



VISUAL CONTENT OF THE OMNIBUS LAW DEBATE IN INDONESIA: A CULTURAL-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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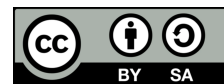
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ABSTRACT

The omnibus law issue, which reached its peak in November 2020, has sparked much debate. This article aims to analyze the pros and cons of the omnibus law, which incorporates visual content on social media, particularly Twitter. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to collect, compile, and analyze relatively unstructured data, emphasizing the essential role of subjectivity in the research process rather than statistical analysis and an interdisciplinary approach for solving problems or tackling topics that are too broad and complex to handle, thus utilizing disciplines from various fields. This helps summarize problems and build a more comprehensive understanding, as well as generate practical knowledge. Data collected through the Twitter search function (API) relates to the Omnibus Law case in Indonesia. The study period ran from October to November 2020. The study concludes that specific historical, cultural, and social contexts significantly influence preferences for visual content formats.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent literature (Alingasa et al., 2020; Bui, 2016; Chattharakul, 2019; Duile, 2020; Fahmi, 2019; Kailani and Slama, 2020; Suwana, 2019) suggests that studies of visual content in Southeast Asia emphasize the role of minority actors in resisting overly large government structures and their hegemonic power. In this regard, visual content empowers grassroots citizens to voice their identities and advocate for social change (Young, 2020). However, this academic view largely aligns with the Western perspective that Twitter is a space for independent performance, and social media users represent social agents who can express their identities and challenge authority. Based on this perspective, this article aims to examine whether the widespread visual content in Indonesia differs from the aforementioned perspectives or whether it possesses its own characteristics. This study will look at visual content in Indonesia through a structuralist perspective and develop its interpretation using a cultural-historical context, thus illustrating how the humanities can contribute to the study of social media from a cultural research perspective.

The year 2020 was a tumultuous one in Southeast Asia, and each government has reinforced its authoritarianism on the grounds of controlling the COVID-19 pandemic (Corpuz, 2021). Amid such a situation,

several grassroots movements reacting against state authoritarianism have produced diverse kinds of visual content to the virtual space. Above all, Indonesia have exhibited the competitive use of visual hashtags between pro-and anti- position, even faced with the limitations imposed by the ITE and iLaw respectively. The internet environment in Southeast Asia has experienced a trend of increasing state control and censorship. Social media has accordingly become the main target for governmental efforts to restrict content (Sinpeng, 2019: 36). This indicates that social media users in Southeast Asia can not be described as independent actors in the same way that they have for the west. A central contention of the present study centers on the need to develop appropriate perspectives that make sense within the particularities of the Southeast Asian context.

Under strict digital surveillance, visual images have emerged as a preferable way of voicing dissent in virtual space because they are deemed to be better at implying criticism, thereby masking explicit provocation while still providing a platform for political objection (Young, 2020). While scholars have of late turned to internet memes as a new form of political expression and pragmatic resistance in Southeast Asia (Soh, 2020), scholarly work on the different visual forms remains scarce. One dominant reason for this comes down to how big data has been trusted as the most objective type of data capable of providing in-depth insights about individual Southeast Asian states.

The prominence of big data means that researchers in the humanities have been marginalized in favor of the use of statistical tools for social media analysis. However, since big data do not provide practical knowledge about Southeast Asia states (Sinpeng and Tapsell, 2020), humanities-based studies should focus on a single case within an individual polity, without needing to develop an alternative analytical framework divorced from big data. Despite a scholarly emphasis that gives primacy to how visual contents work as a tool of expression, this study contends that social media users are not so free as is often assumed by Western scholarship. Twitter is not a free public space for citizens in Southeast Asia because Southeast Asian governments have higher tendencies to sanction social media content and impose strict controls on virtual space (Hapsoro, 2018; Sinpeng, 2019; Tapsell, 2020).

Very few studies have examined visual contents as either physical products or traces of human activity within the Southeast Asian context. Previous scholarship on visual content has attempted to reconstruct periods of social changes on a micro-level in Malaysia (Lim, 2017); describe how youth utilize visual tactics under the state's media surveillance in Cambodia (Young, 2020) and Vietnam (Bui, 2016). Corpus also has focused on a certain form of visual content, namely Internet memes. Such many studies already have described the functionality of internet memes in the social context of Indonesia (Hapsoro, 2018) and explored internet memes as an expression tool through which Singaporeans could voice resentment against the government (Soh, 2020). Even though there are still a lot of kinds of visual content, scholarly work on the different visual forms remains scarce. Many scholars who have conducted visual content analysis within the field of Southeast Asia Studies have not found it worthwhile to consider the visual aesthetics of contents.

Therefore, this study suggests that Twitter should be seen as a 'digital archive' which records and restores broken realities that are not contained in traditional archives (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015; Geismar, 2012; Uimonen, 2020). The visual contents enable users to place emphasis on and ascribe significance to certain conversations (Hine, 2020; Lesmana, 2021); and by reconstructing the historical and socio-cultural conditions attached to them. Scholars could view such visual contents as anthropological sources, in short, artifacts (Kuo, 2018). Even though each study does not succeed in yielding general knowledge about Southeast Asia 'as a whole region' (Sinpeng and Tapsell, 2020), they each nevertheless assume a significant connection between local contexts and visual contents. That is to say, certain cultural, historical, and social contexts in Southeast Asian states considerably influence the forms and attributes of visual content.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method. This method tends to collect, organize, and analyze relatively unstructured data, emphasizing the important role of subjectivity in the research process over statistical analysis (Moleong and Surjaman, 2018; Hammersley, 2013). A total of 299 visual content data were collected from social media, which were then classified into two categories: 162 pro-omnibus law data and 137 anti-omnibus law data. Of the 162 pro-omnibus law data, 69 were taken from online political posters and 93 from online campaign posters. Meanwhile, anti-omnibus law data were taken from photojournalism (38), emergent memes (27), and photographic screen captures (25). From each of these categories, seven topics were identified. Each topic was then analyzed.

Furthermore, this research employed an interdisciplinary approach. An interdisciplinary approach is effective for solving problems or addressing broad and complex topics, utilizing disciplines from various fields. This helps summarize the problem and build a more comprehensive understanding, resulting in practical knowledge (Repko and Szostak, 2021). This study collected visual content using Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), a common method for collecting social media data (Fahmi, 2019, p. 78). The researchers then manually categorized the visual content, which is considered more effective in reducing errors and enabling in-

depth understanding (Sinpeng, 2021, p. 6). From this classification, one example from each category was selected for analysis. These examples were then analyzed structurally to explore and differentiate visual forms and describe their characteristics. The interpretation of the meaning of the content was then carried out using a comparative cultural history approach, as interpreting artifacts is considered akin to 'telling a story about an event or series of events (Eryanto, 2013; Shanks, 2012). Therefore, a comparative approach allows for an understanding of the trajectories around the research object that influence it, both directly and indirectly (Heryanto and Hadiz, 2005).

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This study deal with the case of Omnibus law in Indonesia. According to the given explanation, controversial aspects of visual content have only been shown in Indonesia. According to Table 1, the period from October to November 2020 is when disputes between the pro-and anti- positions of each controversy reached their peaks.

Data was collected through the 'advanced search' (API) function of Twitter, where results were categorized according to top comments. A number of keywords to collect data were chosen so as to only allow for the inclusion of local languages, Indonesian. Data collection focused on original tweets, not retweets, that was posted by the most active users of the hashtag. The same visual data that was found more than once still counts as a single instance. The total number of visual contents gathered for pro-Omnibus Law in Indonesia stands at 162, while anti-Omnibus Law amounts to 137.

Table 1. Hashtags used to collect visual content on Twitter

	Pro-positions	Anti-positions
Omnibus Law	#OmnibusProRakyat	#TolakOmnibusLaw
	#OmnibusUntukBersama	#TolakUUCiptakerja
	#OmnibusIndonesiaMaju	#GagalkanOmnibusLaw
	#OmnibusSejahterakanBuruh	#BatalkanOmnibusLaw
	#OmnibusItuBaik	#RakyatBantuRakyat
	#OmnibusBermanfaatBaik	#CabutOmnibusLaw
	#JagaCiptaKerja	#MosiTidakPercaya

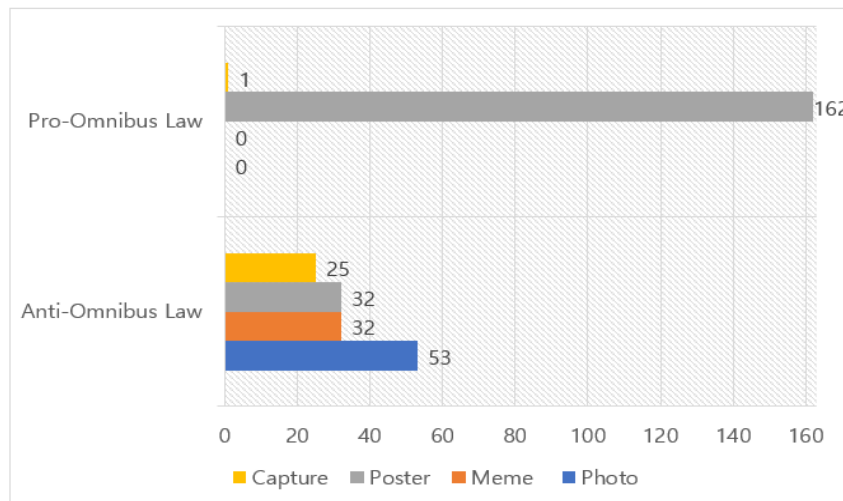


Figure 1. Visual contents in Indonesia

Following Table 2, the poster is the most dominant form of visual content by the pro-Omnibus Law. Especially, these poster includes two types, (a) Online Political Poster (OPP) and (b) Online Campaign Poster (OCP). Among a total number of 162 visual contents, OPP amounts to 69. OPP is considerably marked by its unique composition: portraits of social and political leaders and their quotes that emphasize the benefits and positive impacts of the Omnibus Law. In addition, OCP amounts to 93. OCP by pro-omnibus law aims to explain controversial legal provisions on the ground of 'fact-checking'. This demonstrates the essential purpose of posters to restrain critics and suppress voices against the anti-Omnibus law by the name of the 'anti-hoax movement'.

For anti-Omnibus Law, the number of visual forms has shown more evenly compared to the pro-Omnibus Law position. However, the photograph still accounts more than any other visual form. Meme and Poster topped the next rank and then Capture. In each category, certain visual forms are found significantly: (a) photojournalism with 38, (b) emergent meme with 27, and (c) photographic Screen Capture with 25 respectively.

This study perceives visual content as artifacts, a tangible product of human practice (Woodward, 2007). From the dimension of material culture, artifacts do not represent neutral reality but are more ideological and partial (Shanks and Tilley, 1993, p. 253). This is because creators (similar to creators of visual content on Twitter) are vulnerable to social dynamics such as certain events, and then inscribe certain values, thoughts, and ideology in their artifacts (Borish and Philips, 2012; Riello, 2009).

In this sense, the theory of intertextuality has advantages (D'Angelo, 2009; Grainge, 2002; Höjjer, 2011; Kristeva, 1984; Macey, 2000). First, intertextuality could reveal concealed textual and visual elements (Ott and Walter, 2000) and examine ways that these elements are articulated under the influence of external contexts. Since social media stands at the nexus that connects the real world to the virtual world, socio-cultural factors inevitably influence the formation of visual contents in the virtual space. Second, the theory allows understanding of a hidden meaning from the perspective of a certain party. Events presented in visual contents include values and ideologies accentuated through the choice of events, placement of one's position as opposition or agreement, and which values to be embedded. In other words, this theory provides an in-depth understanding of communication and the ideology of objects.

On the other hand, the theory has drawbacks as a conceptual framework that is an intellectual basis that allows a comparison of results. This is why this theory is usually adaptable to other disciplines, allowing the elaboration of the methodology (Galyamina, 2014; Rataeu et al., 2012). Thus, to fill the gaps, this study adds concepts on progressivism and conservatism.

In terms of material culture, progressivism and conservatism are concepts that are relative and situational (De Cleen, 2018; Winkler, 2012). Subjects influenced by both tendencies differ depending on the cultural, social, and historical context. Although both concepts come from the field of complex political studies, this study simply defines progressivism and conservatism in a practical way (Brennan and Hamlin, 2014). It describes both concepts as "attitudes or reactions about new things" including policies, ideologies, culture, and anything contrary to the previous dominant currents that exist in a particular society (Kissas, 2020; Nyíri, 2016).

This manner of concept presupposes the continuity and change of communication (Frank, 2002; Marková, 2003; Moscovici, 2000). Changes of meaning describe the continuity or changes in values that have occurred in a particular society. Thus, based on this intellectual concept, it can examine why there are differences in the meaning of visual contents and discusses reasons from the cultural-historical context as a result of continuity and change in communication.

Both concepts are important comparators when looking at the visual contents in the Southeast Asian state. In the literature review above, the possibility was raised that Twitter might be suitably considered a "digital archive," especially considering the conditions of Southeast Asia. Visual contents may thus be regarded as (historical, cultural, and social) "artifacts" that reflect people's reactions to particular things at certain times in the Southeast Asian context. However, cultural researchers and historians admit that artifacts are by no means neutral and fair (Hepworth, 2016). In particular, today's mass-created digital artifacts work to strengthen or weaken certain beliefs, values, and identities (*ibid.*, p. 280-1). In the push and pull of the dynamics of ideology and power, the shape of the artifact is determined by the communicative abilities of a particular society. By clarifying ideological tendencies, nuances, and the political thought of an artifact, we can avoid the false belief that artifacts must represent truths (*ibid.*, p. 290).

Pro-Omnibus Law: Poster to Anchor Negative Emotion and Persuade People

The poster form has developed and become an effective communication tool in social media, especially in the political field (Kores, 2020). The poster can be divided into two forms. The first is the OPP (Online Political Posters), designed by political organizations, political parties, and politicians to be shared through digital networks on social media (Lee and Campbell, 2016). Traditional political posters tend to consist of simple and catchy slogans and text. As a relatively new type of communication, however, the OPP form has experienced variations in its design (*ibid.*, p. 49).

Usually, OPP comprise texts and photographs often featuring relevant political figures. As for texts, an OPP might provide quotations from certain figures that highlight an individual figure's positive aspects. In addition to text and photographs, an OPP can be combined with graphic data providing information in the form of bar charts, pie charts, illustrations, and so on, all with the aim of garnering credibility and attracting votes (*ibid.*, 315); in other words, OPP artefacts are exercises in persuasion. Occasionally, OPP images use a conventional style like the traditional billboard.

Conversely, the category of OCP (Online Campaign Posters) includes posters that are more open to political ideology. Each OCP is designated by a political party for use as a communicative medium during certain political periods, such as an election campaign. This means that an OCP is distinguished from other digital creations (e.g., internet memes) that allow users to modify their contents arbitrarily (Steffan and Venema, 2020). Moreover, an OCP further differs from an OPP in that the former are more likely to be shared and circulated within particular communities (Kores, 2020). Likewise, an OCP is characterized by slogans and texts that are more wide-ranging

in ideological terms than those found in other types of poster. The dissemination of OCP on social media typically occurs during certain periods. As a result, OCP images have a wide spectrum of argumentative tone, varying in accordance to the political location on the left or right of the poster's creator.

Poster by pro-omnibus law comprises two kinds of posters. Firstly, there is an Online Political Poster (OPP) that is characterized by its design consisting of portraits of political figures and their quotes (Figure 1). In general, textual quotation marks indicate the start of verbal processes such as saying, announcing, reporting, and others (Thompson, 2004, p. 100). However, the portraits of the character replace the function of the quotation marks and the verbal word. Portraits of figures are useful in building credibility and providing authorization (Van Leeuwen, 2007) regarding the new economic policy in Indonesia.



Figure 2. Online Political Poster

Translation Figure 1:

Regional regulations have often been an obstacle for micro-small enterprise and their cooperation. The Omnibus Law is a breakthrough (terobosan) that can remove these regulatory barriers.

Considered the quotes of OPPs, the Omnibus Law is often described as a 'breakthrough (terobosan)' of the crisis of Pandemic COVID-19 by relieving procedures of foreign investments such as Figure (1). This description tends to strengthen expected lucrative profits to the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises sectors. In addition, Omnibus Law is also described as a 'consequence' that has gone through a long and in-depth discussion with professionals, it aims to legitimate the ratification of the law. These kinds of descriptions are related to emotional restraint (Chilton, 2004) The emotion refers to negative feelings such as fears about bankrupt, destruction, and extinction of social rules, and relationships (ibid., p. 114-116). Accordingly, these emotions are emphasized through the economic conditions in Indonesia, especially the high unemployment rate. Many of the quotes specify the severity of unemployment as an 'immovable' space that someone is pressed down physically, and personified Indonesia as workers who are being cornered.

Emotional restraint is also carried out with the 'future hypothesis' (Reyes, 2011). Hypotheses for the sake of legitimacy assume things will get worse if something is not implemented. But uniquely, pro-Omnibus Law parties often take the phrase 'We hope (Kita berharap)', 'Hopefully with the ratification of the Omnibus Law (Harapannya dengan lahirnya UU Cipta Kerja)'. The party which has responsibility avoids making absolute assumptions about the impact of the law. This strategy is often taken by social figures and politicians to avoid accountability and sharp criticism from their opponents (Phelan, 2014). The non-absolute hypothesis is effective in highlighting the speaker's honesty because it gives the impression of being cautious and aware of the seriousness of a certain issue.

Furthermore, the Online Campaign Poster (OCP) socializes the Law under the name 'anti-hoax movement' by weakening the opposite arguments. Therefore, the OCP put more effort into conveying detailed information about the new law. Although digital characters and anonymous images are used, visual images are only used to subordinate the content of the text, not playing an important role. The use of information has been accepted as a government tool. Additionally, publication information by the government usually takes the form of a public campaign that contains important messages and is supported by detailed evidence (John, 2013). This does not mean that information is always good for the public because it can be deliberately selected with the aim of

persuading and inviting citizens to behave in the interests of government (ibid., p. 607). To attract people's real behavior, the government and the authorities determine the target groups for the campaign objectives. Then, they select the information that is judged to bring about major impacts on the target group. Therefore, the information conveyed by the government often consists of persuasive language (ibid., p. 610).



Figure 3. Online Campaign Poster (1)

Persuasive language is effectively realized by a specification of the object. For instance, Figure (2) shows the verbs contradict each other between Hoax and Fact information. Hoax sentences display a shorter structure, and the objects in sentences are also inaccurate, such as the words 'foreign workers', 'many leave rights and chance to own business (banyak hak cuti dan usaha)'. Compared to hoaxes, factual sentences display more complex structures with the specification of the object. 'Foreign workers are corrected and further sharpened with 'certain foreign workers', many leave rights are sharpened with 'a lot of menstrual leave, maternity leave, and marriage leave', and disaggregated to phrase 'micro and small businesses'. Through specification either minimizing the scope of the objects, statements from hoaxes seem less factual and less professional.

Anti-Omnibus Law: Photo-journalism To gain Sympathy for protests



Figure 4. Photo-journalism with a theme of 'Money Heist'

Products of photo-journalism frequently have been seen on social media. Photo-journalism captures real life, usually key moments in historical contexts, as well as in everyday life (Guidry et al., 2018). The popular style of photo-journalism resembles the idea of an eyewitness to the documented events, typically from the point of view of a citizen or professional journalist who was at the protest site. Taking pictures of demonstrations, in particular, has been considered as an 'act of witnessing' by those who were on the spot trying to record what happened and when (Peters, 2001, p. 717). Photo-journalism thus works as visual evidence, aiming to document injustice and the violence of government officials. However, photo-journalism cannot only be viewed in the positive. According to some commentators, photo-journalism contributes to the reproduction of social

hierarchies because the medium itself often highlights social structures through its dichotomic composition techniques (e.g., police officers versus civil protester) (Newmayer and Rossi, 2018).

Photojournalism shows the symbolic moment of protest clearly through the composition of the characters and surrounding objects, color management, and the choice of symbolic places. Many photojournalism became popular on Twitter because the photos were themed on the Netflix film series entitled 'Money Heist' which was about a group of bank robbers in Spain. Similar to the main character in the 'Money Heist' film series, a student wearing a Salvador Dali mask in Figure (3) burned a copy of the work creation law in front of the Constitutional Court on 27 October 2020. According to the film plot, the main characters are bank robbers but are actually described as having a secret reason that drives them to be forced to rob a bank. On the other hand, figures associated with banks are involved in corruption and political conspiracies. Thus, the contradiction of 'reasonable crime' with 'crime without reason' serves as a dramaturgical tool to legitimize the main character's bad behavior.

In line with this, this photojournalism imitating the 'Money Heist' assumes the form of 'adaptation'. It is dramatic as 'guerrilla theatre' in which protesters perform scripted performances to express discontent, disapproval, and condemnation (Ratliff and Hall, 2014, p. 277). The dramatic action not only talks about the rejection of the law but also satirizes members of the Parlemen and politicians who played a large role in its ratification.

The enactment of the Law on October 5 sparked massive demonstrations that turned violent in various major Indonesian cities including Jakarta, Bekasi, Banten, and Tangerang. These large-scale demonstrations grew to the extreme, resulting in the burning of public facilities such as Trans Jakarta bus stops and the police. Most politicians who support the Omnibus Law argue that the riots are an attempt to de-legitimize the anti-omnibus demonstrations. For example, Megawati Soekarnoputri, the general chairman of the PDI-P party (Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle) as well as a famous political figure on the side of President Jokowi's defense, said 'What is the contribution of the Millennial generation?'. Her conversation had the nuances of disparaging the entire millennial generation, not just a small number of protesters who harm public facilities. Through the conversation, she seemed to not understand the essence of the protesters' arguments. A lot of netizens in social media commented in a sarcastic and critical tone such as 'The millennial contribution does not sell state assets, does not create corruption'.



Figure 5. Photojournalism: protest against Omnibus Law

As a reaction to the representative figure's utterance, other photojournalism attempts to form the image of anti-omnibus protesters as victims. Photojournalism was captured when some protesters suffered from chemical tear gas attacks, as well as when protesters clashed with police and soldiers armed with tear gas and rifles (Figure 4). Especially, images use a retrospective representation with a camera filter function that makes the entire photo color shades of gray, brown, and gold. These colors are usually used to build a retro atmosphere to create fantasy as if the audience is positioned on the 'right' side who stage demonstrations, cause chaos, and violence against the 'wrong' government (Pehe, 2015, p. 241-248). Thus, the retro creates anchoring in thematic antinomies between the right and the false. Thus, watching images that are subject to retrospective representation allows the audience to forgive the perpetrators of the riots in the past. Of course, riots as an expression of incivility as dissent do not at all justify violence. Instead, 'riots as expressions of rejection' have a view: violence and riots have the potential to empower isolated groups to voice their opinions, contradict the authorities, and change the socio-political environment (Edyvane, 2020). Thus, the anti-omnibus party seeks to gain sympathy and understanding from the public regarding the chaotic demonstrations.

4. CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that this study contributes to the study of digital media in Southeast Asia by offering a cultural-historical perspective, although it only analyzes two issues: the layout and form of visual content and the correlation between the form of certain types of visual content and their content, particularly in the Indonesian context. According to the cultural-historical perspective, artifacts do not represent reality but are strongly influenced by cultural, social, and ideological contexts. Visual content in Indonesia can indeed be considered visual content, provided that it recognizes the fact that social media user content is closely monitored by government agencies. However, at the same time, opposing groups have created their own visual content with specific objectives. According to the analysis above, differing preferences in visual forms demonstrate cultural divergences between different groups in their communication tools when shifting from the real world to the virtual space. Furthermore, differences in content reflect the dynamics of controversy in each country, such that these broader cultural differences appear as competing ways of doing things. However, from their perspectives, assessing visual content in Indonesia presents a comparative challenge because the two cases exist on different levels of reality, aligning with specific contextual sensitivities. Despite the challenges posed by the fact that artifacts are produced by humans and are themselves products of external factors, each group of pro- and anti-hashtags was reorganized according to the group's stance toward the new ideology (conservatism and progressivism). Therefore, this study concludes that human reactions to novelty significantly influence how messages are conveyed through visual content. This could be further investigated in future research, such as by comparing across platforms or expanding the analysis period.

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