from April to May 2025 at the UI Depok Campus, a nationally recognized academic institution known for its sustainability commitments under programs like UI GreenMetric (UI GreenMetric, 2023).

This allowed the researcher to witness authentic ethical decision-making and observe inconsistencies between stated values and actual behaviors, thereby identifying the knowledge–action gap that has been widely cited in sustainability research (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Schild et al., 2022). The data collection involved triangulation of methods, combining (1) participant observation at five major consumption nodes on campus, (2) semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a diverse sample of students, and (3) collection of secondary documentation including campus sustainability reports and student-generated media. This triangulated approach enhanced the credibility and transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The chosen site and population also fulfill a maximum variation sampling logic. Universitas Indonesia, while being relatively homogenous in academic mission, is heterogeneous in terms of student demographics, encompassing individuals from various socioeconomic, geographic, and disciplinary backgrounds. In summary, this method was deliberately chosen and systematically executed to address the

central issue of how university students in an urban academic setting enact or resist environmental ethical paradigms in their daily consumption practices. The combination of observational and dialogical data, situated within the lived experience of an actively sustainability-committed campus, demonstrates that this study contributes meaningfully to both environmental ethics literature and applied sustainability practices in higher education.

2.1 Research subjects and sampling

The participants involved in this study were seven active undergraduate students currently enrolled at the University of Indonesia, located at the Depok campus. These individuals were carefully selected using purposive sampling, a method widely employed in qualitative research to identify participants who are most likely to offer rich and relevant insights into the research questions. This selection strategy was guided by the need to ensure that the students chosen had active and regular engagement with the campus environment, particularly in relation to daily consumption practices. Each participant was known to spend a significant portion of their week at least four days on campus, which allowed the researcher to observe authentic patterns of behavior within the scope of food consumption, beverage habits, online shopping, waste disposal, and ethical reflection. These seven students represented a diverse mix of faculties, including the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, the Faculty of Computer Science, the Faculty of Engineering, and the Faculty of Psychology.

The decision to select participants from varied academic and organizational backgrounds was deliberate. This diversity allowed for the exploration of multiple perspectives and interpretations of environmental responsibility. Prior studies have shown that women, for instance, often report stronger environmental attitudes and more frequent engagement in pro-environmental behavior, while students from social science backgrounds tend to express more reflexive views about ethics and values than those from technical disciplines. Including students from across these domains enabled the research to investigate whether such patterns also emerged in the Indonesian context. All interviews were conducted in an informal, conversational tone and were scheduled at times and places most comfortable for the participants, typically in familiar campus settings such as student canteens or shaded outdoor areas. Although the sample size may appear modest, it is consistent with qualitative inquiry and justified by the principle of information sufficiency. The result of this sampling approach was a set of deeply contextualized portraits of student life, each reflecting unique relationships to environmental awareness, convenience, habit, and ethical reasoning.

2.2 Research variables and data types

Unlike quantitative studies that rely on predefined measurable variables, this research does not use variables in the conventional statistical sense. Instead, the focus lies on units of qualitative analysis, specifically embodied in the individual actions, daily practices, and reflective statements of university students. These parameters were designed to operationalize ethical orientations in consumption and were developed based on a synthesis of sustainability literature, environmental psychology, and prior studies on student behavior in university settings (Ozanne et al., 2022; Morais & Ishida, 2024). The researcher employed five core parameters to assess students' alignment with or divergence from environmentally ethical practices. These included; choices related to food packaging, beverage consumption habits, patterns of online shopping, waste management behavior, and ethical awareness or reasoning. In the case of food packaging, ethical behavior was exemplified by bringing reusable food containers or intentionally selecting vendors that offer biodegradable packaging options. Beverage consumption behavior similarly offered a clear metric for evaluating students' environmental sensitivity. A third dimension involved students' online shopping behavior, which was evaluated through questions about

frequency, intention, and packaging awareness. Students who made occasional, need-based purchases and paid attention to delivery packaging (e.g., opting out of plastic bubble wrap) were considered more ethically aligned with biocentric thinking.

Waste management practices were observed both through self-reporting in interviews and during field observations at selected campus locations. These behaviors were often coupled with narratives of resignation ("it all ends up in the same place anyway") or social detachment ("no one else does it either"), underscoring the role of social norms and institutional trust in shaping action. The final parameter, ethical values and awareness, was not assessed through action alone but through the depth and quality of students' moral reasoning about their consumption. Data for this analysis came from two primary sources. The first source was primary data, collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and direct participant observation. Interviews were designed to be open-ended, allowing students to express their thoughts and experiences freely, while the observational component offered an opportunity to validate those statements against actual behavior in key campus settings such as food courts, cafes, public lounges, and waste collection zones. The second source consisted of secondary data, which included documents and materials related to Universitas Indonesia's green campus efforts. This secondary data provided context and contrast, allowing the researcher to assess the extent to which institutional sustainability discourse was reflected or contradicted in students' personal conduct.

2.3 Data collection procedure

The process of data collection in this study was designed to capture both the observable behavioral patterns and the subjective ethical reasoning of students in relation to their daily consumption practices within the UI Depok campus. This methodological triangulation allowed the researcher to cross-validate findings from different sources while also uncovering discrepancies between what participants said and what they actually did particularly relevant in studies involving moral or environmentally sensitive behavior. The first stage involved extended participatory observation over a period of four weeks.

Observations were conducted at five key consumption and disposal locations across the campus, the canteen at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, a popular student coffee shop near the Central Library, the Rotunda ring garden (a communal green space frequented during breaks), the pedestrian zone near the UI Commuter Line station (a common gathering point before and after class), and a series of designated waste sorting stations strategically placed around high-traffic areas. During each session, detailed field notes were taken using a structured observation sheet to document behavior indicators aligned with the five ethical consumption parameters outlined in the study: food packaging, beverage choices, online shopping material presence, waste disposal practices, and evidence of ethical reflection (e.g., signage reading, peer discussion).

To supplement field notes, photo documentation was also conducted selectively. The use of photography followed ethical guidelines, ensuring that individuals were not photographed without consent or identifiable in sensitive scenarios. The second stage of data collection focused on semi-structured interviews, conducted with all seven student participants selected during the sampling process. These interviews were designed to elicit reflective narratives and personal interpretations of consumption habits, allowing students to share their motivations, justifications, challenges, and emotional responses toward their behaviors. Each interview lasted between 35 and 50 minutes, depending on the depth of participant engagement and availability.

The interview guide was developed thematically based on the five ethical parameters used in the study but was kept flexible to allow participants to speak freely and to probe into emergent themes. Some of the core open-ended questions included; "Why do you choose to bring your own container or not?", "What are your considerations in choosing a place to eat or drink on campus?", "Have you ever felt conflicted about your consumption habits?", and "What does environmental responsibility mean to you personally?" These prompts aimed to draw out ethical reasoning and reveal how participants interpreted their

behaviors within broader narratives of personal values, social expectations, and institutional influence. For example, students who expressed strong concern for the environment in interviews were sometimes observed using disposable plastics out of habit or social conformity, reinforcing the importance of triangulating declared beliefs with observed behavior. In addition to primary data, supplementary insights were gathered from institutional documents, such as campus sustainability reports, event posters, and student publications. The combination of environmental cues, social norms, and internal moral reasoning captured through this process formed the foundation for the thematic analysis that followed.

2.4 Data analysis technique

The analysis of qualitative data in this study was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, following the framework developed by Braun & Clarke (2006). This method was particularly suitable for the current research, as the aim was not merely to describe what students do, but to explore how their actions are shaped by, or deviate from, environmental ethics paradigms. The thematic analysis unfolded through six iterative stages, each contributing to the gradual construction of an interpretive narrative that linked empirical data to the theoretical concepts of anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. This interpretive framework allowed the researcher to uncover how environmental ethics are embedded or absent in the micro-decisions of daily student life. The first stage involved data familiarization, during which the researcher engaged in repeated and immersive reading of all transcribed interviews and observational field notes. Following familiarization, the second stage consisted of initial or open coding, where segments of the data were highlighted and labeled based on semantic content. These codes represented recurring behavioral tendencies, motivations, and ethical positions expressed by the participants. Examples of frequent codes included; “avoiding plastic,” “carried out of habit,” “guilt but no change,” “social conformity,” “practical and fast,” and “aware but indifferent.” Observational data were also coded, capturing visible behaviors such as “discards without sorting,” “uses reusable tumbler,” or “reads signage but ignores.” This dual-source coding enabled the researcher to build a bridge between narrative discourse and material action.

The third stage involved generating initial themes by clustering related codes into broader categories that captured patterns of meaning. These emergent themes were analyzed in relation to the ethical spectrum: themes that aligned with anthropocentrism typically centered around utilitarian reasoning, while themes leaning toward ecocentrism highlighted collective responsibility and ecological concern. In the fourth stage, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and theoretical relevance. For example, an early theme titled environmental awareness was divided into two subthemes: cognitive awareness without behavior and awareness with action, as they represented fundamentally different ethical implications. The researcher also re-examined the themes in light of literature on moral reasoning and behavioral psychology to confirm their validity and resonance. The fifth stage involved defining and naming the final themes, which formed the backbone of the interpretive narrative. For example, under the theme socially discouraged action, a participant’s statement about not wanting to use a lunchbox because “no one else does” was paired with observations of group dynamics in campus canteens. These integrated data points allowed for a more nuanced ethical analysis and helped situate individual behaviors within a larger social-ecological system. The final stage consisted of interpretation and synthesis, in which the themes were mapped onto the three environmental ethics paradigms. Participants who demonstrated some level of consideration for non-human life or waste reduction, but inconsistently or without structural reflection, were categorized under partial biocentrism. The findings of this analysis thus serve as the empirical foundation for the discussion chapters that follow, illuminating the moral complexity of student consumption behavior in a modern urban university.

2.5 Validity, research ethics, and reflexivity

Establishing validity in qualitative research requires a commitment to methodological rigor, transparency, and ethical sensitivity throughout the research process. In this study, multiple strategies were employed to ensure the credibility, trustworthiness, and ethical integrity of the findings, while acknowledging the role of the researcher's positionality in shaping both data collection and interpretation. The integration of these data streams made it possible to evaluate the coherence between what participants said in interviews and what they did in practice. For instance, if a student expressed strong concern for environmental issues during an interview but was observed repeatedly discarding plastic waste without sorting, this contradiction became a point of interpretive interest rather than analytic error. Additionally, member checking was conducted to further enhance validity. After transcription, each participant was given the opportunity to review the transcript of their own interview for accuracy, clarification, or correction. The researcher also engaged in continuous reflexive journaling and maintained field notes throughout the research process to monitor potential biases, emotional responses, and shifting interpretations. Reflexivity in this study was not an afterthought, but a sustained practice. The researcher recognized that their dual role as an insider (a student within the same university context) and observer could simultaneously grant privileged access and introduce subjective assumptions.

In terms of ethical considerations, the research was conducted in accordance with best practices for social research involving human participants. Although formal institutional ethics approval was not required for this study, informal approval was secured from the supervising academic advisor, who reviewed the study design, interview questions, and consent procedures. All identifying information was removed or anonymized during transcription, coding, and reporting. Interview recordings and transcripts were stored securely in encrypted digital files accessible only to the researcher. Beyond methodological validity and ethical protocols, the study also sought to uphold interpretive validity, which concerns the degree to which the findings resonate with and accurately reflect the lived realities of the participants. Ultimately, this framework for ensuring validity, ethics, and reflexivity served not only to protect participants and ensure the quality of the research but also to strengthen the study's core contribution: a textured, context-sensitive understanding of the value systems and moral reasoning that shape everyday consumption among university students.

3. Result and Discussion

The primary aim of this section is to examine how students at UI Depok campus negotiate environmental ethics in their everyday consumption choices, and to evaluate how their actions align with or diverge from the normative frameworks of anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. These findings are based on a qualitative synthesis of data collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and supporting campus documentation, all of which have been thematically analyzed in accordance with Braun & Clarke (2006) method. These narratives are structured around the five ethical parameters developed in the earlier methodological framework; food packaging choices, beverage consumption behavior, online shopping habits, waste management practices, and ethical awareness.

The study begins with an overarching portrayal of the UI campus as both a site of intensive consumption and an arena of moral negotiation. Despite the university's reputation as an environmentally engaged institution exemplified by its participation in the UI GreenMetric ranking and its visible environmental campaigns the everyday consumption behavior of students suggests that a transition from "convenience" to "consciousness" remains partial and uneven. Observational data consistently revealed a high reliance on single-use plastics, limited use of reusable containers, impulsive e-commerce purchasing, and inconsistent adherence to campus waste sorting protocols. These findings point to the persistence of anthropocentric values, where consumption decisions are primarily driven

by convenience, social conformity, and price sensitivity, rather than ethical or ecological considerations. This knowledge–action gap echoes findings in environmental psychology literature, where cognitive awareness alone is often insufficient to change behavior without the presence of supporting social structures, personal accountability, or habitual reinforcement (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Schild et al., 2022).

By mapping students' actions and ethical justifications onto the three paradigms of environmental ethics, this study reveals a distribution of moral orientations that reflects broader trends in youth consumption culture. Beyond individual profiles, the findings also reveal the role of the university as a moral ecosystem, where values are shaped by infrastructure, peer norms, institutional policies, and everyday routines. For instance, while the UI campus does provide infrastructure for sustainability such as waste-sorting bins and refill stations the low usage rate suggests that material provision alone is not enough to produce ethical action. The results also point to the importance of peer influence and social signaling in either reinforcing or inhibiting ethical consumption.

The study affirms that fostering ecological responsibility requires more than information campaigns; it demands sustained engagement with value systems, cultural narratives, and ethical leadership embedded in everyday practice. In summary, the results of this research do not simply describe how students behave, but interrogate why they behave as they do, what values underlie their decisions, and what tensions emerge between ideals and realities. The patterns identified in this study offer both a cautionary tale and a hopeful possibility: while many students remain embedded in systems of convenience, there are visible seeds of ethical reflection and collective potential. These findings provide the conceptual and empirical foundation for proposing more integrative, value-based interventions that go beyond individual behavioral change to cultivate a culture of moral responsibility within the university and beyond.

3.1 General overview: Ethical orientation of student consumption

The UI Depok campus operates not only as an educational institution but also as a high-density consumption ecosystem reflective of broader urban lifestyle patterns. As one of Indonesia's leading universities and a global proponent of sustainable education through platforms such as the UI GreenMetric World University Ranking, UI has publicly committed itself to environmental leadership. Nonetheless, findings from this study reveal a persistent dissonance between institutional sustainability discourse and the actual consumption behaviors of its student population. These patterns underscore the limitations of technocratic or infrastructure-based interventions when not supported by corresponding shifts in social norms and individual ethical frameworks (Ozanne et al., 2022; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). One notable feature of the UI campus is its spatial-commercial design, which unintentionally reinforces unsustainable behavior. As Franks et al. (2018) argue, such contradictions are symptomatic of a utilitarian paradigm in which nature is valued primarily in terms of its instrumental function to human needs, a hallmark of anthropocentric ethics. These findings resonate with Zhang et al. (2024), who highlight the role of peer conformity and normative validation in shaping ethical behavior among university populations. Social norms thus serve as a powerful mechanism that can either reinforce ecological awareness or suppress it through ridicule, indifference, or apathy (Alisha & Kumar, 2024; Mamada, 2024).

The rise of digital consumption has further complicated the ethical terrain (Gursot et al., 2025; Hoelscher & Chatzidakiz, 2021; Scheider & Eli, 2023). Items are frequently ordered in small quantities, resulting in excess packaging waste that is seldom sorted or recycled. Interviews revealed that students rarely considered the lifecycle of these goods or the hidden environmental costs of digital consumption. This detachment is consistent with global trends, as discussed by Yang & Yan (2023), where algorithm-driven consumption and digital marketing reduce ethical reflection and promote hyper-convenience culture. However, their decisions were often governed by competing values: time efficiency, financial constraints, and the desire for social belonging. This reinforces the notion of a

knowledge–action gap, wherein awareness fails to translate into consistent behavior due to the absence of affective engagement and moral internalization (Schild et al., 2022). Another challenge lies in the symbolic nature of environmental messaging within the campus. While posters, banners, and UI GreenMetric rankings signal the university's environmental agenda, they often lack meaningful interaction with students' lived experiences. Several participants noted that sustainability initiatives were perceived as performative rather than participatory, something "the institution does" rather than something students are co-responsible for. Taken together, the findings in this section suggest that student consumption at UI reflects a complex, layered dynamic that is not reducible to ignorance or negligence. Instead, it emerges at the intersection of structural design, social pressures, digital economies, and competing moral logics. This involves not only redesigning systems for easier ethical action but also reshaping the moral narratives that define what is considered "normal" and "desirable" among students. Universities, as institutions of ethical formation as much as intellectual training, must therefore position themselves as value ecosystems that model, nurture, and reward environmental responsibility in both form and substance.

3.2 Patterns of practical ethical behavior in daily campus life

The practical manifestations of students' environmental ethics at UI, Depok, present a rich yet uneven landscape of ethical engagement. From observations and interviews conducted throughout the campus, it becomes evident that students' everyday consumption choices are influenced by a constellation of values, situational constraints, and institutional contexts, producing a range of behaviors that oscillate between convenience-driven habits and emerging ethical awareness. Most participants cited convenience and lack of alternatives as justifications for relying on single-use packaging. The ethical dimension of such decisions, though acknowledged during interviews, was often downplayed or dismissed in moments of daily routine. Students affiliated with environmental organizations were more likely to use lunchboxes, but even their behavior fluctuated when those around them did not do the same. Beverage consumption mirrored similar patterns. Disposable plastic cups remained dominant, especially at high-traffic locations such as the FISIP canteen and the coffee shop near the central library. Even those who owned tumblers admitted forgetting to bring them or lacking access to clean, working refill stations. The effort required to sustain sustainable behavior, what one participant called "extra homework", underscored the tension between ethical commitment and daily practicality. Students acknowledged that online shopping generated excess plastic waste, but rarely incorporated that awareness into their consumption logic. This detachment reflects the psychological and temporal distance often associated with digital transactions, where ecological consequences are invisible and therefore emotionally inert.

Waste management behaviors similarly revealed contradictions. Despite the presence of labeled bins and green signage across campus, most students did not sort their waste consistently. Observational data confirmed widespread practices of mixing organic, inorganic, and recyclable materials. Participants offered multiple explanations for this, ranging from confusion about sorting categories to cynicism about whether the sorted waste was actually processed properly. A common refrain "it all ends up in the same place anyway" revealed a breakdown in institutional trust and feedback loops. Yet only a minority demonstrated a strong sense of moral obligation that guided their actions. One student, for example, admitted feeling bad about always buying bottled drinks but continued the habit, citing time pressure and lack of alternatives. This illustrates the depth of the knowledge–action gap, where ethical cognition fails to translate into ethical practice without sustained support from cultural norms, material conditions, and affective investment. Across these dimensions packaging, beverages, online shopping, waste disposal, and moral reasoning, a general pattern emerges: students are aware of environmental issues, but this awareness is inconsistently embodied. Their ethical orientation is largely shaped by a pragmatic anthropocentrism, where the environment is viewed as important but secondary to

personal routines, academic schedules, and social expectations. Thus, ethical consumption among university students cannot be understood solely through the lens of individual choice or information access. It must be seen as a culturally situated practice, shaped by structural limitations, normative pressures, and the evolving moral narratives that frame what it means to be a responsible member of both the campus community and the global ecological system.

3.2.1 Food packaging choices

One of the most telling indicators of students' environmental orientation lies in their food packaging choices. Across interviews and observational sessions, it became apparent that the majority of participants continued to rely on single-use plastic and styrofoam packaging as a default part of their daily routines. These decisions were generally justified through appeals to practicality, affordability, or habit. Rarely through explicit dismissal of environmental values, but rather through what seemed to be a quiet resignation to structural convenience. Two students stood out as occasional users of reusable containers, yet even their commitment appeared situational and socially influenced. This behavior supports the findings of Ozanne et al. (2022), who argue that food consumption practices in university contexts are not purely individual decisions but are shaped by social norms, peer behavior, and contextual constraints. Only one student demonstrated consistent use of a personal food container and made active choices to avoid vendors who used environmentally detrimental packaging. This individual had prior experience volunteering in green campus programs and described their behavior as a "small but meaningful commitment to sustainability." This contrast highlights the power of habit formation and value internalization in sustaining pro-environmental behavior, a notion well supported in behavioral science literature (Verplanken & Whitmarsh, 2021). Despite institutional efforts to promote sustainable alternatives, including campaigns encouraging students to bring their own containers and the occasional availability of biodegradable packaging, uptake remains low. As one student put it,

> *"If only more vendors provided real alternatives, I'd definitely make different choices but most of the time, it's not even an option."* (Informant)

The dominance of single-use materials in campus food culture reflects a broader societal trend where disposable convenience has become the default, and alternatives are still perceived as the exception. Research by Wang et al. (2022) reinforces this observation, noting that even when students are equipped with environmental knowledge, the absence of systemic reinforcement through pricing, availability, or institutional modeling renders individual ethical action fragile and inconsistent. Ultimately, food packaging decisions reveal a significant gap between ethical intention and embedded practice. While some students have taken steps to resist the norm, most remain trapped within a system where unsustainable practices are not only easy but expected. What emerges is a clear need for a value-congruent infrastructure one that supports, rather than undermines, the ethical aspirations that many students already hold.

3.2.2 Beverage consumption habits

The way students consume beverages on campus offers further insight into their environmental orientations and the constraints they face in enacting ethical choices. Among the participants in this study, only two reported consistent use of personal tumblers, integrating the habit into their daily routines regardless of schedule or setting. They described the habit as something that initially required effort but eventually became second nature. One student explained,

> *"At first, I kept forgetting it. But over time, it just became part of my bag, like my wallet or phone."* (Informant)

In contrast, the majority of participants five out of seven relied heavily on bottled or cup-packaged beverages, purchased from food stalls, vending machines, or nearby cafés. Observations conducted at the FISIP canteen and the popular coffee shop near the central library confirmed this behavior. Plastic cups, straws, and sealed drink containers were frequently used and discarded without sorting. Bins were often filled with mixed waste, and signage promoting waste segregation appeared to have minimal influence on student disposal practices. In most cases, the decision to purchase drinks in disposable containers was not a matter of overt disregard for the environment but a result of habitual convenience. As one student casually remarked,

> *"If I'm already out and thirsty, I just buy whatever's there. I don't really think about it."* (Informant)

This behavior contributes directly to the campus's plastic waste burden and reflects a broader tension between ecological values and modern consumer culture. Morais & Ishida (2024) note that single-use beverage packaging especially from sugar-sweetened drinks is not only a major contributor to plastic pollution but is also tied to significant greenhouse gas emissions across the production and disposal chain. The environmental cost of these beverages, often seen as minor or invisible in daily life, accumulates rapidly when practiced at scale within a dense academic environment like UI. Several participants noted that they would be more likely to bring their tumblers if refill stations were more visible, functional, and widely distributed. This indicates that ethical behavior cannot be separated from material enabling conditions. The decision to use or not use a reusable container is not merely a reflection of personal values but also of the structural environment that makes certain choices easier, faster, or more socially accepted.

Social context once again played a mediating role. Students who were part of environmental organizations or who socialized with peers who used tumblers reported feeling more accountable for their choices. Conversely, those whose friends or classmates routinely bought packaged drinks felt little pressure to act differently. As a result, individual ethical awareness often becomes diluted within a broader culture of apathy or inertia. Underlying many of these patterns is a moral ambivalence a cognitive awareness of environmental harm that coexists with inaction. Students did not deny the negative impact of single-use plastics, but they often described themselves as "too busy," "forgetful," or "helpless to change the system." This reflects what scholars like Kollmuss & Agyeman (2002) describe as the "intention–behavior gap," in which people hold pro-environmental values but fail to act on them due to a combination of internal and external barriers. In the case of beverage consumption, these barriers include habit, lack of infrastructure, weak social norms, and the emotional distance created by routine consumerism. In conclusion, beverage consumption among students at UI illustrates a microcosm of the challenges facing sustainable lifestyle adoption in youth populations. Without intentional intervention in the form of visible infrastructure, normative modeling, and reward-based reinforcement, it is unlikely that voluntary ethical behavior will scale across the student body. Instead, ethical action risks remaining confined to the margins, practiced by a committed few rather than embraced as a shared cultural norm.

3.2.3 Online shopping behavior

Online shopping behavior among students at UI reflects another dimension of the complex relationship between convenience, consumption, and environmental ethics. All participants in this study reported engaging in online shopping regularly, often as part of their weekly or even daily routines. The reasons ranged from academic needs such as ordering books or stationery to lifestyle consumption, including clothing, gadgets, snacks,

and cosmetic products. The remaining participants acknowledged shopping online out of habit, boredom, or opportunistic reasons, particularly when items were discounted or part of limited-time promotions.

> *"I don't really need most of the stuff I buy online, but when it's cheap and it shows up on my feed, I just get it."* (Informant)

This candid statement reflects a broader pattern of impulsive consumption, one that is decoupled from environmental awareness and increasingly normalized in the era of algorithm-driven marketing and 24/7 access to digital marketplaces. This disconnect between action and impact is emblematic of what Igini (2024) identifies as the "hidden footprint" of e-commerce: not only does online shopping produce a significant amount of non-recyclable packaging, it also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions through transportation logistics, energy-intensive warehousing, and the return-shipping loop. Unlike the tangible act of throwing away a plastic bottle after use, online shopping waste is generated elsewhere by the seller, the courier, the warehouse and only becomes visible when packaging accumulates in dorm rooms or trash bins. Even then, students may not connect their personal habits to broader ecological harm. As one participant put it,

> *"Yeah, there's a lot of trash from my packages. But that's just how online shopping works, right?"* (Informant)

Additionally, convenience culture reinforces the behavior. Most students reported choosing online platforms over in-person shopping because it saved time, offered more variety, and was easier to do between classes or late at night. What emerges is a pattern where ethical considerations are eclipsed by efficiency, availability, and instant gratification hallmarks of a modern consumer identity that prioritizes access over accountability. The findings suggest that educational interventions targeting sustainable online shopping remain largely absent or ineffective in the current campus context. Students lacked information on how to shop more responsibly, and few were aware of options like minimal-packaging delivery services or carbon-offset purchasing platforms. This absence contributes to the perception that digital consumption lies outside the scope of campus sustainability concerns. Despite this, the behavior of the one student who intentionally adapted their online shopping habits offers a glimmer of possibility. They also described a sense of satisfaction in aligning their actions with their environmental values. Such examples point to the potential for moral reflection and behavior change, provided that students are equipped with the tools, narratives, and incentives to support that shift. In conclusion, online shopping behavior among students at UI is characterized by widespread engagement, low ethical awareness, and minimal structural support for sustainable alternatives. While the convenience of e-commerce has become an inseparable part of student life, its environmental consequences remain obscured or disregarded. Without such efforts, digital consumption will continue to represent a blind spot in environmental ethics discourse, despite its growing ecological impact.

3.2.4 Waste management practices

Waste management behavior among students at UI reveals another layer of disconnection between environmental infrastructure and everyday practice. Although sorted waste bins are available at multiple strategic locations across the Depok campus particularly around high-traffic areas such as the Rotunda, the UI Commuter Line Station, and faculty canteens observational and interview data indicate that this infrastructure is underutilized and often misunderstood by the student population. These students demonstrated a relatively high level of environmental concern and habitually sought out recycling bins, even if it required walking further or taking additional time. They expressed a sense of moral obligation and a desire to "do the right thing," even when those around

them did not. In contrast, the remaining participants either ignored the waste categories altogether or expressed confusion about how to use them. Observational data supported this pattern; bins labeled "organic," "non-organic," and "recyclable" were often filled with mixed waste, indicating that signage and color codes were insufficient in guiding behavior. Students frequently disposed of plastic cups, food wrappers, tissues, and even electronics packaging in the same container, regardless of instructions. When asked about this, some responded with indifference "it's all trash anyway" while others expressed skepticism about whether the university actually followed through with proper waste processing.

> *"I heard the cleaners just mix it all again,"* one participant noted, reflecting a breakdown of trust in the system. (Informant)

As Wang et al. (2022) point out, personal norms, environmental concern, and knowledge are strong predictors of waste management behavior, but these individual factors often falter in the absence of visible institutional accountability and cultural reinforcement. At UI, while the infrastructure may be physically present, its symbolic and functional integration into campus life appears superficial.

Part of this disconnect stems from the invisibility of outcomes. Unlike classroom performance, which yields grades, or physical fitness, which results in visible change, the impact of proper waste disposal is diffuse and delayed, making it less emotionally rewarding and more abstract. This is compounded by a campus culture that does not actively celebrate or normalize responsible waste practices. Cleanliness staff are rarely seen correcting misuse, and academic leaders or campus influencers seldom model pro-environmental behaviors in public settings. As a result, ethical behavior in waste management often feels like an individual burden rather than a shared norm. Even students who do make the effort described feeling isolated or demotivated by the perceived apathy of their peers. Despite these challenges, the few students who did sort their waste consistently serve as proof of potential. One participant shared how a sustainability workshop changed the way they perceived trash, helping them understand the lifespan of waste beyond the bin. Such narratives suggest that targeted interventions especially those that combine cognitive, emotional, and social engagement can shift student behavior meaningfully. In essence, the presence of bins is not enough. It is the values, narratives, and social structures around those bins that determine whether students treat them as tools for environmental responsibility or as just another object in the background of campus life.

3.2.5 Ethical values and environmental awareness

The moral reflections shared by students during interviews reveal a subtle yet powerful tension that lies at the heart of environmental ethics: the persistent gap between knowing and doing. In fact, five of the seven participants openly admitted to feeling guilt or discomfort when engaging in actions they knew to be environmentally harmful, such as purchasing over-packaged goods or discarding recyclable materials without sorting. Yet, despite this cognitive dissonance, they struggled to act differently. One participant shared,

> *"I always feel bad after buying another plastic drink, but it's not like I can stop everything. It's just hard to think about that all the time."* (Informant)

This statement illustrates the emotional fatigue and ethical paralysis that can accompany environmental awareness in a setting where unsustainable behavior is normalized and systemic change feels out of reach. Only two participants demonstrated what could be described as deep ethical reflection, in which their environmental awareness was linked to a coherent moral framework that guided decision-making. One referred to their actions as "small revolutions," suggesting a belief in the cumulative impact of ethical habits. This depth of reasoning is consistent with what environmental ethics scholars call ecocentric moral consciousness an understanding of one's place within a larger ecological

web that demands respect, restraint, and relational care (Cafaro & Primack, 2024). The contrast between these two groups of students those who feel ethically unsettled but inactive, and those who act from moral conviction highlights the presence of what Mooney et al. (2022) term the knowledge–action gap. The existence of this gap suggests that information alone is insufficient; without the affective and value-laden components of moral development, even well-informed individuals may fail to alter their actions.

Multiple factors contribute to this disconnect. Social norms on campus, as discussed earlier, often fail to support or reward ethical behavior, making students feel isolated in their intentions. Without positive moral reinforcement, students may come to view sustainability not as a shared value but as a niche concern for activists or "the already committed." To bridge this gap, universities must do more than offer eco-friendly infrastructure or conduct informational campaigns. There is a need for deep cultural integration of environmental ethics into the student experience through reflective pedagogy, peer-led dialogue, public rituals of ecological responsibility, and ethical storytelling that frames sustainability as an act of care rather than constraint. Ultimately, the findings from this dimension point to the invisible yet foundational role of ethics in shaping whether knowledge leads to action. While many students understand what sustainability requires, few have been given the moral scaffolding to live those values consistently. Interviews, five participants admitted to feeling guilty after overconsumption or discarding plastic waste but lacked a strong motivation to translate that into action. Only two participants showed deep reflection, linking their consumption behavior to a moral responsibility for the planet's sustainability.

3.3 Thematic analysis by ethical parameters

A deeper understanding of students' consumption behavior at UI, Depok, emerges when analyzed through the theoretical lens of environmental ethics paradigms, namely anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. By mapping specific actions such as the use of single-use plastics, the decision to carry reusable containers, online purchasing habits, waste sorting, and expressions of moral concern onto these ethical orientations, it becomes possible to illuminate the moral logic underlying everyday decisions. Students who routinely bought food in plastic packaging, preferred bottled beverages, or made impulsive online purchases rarely articulated their choices in relation to environmental consequences. Even when aware of the environmental harm, many framed their decisions as "practical" or "inevitable." This reflects a dominant ethical posture in which nature is secondary to human-centered priorities, and environmental concern is acknowledged but subordinated to personal routine. Such reasoning was particularly evident in waste disposal practices. Several students who expressed concern about pollution nonetheless discarded unsorted trash, citing either systemic inefficacy ("it all ends up mixed anyway") or social pressure ("nobody else does it"). These rationalizations are emblematic of what Cafaro & Primack (2024) describe as instrumental environmentalism, a diluted form of anthropocentrism where nature matters, but only insofar as it affects human well-being or disrupts personal routines. These students occasionally brought reusable containers, avoided unnecessary online purchases, or attempted to sort their waste, even when such actions were inconvenient. What distinguished them was not the perfection of their behavior, but the intentionality behind it. They expressed empathy for future generations, concern for animals harmed by pollution, or frustration with their own inconsistencies. One participant, for example, spoke about choosing biodegradable packaging,

> *"Not because it helps me, but because I feel responsible for what happens to it after."* (Informant)

Another expressed guilt after ordering multiple parcels online and resolved to consolidate purchases moving forward. Finally, a few students demonstrated a more robust alignment with ecocentric ethics, which position entire ecosystems not just individual

organisms as entities worthy of moral concern. This was evident in participants who consistently used reusable items, actively avoided overconsumption, and engaged in reflective practices linking their lifestyle to broader planetary systems. One student described their behavior as "being part of something bigger than myself," articulating a worldview in which human identity is not separate from nature but embedded within it. These participants were often those who had been involved in sustainability education, environmental organizations, or had experienced moments of moral awakening through travel, activism, or community work. A single individual may express anthropocentric logic in one context (e.g., online shopping), biocentric concern in another (e.g., waste sorting), and ecocentric intention in a third (e.g., ethical reflection during interviews). These overlapping ethical orientations suggest that students inhabit a moral continuum, shaped by personal values, institutional messages, peer influence, and lived experience. The implications of this finding are both challenging and hopeful. On one hand, the dominance of anthropocentric reasoning underscores the limitations of existing sustainability interventions that focus only on infrastructure or awareness. By engaging students not only cognitively but also emotionally and ethically, universities can play a central role in fostering the kind of deep value transformation needed to align everyday practices with planetary sustainability.

3.4 Ethical reflection: Partial awareness and resistance to change

One of the most revealing insights from the interview data was the presence of ethical ambivalence among students an internal conflict between the aspiration to live more sustainably and a persistent resistance to behavioral discomfort. This dissonance underscores a critical yet often overlooked dimension of environmental ethics: the emotional and social struggle that accompanies attempts to align values with actions in daily life. Participant 3, for example, expressed a desire to adopt more environmentally friendly habits but cited the absence of a "supportive social environment" as a significant barrier. In this case, the student's willingness to change was conditional upon the existence of a peer context that normalizes and encourages pro-environmental practices. This observation aligns with broader literature in moral psychology, which emphasizes the importance of moral scaffolding structures of support, recognition, and reinforcement that allow ethical intentions to materialize into consistent practices. In contrast, Participant G, an engineering student, described their lifestyle shift as stemming from personal experience with Jakarta's recurrent flooding and a growing awareness of the climate crisis.

This narrative illustrates how transformative change can be catalyzed by affective and embodied encounters with environmental degradation. This finding is consistent with the view that sustainable behavior is often preceded by what environmental education scholars call "moral moments", affectively charged events that reorient one's sense of responsibility and agency. Together, these contrasting narratives reveal that partial awareness of environmental issues does not necessarily translate into behavioral change, especially when social or emotional reinforcement is lacking. This phenomenon complicates the conventional assumption that increased knowledge will lead to more sustainable behavior. Instead, it suggests that ethical transformation requires not just information but also affective engagement, social affirmation, and opportunities for experiential learning. Ethical ambivalence, then, should not be interpreted as hypocrisy or failure, but as a site of moral possibility. It signals that the seeds of ethical awareness have taken root, albeit in uncertain soil. The task of educators and institutions is to nurture these seeds by creating ecosystems of meaning, solidarity, and practice that can bridge the gap between knowing and doing. Only then can the resistance to change be transformed into a readiness for ethical action.

3.5 The role of campus as a moral ecosystem

Universities are more than institutions of knowledge they are ethical environments where values are cultivated, challenged, and normalized. The UI, through initiatives such as

the UI GreenMetric and the establishment of waste management infrastructure, has taken commendable steps toward institutionalizing environmental sustainability. Observational data and student testimonies converge on a central theme: the absence of moral reinforcement mechanisms. Students noted that these infrastructures are frequently seen as passive installations rather than active agents of behavioral change. More importantly, there appears to be a deficit of institutional role models figures such as lecturers, staff, or student leaders who visibly embody and promote sustainable practices. As one participant put it, "I've never seen my lecturer bring a tumbler or sort their trash so why should I?" This perception reflects a deeper institutional challenge: sustainability must be lived, not just displayed. In this sense, the university functions as a moral ecosystem a social and cultural environment that shapes ethical behavior through norms, expectations, modeling, and feedback loops. To address this, the study argues for a shift toward participatory and reflective forms of sustainability education.

Rather than relying solely on top-down information campaigns, universities must create opportunities for students to engage actively with ethical questions surrounding consumption, waste, and environmental responsibility. This includes incorporating environmental ethics into the formal curriculum across disciplines not only in environmental studies programs but also in engineering, economics, social sciences, and the humanities. Equally important is the integration of sustainability into student organization activities and campus rituals. The role of student organizations is especially critical, as peer dynamics were repeatedly shown in this study to influence behavior more strongly than abstract knowledge or institutional signage. Ultimately, for the University of Indonesia to fully embody its green campus mission, it must move beyond infrastructural provision toward cultural transformation. The campus must become a space where sustainability is not only possible but expected where ecological awareness is embedded in relationships, routines, and institutional identity (Brown & Smith, 2024; Weiss et al., 2021). In doing so, university becomes more than a place of learning; it becomes a site ethical formation, capable of nurturing a generation of students who see environmental responsibility not as an optional lifestyle, but as an integral part of who they are.

4. Conclusion

This study finds that although students at the University of Indonesia Depok live in a progressive academic environment with access to sustainability information, most of their consumptive behaviors still reflect anthropocentric values. Consumption choices are driven by convenience, efficiency, and dominant social norms that do not yet fully support environmentally friendly practices. The phenomenon of the knowledge-action gap appears consistently, indicating that intellectual awareness of environmental crises has not automatically translated into concrete actions in daily life. The ethical paradigm mapping shows a diverse distribution, ranging from highly pragmatic behaviors to those beginning to demonstrate ecocentric awareness. Only a small number of students consistently brought their own food containers, sorted their waste, and avoided impulsive consumption. In contrast, the majority still operate within a utilitarian spectrum that treats the environment merely as a means to an end. This underscores the need for interventions that are not only informative but also transformative, engaging the affective and moral dimensions of student consciousness.

As a value ecosystem, the campus plays a vital role in shaping and reinforcing a culture of environmental ethics. UI, as a green-committed institution through the GreenMetric program, can further empower both students and faculty to create reflective spaces and tangible incentives. Value-based education, the integration of sustainability into student organization activities, and direct incentives such as tumbler discounts or recognition of ethical practices are strategic steps to bridge the gap between knowledge and action. Thus, the transformation of student lifestyles from convenience to a consciousness is a gradual process that requires collective support. Students are not only future agents of change but also key actors in driving change today. Ecological awareness is not merely a matter of

personal choice but a reflection of moral responsibility in the face of an escalating planetary crisis. If each small action is a carried out with awareness and consistency, then the consumptive lifestyle we live today can become the starting point of a larger, sustainable transformation.

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