

Cultural Usability and Cultural Policy in the Era of Digital Transformation

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Abstract

This study examines the transformation of cultural policy in the era of digital transformation through the framework of 'Cultural Usability'. Moving beyond conventional accessibility-centered approaches, the study argues that cultural policy should focus on how citizens meaningfully interpret, experience, and utilize cultural resources in everyday life. To explore this perspective, the study conducts a comparative analysis of cultural policies in Korea and France. In particular, France has institutionalized long-term systems of cultural participation through governance structures such as EAC, EPCC, DRAC, and Micro-Folie, emphasizing mediation, learning pathways, and collaborative governance. By contrast, Korea has achieved notable progress in expanding digital cultural infrastructure and accessibility; however, limitations remain in terms of sustainable governance, professional mediation, and long-term operational continuity. Based on these findings, this study proposes a three-dimensional model of cultural usability consisting of cognitive, participatory, and structural dimensions. Ultimately, the study suggests that future cultural policy should move beyond infrastructure-centered expansion toward experience-centered cultural design that promotes citizens' active cultural engagement and sustainable participation.

Keyword : Cultural Usability, Cultural Accessibility, Digital Transformation, Digital Cultural Policy, Cultural Governance

1. Introduction

Digital transformation is reshaping the creation, distribution, and consumption of culture and the arts, requiring a fundamental rethinking of cultural policy [1]. In particular, the expansion of digital platforms following the pandemic has broadened access to cultural content while simultaneously transforming the ways users participate in and interpret cultural experiences. Consequently, cultural policy discussions have shifted beyond the question of who can access culture toward the conditions under which cultural resources are meaningfully understood and utilized [2].

Existing studies have largely approached this issue from three perspectives: expanding opportunities for cultural participation and cultural welfare [3], strengthening collaborative cultural governance among public institutions and stakeholders [4], and promoting digital technologies and infrastructure in response

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to post-pandemic cultural environments [2]. Although these studies have significantly advanced cultural accessibility, they have paid relatively limited attention to what occurs after access is achieved—namely, how users interpret, experience, and continuously engage with cultural resources. Most previous research has emphasized institutional provision and digital infrastructure while overlooking the experiential processes through which cultural opportunities become meaningful cultural practices. This suggests that contemporary cultural policy should extend beyond expanding access to include the conditions that enable interpretation, participation, and sustained cultural engagement.

To address this gap, this study proposes the concept of Cultural Usability as a framework for reinterpreting cultural policy in the era of digital transformation. Rather than replacing accessibility, Cultural Usability extends it by focusing on the cognitive, participatory, environmental, and governance conditions that enable individuals to understand, select, and meaningfully utilize cultural resources in their everyday lives. To operationalize this concept, the study adopts the notion of the context of use from Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), where usability refers to the extent to which users achieve intended goals effectively within specific environments. Applying this perspective to cultural policy enables analysis of cultural participation as a process shaped not only by access to cultural resources but also by users' experiential contexts.

Based on this framework, the study conducts a comparative analysis of the French cultural policy ecosystem—including the EAC policy, the EPCC governance model, and digital initiatives such as Micro-Folie—and examines their implications for Korean cultural policy. Specifically, it evaluates the limitations of accessibility-centered approaches in areas such as smart museums, immersive cultural content, arts education, and digital cultural infrastructure, while exploring strategies for enhancing users' cultural experiences.

Ultimately, this study argues that future cultural policy should move beyond expanding opportunities for access toward designing sustainable conditions that foster meaningful interpretation, active participation, and continuous cultural engagement. By shifting the analytical focus from infrastructure provision to experiential usability, the study contributes a new theoretical framework and practical policy directions for user-centered cultural governance in the digital era.

2. Theoretical Shift and Analytical Framework

2.1 Achievements and Limitations of Accessibility Discourse

Discussions on cultural accessibility have played a significant role in expanding opportunities for

cultural participation as a matter of public rights [5]. In particular, international discourse centered on UNESCO has redefined cultural participation not merely as a matter of access, but as an issue of social participation and cultural rights, thereby establishing it as a central agenda of cultural policy [6]. Within this context, Korea has also achieved certain progress in alleviating economic and geographical barriers and expanding opportunities for cultural participation through initiatives such as the enactment of the Framework Act on Culture and the Cultural Nuri Card program. Nevertheless, accessibility-centered cultural policy has gradually revealed structural limitations. First, as policy performance has become heavily focused on quantitative indicators such as the number of visitors, utilization rates, and distribution figures, the qualitative dimensions of cultural experience have not been sufficiently reflected. This tendency has resulted in supply-centered performance management rather than a deeper understanding of user experience, ultimately reinforcing the reduction of cultural participation to a mere act of consumption.

Furthermore, although cultural participation constitutes a complex experience shaped by individuals' interpretive capacities, cultural capital, and social contexts, existing accessibility discourse has failed to adequately explain these conditions. In particular, the assumption that opportunities for access to cultural activities automatically lead to meaningful participation is, in reality, likely to be constrained by differences in cultural capital. In other words, it has been consistently argued that the mere provision of opportunities is insufficient to resolve cultural disparities among social classes [7].

Moreover, demand-support policies based on selective welfare may contribute to expanding accessibility for specific groups; however, in the long term, such approaches may also reinforce stigmatization by fixing beneficiaries within particular categories. These issues suggest that cultural policy should move beyond merely expanding opportunities for access and should also consider the sustainability and usability of cultural experiences. Such limitations become even more pronounced in the context of digital transformation.

Today, cultural participation is shaped not only by physical accessibility or economic conditions, but also by new factors such as digital literacy, platform utilization capabilities, and information interpretation skills. In other words, the substantive gap in cultural participation increasingly emerges not at the level of 'accessibility' itself, but at the level of 'usability', which cannot be sufficiently explained through conventional accessibility discourse alone.

Accordingly, cultural policy in the era of digital transformation requires a new analytical framework capable of explaining how cultural experiences are actually understood, participated in, and continuously utilized beyond the mere expansion of accessibility. In this regard, cultural policy needs to move away

from a supply-centered approach and be reconstructed around users' experiences and contexts of use.

2.2 Conceptualization of Cultural Usability and the Theoretical Application of the Three-Dimensional Model

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study proposes the concept of 'Cultural Usability'. Cultural usability refers not simply to access to cultural resources, but to the ways individuals interpret, appropriate, and sustain cultural experiences within specific socio-cultural contexts. Whereas accessibility primarily concerns the opportunity structure of cultural participation, cultural usability provides a conceptual framework for analyzing the conditions under which cultural experiences are meaningfully formed and continuously maintained after access has been secure. This concept extends the notion of 'usability', originally developed in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), into the domain of cultural policy [8].

In general, usability refers to the extent to which specified users can achieve particular goals effectively, efficiently, and satisfactorily within a given environment. Initially, discussions of usability focused primarily on functional convenience and efficiency; however, the concept has gradually expanded to include users, experiences and contextual conditions. By applying the concept of usability to cultural policy, this study argues that cultural participation should be understood not simply in terms of whether cultural resources are provided, but in terms of how they operate within users' experiential contexts. In particular, cultural usability emphasizes the importance of 'context'. Users' social backgrounds, cultural experiences, living conditions, and technological environments directly influence the formation and utilization of cultural experiences. Even identical cultural resources may be interpreted in entirely different ways depending on users' experiences and environments. Therefore, cultural policy should move beyond uniform expansion of supply and shift toward an experience-centered approach that considers diverse user conditions.

Furthermore, cultural usability assumes citizens not as passive beneficiaries but as active agents. This perspective understands cultural participation not merely as an act of appreciation or consumption, but as an expanded process of cultural practice involving participation, creation, and reinterpretation. Such discussions are closely related to John Dewey's perspective, which explains artistic experience as an interactive process formed within the context of everyday life [9]. At the same time, they also resonate with Michel de Certeau's argument that culture is consumed and reconstructed through everyday practices [10].

Taken together, these discussions suggest that cultural usability should be understood not as a single-dimensional concept but as a multilayered structure. On this basis, as shown in [Table 1], this study proposes a "Three-Dimensional Model (Cognitive-Participatory-Structural Model)" consisting of cognitive, participatory, and structural dimensions of cultural usability. This model serves as an integrated analytical framework for examining the policy conditions that sustain cultural participation.

First, cognitive usability relates to individuals' capacities to understand and interpret cultural experiences. It includes the accumulation of cultural capital, learning processes, and meaning-making abilities, referring to the process through which mere access is transformed into an 'understandable experience'. From this perspective, cultural policy should be designed to strengthen citizens' interpretive capacities through the integration of education and cultural engagement.

Second, participatory usability concerns active involvement in cultural activities and the possibility of creative engagement. It positions citizens not merely as spectators but as subjects of cultural production and reconstruction, raising the question of how participatory structures can be ensured within the processes of program design and operation. Autonomous choice, collaborative activities, and opportunities for collective creation constitute key elements of this dimension.

Third, structural usability refers to the institutional and environmental conditions that support the sustainability of cognitive and participatory practices. These conditions include funding system, policy governance, cooperative networks, and data-driven operational and evaluative frameworks. In this sense, structural usability functions as the institutional foundation that enables the long-term sustainability of cultural participation.

[Table 1] Three-Dimensional Analytical Framework of Cultural Usability

Analytical Dimension	Core Concept and Objective	Major Operational Mechanisms (Design Elements)	Empirical Indicators (Examples)
Cognitive Usability	A cognitive foundation that enables the public to actively interpret cultural resources rather than merely consume them	Design of cumulative learning pathways beyond one-time experiences, and integration of knowledge and creative practice	Accumulated cultural experiences across the life cycle; rate of acquisition of public certifications (e.g., EAC labels)
Participatory Usability	An institutional environment in which citizens move beyond passive spectatorship and actively engage in planning and secondary creation	Guarantee of users' autonomous curatorial participation and active support from on-site mediators (médiateurs)	Degree of citizen participation in programs; voluntary revisit rates; number of derivative user-created works

Structural Usability	Governance structures that support the long-term of cognitive and participatory practices through institutional and financial systems	Formation of diversified co-financing systems and distribution of authority based on multi-year agreements	Proportion of multi-year agreements; stability of financial resources; representation of citizens within decision-making bodies
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These three dimensions are not independent categories, but mutually constitutive elements that operate in close interrelation. For instance, without sufficient cognitive capacity, participation is likely to remain superficial or merely formalistic. Likewise, in the absence of adequate structural support, participatory and educational practices cannot be sustained over time. Accordingly, cultural policy should move beyond approaches that privilege a single dimension and instead adopt an integrated framework that simultaneously addresses cognitive, participatory, and structural conditions. Ultimately, the three-dimensional model proposed in this study reconceptualizes cultural participation not simply as a matter of access, but as a multilayered experiential process shaped by interpretation, participation, and institutional support. In doing so, the model complements the limitations of conventional accessibility-centered policies while offering a new analytical framework and policy orientation for cultural policy in the era of digital transformation.

3. Analysis of 'Cultural Usability' in France

3.1 Analytical Approach: Cross-Analysis at the Level of Institutional Mechanisms

This section examines French cultural policy not through a simple description of individual institutions, but through the 'institutional mechanisms' by which policy is operationalized in practice. The analysis focuses on the 100% EAC label, the governance structures of EPCC and DRAC, and the digital cultural platform Micro-Folie. Rather than treating these cases as isolated institutional examples, the study investigates how they collectively constitute the conditions of cultural usability across cognitive, participatory, and structural dimensions. Here, cultural usability does not simply refer to the expansion of opportunities for access, but rather to a concept that explains how cultural experiences are actually understood, participated in, and sustained. Accordingly, the analytical focus of this study lies not in the quantitative expansion of institutions themselves, but in how the 'conditions of use' after access are designed and organized. Traditionally, French cultural policy emphasized the expansion of accessibility through the principle of 'cultural democratization'. In recent years, however, policy orientations have

increasingly shifted toward citizens' active participation, cumulative learning pathways, regional cooperation, and digital environments [11]. This transition indicates that the central concern of cultural policy is moving beyond the mere provision of access toward the design of user experience and participatory conditions.

To analyze these transformations, this study approaches the operational structure of French cultural policy through three interrelated dimensions: policy objectives, operational mechanisms, and evaluation and feedback systems. First, policy objectives refer to the normative orientations underpinning cultural policy, including universality, proximity, and the expansion of participation. Second, operational mechanisms encompass the institutional arrangements through which policy is implemented, such as certification systems, governance structures, funding allocation, mediation personnel, and cost-sharing frameworks. Third, evaluation and feedback systems include auditing procedures, performance indicators, policy reporting, and mechanisms of policy adjustment and revision. This analytical framework also represents an attempt to concretize, at the level of policy design, UNESCO's understanding of cultural rights as multidimensional rights encompassing participation, creation, and cultural enjoyment, rather than merely rights of access. From this perspective, cultural policy should not be understood simply as the provision of cultural facilities or content, but as the organization of the social and institutional conditions through which citizens can meaningfully experience and utilize culture.

[Table 2] Cross-Mapping Matrix of the Three-Dimensional Mechanisms in French Cultural Policy

Policy Mechanism	Cognitive Mechanism	Participatory Mechanism	Structural Mechanism
100% EAC Label (Arts and Cultural Education)	[Pathway Structuring] Mandatory organization of a "consistent three-stage learning pathway (Niveau 1-3)" from childhood to adulthood, rather than one-time cultural experiences	[Collaborative Planning] Joint project design through multi-stakeholder partnerships among schools, cultural institutions, and artists, rather than top-down directives	[Administrative Integration] Joint evaluation by the Rectorat and DRAC, with mandatory co-signature by the Prefect and the Superintendent of Education
Micro-Folie (Digital Cultural Hub)	[Resource Structuring] Provision of high-quality national collections as "modular curatorial resources" connected to educational programs, rather than simple technological adoption (e.g., VR)	[Human Mediation] Facilitation of discussion and secondary creative experiences through FabLab-linked programs and resident mediators (médiateurs), beyond mere technological operation	[Cost-Sharing Structure] Reduction of structural asymmetry through central government support for initial capital expenditure (CapEx) and local government responsibility for operational expenditure (OpEx)

<p>EPCC & DRAC (Governance System)</p>	<p>Primarily concerned with participatory and structural mechanisms</p>	<p>[Institutional Representation] Legal guarantee of voting rights for student and staff representatives within governing boards, thereby forming a public sphere</p>	<p>[Corporatization and Mediation] Establishment of independent public corporations with diversified co-financing systems, rather than loose agreements (MOUs), coordinated through DRAC's mediating role</p>
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Accordingly, the purpose of this section is not merely to present French cultural policy as an exemplary foreign model, but to interpret its operational principles through the analytical framework of cultural usability. By examining learning pathway design, participatory structures, mediation systems, and collaborative governance within French cultural policy, this study seeks to derive institutional and operational implications applicable to Korean cultural policy in the era of digital transformation. Ultimately, as illustrated in [Table 2], the present analysis conceptualizes cultural policy not as a supply-oriented system of cultural provision, but as the design of a user environment that structures experience and participation. This perspective suggests that the central challenge of cultural policy in the digital era lies not simply in technological adoption or infrastructural expansion, but in the construction of sustainable conditions of use through which citizens' cultural experiences can be continuously sustained and reproduced.

3.2 Cognitive, Participatory, and Structural Mechanisms

Cognitive mechanisms refer to the institutional and experiential conditions through which cultural experiences develop beyond consumption into processes of interpretation and meaning-making. France's 100% EAC (Éducation Artistique et Culturelle) policy exemplifies this approach by institutionalizing arts and cultural education as a lifelong learning pathway rather than a series of isolated programs, thereby fostering cumulative cultural understanding [12]. Similarly, Micro-Folie extends cognitive mechanisms into digital environments by integrating digital museums and VR-based content with educational and interpretive programs, improving both accessibility and interpretability while reducing regional cultural disparities [13]. However, digital access alone does not ensure meaningful learning. Digital environments may also produce information overload and fragmented engagement, highlighting the need for educational frameworks that connect access with sustained interpretation and learning [14]. Thus, the value of cognitive mechanisms lies not in expanding access itself but in organizing cultural experiences to promote interpretation and reflective learning.

Participatory mechanisms refer to the conditions that transform cultural participation into active cultural practice. Micro-Folie illustrates this through mediation programs, collaborative creation, and discussion-based activities that position users as active participants rather than passive audiences. These practices demonstrate that meaningful participation depends less on technology than on program design, professional mediation, and experiential organization. This perspective aligns with Michel de Certeau's view that culture is continually reconstructed through everyday practices [11]. Likewise, the 100% EAC policy promotes collaborative creation and project-based learning, while the EPCC model institutionalizes stakeholder participation in cultural governance. Participation is therefore understood not simply as cultural consumption but as institutional inclusion and public engagement. Participatory usability emerges when mediation systems, educational programs, and governance structures are effectively integrated.

Structural mechanisms provide the institutional foundations that sustain cognitive and participatory practices over time through governance, funding, operational systems, and evaluation. France's EPCC and DRAC systems coordinate cultural policy through collaboration between central and regional authorities, enabling policies that respond to local conditions [15]. Likewise, Micro-Folie combines centralized content provision with decentralized local management, strengthening regional autonomy while reducing barriers to implementation [16]. Nevertheless, challenges related to long-term financial sustainability and qualitative evaluation remain. These cases demonstrate that cultural usability depends not only on individual participation but also on stable institutional design, collaborative governance, and continuous evaluation.

Taken together, cognitive, participatory, and structural mechanisms operate as mutually reinforcing dimensions of cultural usability. Without cognitive capacity, participation remains superficial; without structural support, educational and participatory practices cannot be sustained. The French case therefore demonstrates that contemporary cultural policy is moving beyond expanding accessibility toward designing user experiences and participatory conditions. In the era of digital transformation, the central challenge of cultural policy lies not simply in adopting digital technologies but in creating institutional structures that sustain meaningful cultural engagement over time.

4. Proposal for a Korean Model of Cultural Usability

In the context of digital transformation, although physical accessibility to cultural resources has expanded considerably, the cognitive capacities required to interpret and meaningfully utilize these resources are not automatically developed. Consequently, inequalities in cultural participation arise not

only from differences in access but also from disparities in interpretive ability and accumulated cultural capital [8]. Even when identical digital platforms and cultural content are provided, actual levels of participation and usability vary according to individuals' prior experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds. While Korean cultural policy has expanded school-based arts education and cultural programs, these initiatives have largely depended on short-term project funding, limiting the establishment of continuous learning pathways. This contrasts with French cultural policy, which institutionalizes lifelong cultural learning through regionally coordinated systems [17].

Accordingly, the limitations of cognitive usability in Korea should be understood not simply as a shortage of programs but as a structural disconnect between educational opportunities and sustained cultural experiences across the life course. Cultural policy should therefore move beyond expanding program provision toward designing cumulative learning pathways that support continuous engagement. Likewise, cultural participation should be viewed not merely as spectatorship but as an active process of interpreting, appropriating, and integrating cultural resources into everyday life. As Hilary Silver argues, social exclusion reflects the disconnection of relationships and belonging, suggesting that cultural policy must emphasize participatory structures rather than accessibility alone. From this perspective, participatory usability refers to the institutional conditions that enable citizens to actively reinterpret and incorporate cultural resources into their daily cultural practices.

Korea has made substantial progress in expanding digital cultural access through initiatives such as smart museums, online exhibitions, immersive content, and SAC ON SCREEN under the Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Museums and Art Museums (2024 - 2028). However, these policies remain largely focused on infrastructure development, while comparatively limited attention has been paid to operational systems that sustain user experience and long-term participation. As emphasized in ISO 9241-11, usability depends on the interaction among users, tasks, and contexts of use rather than on technology alone [9]. Nevertheless, current policy evaluation continues to prioritize quantitative indicators –including visitor numbers, infrastructure development, and content distribution–while qualitative measures such as sustained participation, revisit rates, and community engagement remain underdeveloped. Strengthening participatory usability therefore requires integrating cultural content, education, digital platforms, and local communities through professional cultural mediators and sustainable operational systems.

The sustainability of cognitive and participatory usability also depends on governance structures. Although Korea has expanded its cultural infrastructure through national and regional cultural foundations, policy implementation remains highly centralized, constrained by single-year budgeting and

performance-oriented evaluation. These conditions limit regional autonomy, discourage long-term planning, and reduce local organizations to implementing centrally designed programs. Decision-making likewise remains dominated by government agencies and experts, with relatively limited participation from user communities [3].

Ultimately, the challenges facing Korean cultural policy stem less from the absence of institutions than from the limitations of existing operational and governance frameworks. Building on the preceding analysis, this study proposes four design principles for a Korean model of Cultural Usability [Table 3]: (1) Rights-based Universality, ensuring continuous cultural learning throughout the life course; (2) Modularity and Mediation, integrating cultural content, education, digital platforms, and local communities; (3) Decentralization and Coordination, strengthening regional autonomy and intergovernmental collaboration; and (4) Multi-year Contracts and Feedback, promoting long-term operational stability and qualitative evaluation. Together, these principles shift cultural policy from infrastructure-centered provision toward the creation of sustainable experiential and participatory conditions that enable meaningful cultural engagement.

[Table 3] Deficiencies and Design Principles of the Korean Model of Cultural Usability

Deficiency Diagnosis	Policy Problem Patterns	Responsive Design Principles
Cognitive Deficiency	Selective support centered on single-year public funding programs, and weak continuity of learning pathways	Rights-based Universality
Participatory Deficiency	Digital investment centered on infrastructure construction (CapEx), and insufficient design of human mediation programs	Modularity & Mediation
Structural Deficiency A	A tendency toward vertical dependency and delivery-oriented systems among central, metropolitan, and local levels of government	Decentralization & Coordination
Structural Deficiency B	Single-year budget volatility and an excessive reliance on quantitative evaluation centered on budget execution rates	Multi-year Contract & Feedback

5. Conclusion

This study argues that the central challenge of cultural policy in the era of digital transformation lies not merely in expanding accessibility but in securing cultural usability. While existing policies have primarily emphasized the provision of cultural facilities and digital infrastructure, this study instead focused on how cultural experiences are interpreted, enacted, and sustained over time. Accordingly, cultural usability was conceptualized as a multidimensional framework encompassing cognitive,

participatory, and structural dimensions, providing a new analytical perspective for understanding contemporary cultural policy. The findings suggest that cultural inequality arises not only from unequal physical access but also from disparities in learning opportunities, participatory conditions, and institutional arrangements that enable meaningful cultural engagement. The French case demonstrates that cultural policy is increasingly shifting from ensuring access to designing conditions that continuously support citizens' cultural participation. Specifically, the 100% EAC initiative strengthens cognitive usability through life-cycle-based cultural education, while Micro-Folie enhances participatory usability by integrating digital technologies with professional mediation. Moreover, the governance structures of EPCC and DRAC institutionalize structural usability through coordinated cooperation between central and regional governments.

By comparison, although Korea has significantly expanded its digital cultural infrastructure, its policy framework remains largely infrastructure-oriented and project-based. Professional mediation systems, qualitative evaluation mechanisms, and institutional arrangements that sustain long-term participation remain comparatively limited. These findings indicate that digital cultural policy should move beyond technological adoption toward operational and institutional designs that foster continuous cultural engagement. Based on this analysis, the study proposes four policy principles for enhancing cultural usability in Korea: rights-based universality, modularity with professional mediation, decentralized collaborative governance, and multi-year operational systems supported by qualitative feedback mechanisms. These principles suggest that future cultural policy should prioritize the design of meaningful cultural experiences rather than the simple expansion of cultural provision.

The principal contribution of this study lies in proposing a conceptual shift from accessibility-centered cultural policy toward an experience-centered framework. By introducing the concept of cultural usability, the study reconceptualizes cultural policy as the design of institutional environments that organize cultural experience, participation, and practice, thereby extending policy analysis beyond infrastructure to experiential and operational dimensions.

Nevertheless, this study is limited by its conceptual focus and institutional analysis centered on the French case, without empirical validation of policy outcomes. Future research should incorporate empirical indicators, including Cultural Nuri Card usage, user re-participation, operational outcomes of digital cultural platforms, and the sustainability of regional cultural activities. Comparative analyses across generations, regions, and socioeconomic groups would further strengthen the theoretical and practical applicability of cultural usability as both an analytical framework and a guiding principle for future cultural policy in the digital era.

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