

A Study on Service Brand Communication Special Reference to the Private Professional Educational Institutes

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Service Brand Communication plays a crucial role in determining the brands, which is useful for business and it provides the values to consumers as well. This study examined the level of Service Brand Communication in Private Professional Educational Institutes as research problem. Hence the research was carried out with an objective to identify the degree of Service Brand Communication in Private Professional Educational Institutes. Personal Interactive Communication and Marketing Mix Communication were considered as the measurement variables of Service Brand Communication. 200 students have been selected from 07 Private Professional Educational Institutes in Batticaloa District as a sample based on the stratified proportionate random sampling method. Data were analyzed and evaluated by descriptive statistical method. Findings have shown that the Service Brand Communication is at high level in Private Professional Educational Institutes in Batticaloa District. Result of this study revealed that the Service Brand Communication is important to attract the students at Private Professional Educational Institutes in Batticaloa District.

Keywords: *Service Brand Communication; Personal Interactive Communication; Marketing Mix Communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

In marketing field, the discussion about communication began in the early 1990s. Though there are different opinion, most scholars view the marketing communication as Service Brand Communication rather than Marketing Mix Communication of single product or activity. Schultz [1] suggested that the brands are central to the integrated marketing communication. According to Keller [2], marketing communications represent the voice of a brand. As branding increases in importance, it appears that the brands play a particularly crucial role in the marketing of services. Turley and Moore [3] advocated that the service brand name becomes a crucial component of the brand and important source of information to the consumer due to the difficulty in service evaluation.

Qiu wei [4] said that the Service Brand Communication is useful for businesses, which creates the values such as explaining product information, reducing purchase risks and providing additional social and mental benefits. Service Brand Communications draws heavily on the work of George and Berry [5] who provided a number of recommendations to marketers of services, which address issues concerning the intangibility, heterogeneity and perishability of services. Turley and Moore [3] said in the context of services, brand names are argued to be a crucial component of the brand and important source of information to the consumer because, in many cases, service attributes are difficult to communicate via other means.

In today's higher education landscape, college and university leaders may well consider principles of brand management to assure their positions regarding their competitors. Higher education leaders may derive guidance to manage effectively what may be the most important intangible asset a college or university owns its long-term image and bundle of core meaning. Number of courses and programmes are conducted by many private educational institutes in Sri Lanka namely CIMA, Chartered Accountancy, CMA, IBSL, Diploma in English and Diploma in IT. The country to be more systematic and produce employable students to take up the challenges and to harness opportunities globally. Some of the students in

academic degrees follow professional courses conducted by other institutes after their graduation in seeking employment.

The objective of brand communication has been to expose the audience toward a brand, whereby the effect can be maximized in terms of increased awareness and higher recall, so that the customer will buy the brand which has the highest recall; and to satisfy the customer to the optimum level. Any exposure to the brand communication affects consumer response, which can be measured by analyzing variables like brand awareness in terms of recall and recognition, favorability, strength and uniqueness of the brand associations in the consumer memory [6]. Therefore, positive brand attitudes are vital to the long-term success and sustainability of service brands. As such, astute educational institutes expend considerable effort on creating and maintaining positive attitudes towards their brands and this is usually achieved through the Brand's Communications. However, most researchers have focused on product rather than service brand. Therefore it is important to understand the level of Service Brand Communication in the private educational institutes.

1.2 Research Problem

De Chernatony and Segal-Horn [7] said the Product Brand Communication differ from Service Brand Communication through creating more attention to the direct employee contribution. Most researches have focused on product rather than service brand. Java and Cliquent [8] pointed out interpersonal interaction in service has more functions: informing, assisting and advising. Thus, beginning with service's characteristics, this study concentrates on Service Brand Communication.

In the recent years, massive changes in policy, governance, structure and status of higher education have been taken place all over the world. At the same time the education sector is heterogeneous in today's complex and highly competitive marketplace. Free education should be protected and developed further to cater to the talented students in the country. Meanwhile higher educational institution has adopted marketing strategies to compete at the student enrollment. Kotler [9] indicated that educational institutions are not increased their interest in marketing to become more effective at both attracting and assisting students who are not

selected to the state universities. These type of professional education institutions co-exist and these operate with very low motives and working contexts to communicate their institution brand among students, thus the reason all types of professional & private education institutions face serious problems in communicating the quality of education among new consumers.

As far as the researcher knows few research has been conducted in Sri Lanka to examine the level of Service Brand Communication with special reference to Private professional educational institutes. Thus, the clear knowledge gap is existed. This knowledge gap becomes a problem to marketers in acquiring consumers toward their organizations. Absence of such knowledge makes marketers unclear and difficult to satisfy expectations of the customers. Therefore, the research examines this problem and attempts to fill this knowledge gap.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions are advanced in this study.

1. What is the level of perceived Service Brand Communication in Private Professional Educational Institutes?
2. Whether Gender, Age, Education, Religion have impact on perceived Service Brand Communication in Private Professional Educational Institutes?

1.4 Objective of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are given below. These objectives have been derived from the research questions and purpose of the study.

1. To identify the level of perceived Service Brand Communication in Private Professional Educational Institutes.
2. To examine the impact of Gender, Age, Education, and Religion on perceived Service Brand Communication in Private Professional Educational Institutes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Service Brand Communication

Schultz [1] has argued that the brand is the key to integrated marketing. The brand, in increasingly, is the central core or hub of what

consumers want, need, and consider to be value. Brand communication is the primary integrative element in managing brand relationships with customers, employees, suppliers, channel members, the media, government regulators, and community. Brand communication should aim to enhance brand loyalty by making consumer more attached to the brand in order to strengthen the consumer's brand relationship over time [7,9].

Turley and Moore [3] indicates that brand names should not be overlooked as a valid and useful avenue of communication in the creation of brand attitudes. As competition amongst service brands is increasing, at the same time service providers and service designers are starting to realize the importance of having a strong corporate brand.

Strong service brands allow customers to better visualize and understand intangible services. They also reduce customer's perceived risk of buying services, which are difficult to evaluate prior to purchasing the service [10]. However, many service companies fail to consider all the touch points where customers interact with the service brand.

According to Keller [2] Competition amongst service brands is increasing. Further service organizations are needed to differentiate themselves by providing unique brand communication to customer. In fact, as pointed out by Stern [11], "a good brand name can save millions of dollars over the product's life because it carries its own meaning, describes the product's advantages, is instantly recognized and serves to differentiate the product significantly from other competitors".

In the context of services, brand names are argued to be a crucial component of the brand and important source of information to the consumer because, in many cases, service attributes are difficult to communicate via other means [3]. In the service sector, the importance of branding has been highlighted by several authors [10,12,8,13,14,15]. They agree that the branding is as a key success factor for service organizations and that it must be seen as "a cornerstone of services marketing in the 21st century" [10].

Brakus et al. [16] conceptualized that the brand experience as "subjective, internal consumer

responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand related stimuli that are a part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, environments and communications." In other words, each Interaction between a consumer and a tangible or intangible brand artefact, which awakes subjective consumer responses, is characterized as a brand communication [17].

The role of brand in higher education is considered as very crucial. The brand is possibly the most important connection between students and educational institution. The brand of a University carries the promise of a particular level of service and student outcomes. In the case of education, the service is more than a simple set of tangible features but it is a complex bundle of benefits that satisfy customer's needs.

An educational brand is often equated to an institution's academic reputation. But, that explanation is too far limiting. College or university brand is being synonymous with the institutions personality-congruent with its mission, defined by its values. Perhaps the most significant benefit of branding for student is the focus, which brought to an institution. However, it has been limited research into the notion of branding. More specifically, there has been minimal, if any, amount of research conducted into establishing what builds customer-based brand equity within this specific educational industry.

2.2 Areas of Service Brand Communication

2.2.1 Personal Interactive Communication

Communication, one of the most representatives of human activities and the basis for social interaction, is defined as the exchange of ideas, information and feelings. In recent decades, the phenomenon has evolved faster communication and dramatic changes due to the increasing need for communication in all areas and technological performance.

Since communication requires converting the original concepts into symbols that can transmit the desired message (Blythe, 2006) the individual or organization who communicates has to transform first the concepts in a set of symbols that can be transferred to the receiver,

who need to decode the symbols, in order to understand the original message. In a global market characterized by high dynamism and fierce competition, organizations try to find the most efficient way to get their word out so that customers understand the benefits that can be obtained by consumption or use products or services [18].

In recent years, brand management has been confronting two opposite tendencies: the loss of brand authenticity and the increasing influence of empowered consumers on brand communications [19]. A consumer's process of information acquisition relies on both external and internal information sources that together influence his or her overall brand equity judgments and brand choices. A traditional theoretical foundation of the relationship between communication and brand attitude, we expect the two forms of communication to directly affect brand equity and brand attitude [20]. The framework illustrates that consumers compare communication stimuli with their stored knowledge of comparable communication activities. Brand communication positively affects brand attitude as long as the message creates a satisfactory customer reaction to the product in question compared to a similar non-branded product [21]. Moreover, communication stimuli cause a positive effect in the consumer as a recipient; therefore, the perception of communication positively affects an individual's awareness of brands.

2.2.2 Marketing Mix Communication

IMC is considered one of the most controversial areas of research, expert's opinions being found in a diverse range, whose amplitude includes very different approaches. There are point of views according with this concept is the most important development of marketing communications in the last decade of the twentieth century [22] and views which assume that IMC does not go beyond a collection of specific concepts traditional marketing, presented in a new form [23]. An IMC program must be structured in multiple strands, influencing all the processes of consumer behavior (perception, learning, attitude, motivation), not only the actual behavior.

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) is one of the most controversial areas of research, the concept marking a constant progress from

the simple coordinating of promotional tools to a complex strategic process. Identifying the communication pathways which influence consumer behaviour is an essential marketing communications activity, the ultimate goal being the creation of marketing messages to reach target audiences through the most appropriate channels. Adopting the approach according with IMC is not part of the marketing mix, but a holistic concept using marketing mix elements to create and strengthen relationships with consumers and to send a unified message, this paper aims to clarify some aspects of the mechanism of IMC influence on consumer behavior, reflected also in the buying decision process.

Consequently, marketing communications have become a fundamental aspect of marketing, a business vision and an essential factor in successful marketing communication [24]. Its importance has increased dramatically in recent decades, considering that the marketing and communication are inseparable, all organizations business areas using various forms of marketing communication to make their offer and to meet financial or non-profit targets [25].

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3. CONCEPTUALIZATION

Following conceptual framework was developed based on literature survey. This conceptual framework emphasizes the Service Brand Communication and its dimension.

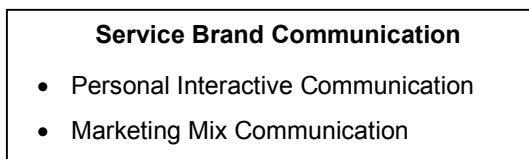


Fig. 1. Figure conceptual model

The above figure depicts the dimension of Service Brand Communication. According to the figure, Service Brand Communication shown as construct. Brand Communication can be measured in terms of two dimensions that are Personal Interactive Communication and Marketing Mix Communication which was recommended by Zeithaml and Bitner [26]. Hence above conceptual framework establishes the variables of Brand Communication.

4. METHODOLOGY

Researcher applied quantitative methodology for this study. Thus, survey method has been adopted. Personal Interactive Communication and Marketing Mix Communication have been identified as measurable dimensions of Service Brand Communication for the purpose of questioner development. Furthermore, the adopted questionnaire [4] was used to collect the data from the study area.

4.1 Sample Selection

Sri Lankan academic sector comprises of 2 major categories, namely Government Institute and Private Institute. 07 registered Private Professional Educational Institutes (PPEI) were in Batticaloa District as at June 2016. This research is limited to the PPEI in Batticaloa District, thus 200 students of 07 institutes were considered as the sample based on stratified proportionate random sampling method. Hence researcher distributed questionnaire to students of those selected institutes.

4.2 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

This study was carried out based on primary data. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The Questioner comprised of statements on dimensions. Hence questioner was given to the 200 students in Batticaloa District.

Likert scale of 1-5 which ranges from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" were applied in the questionnaire to identify responses. The numerical values were given for the purpose of quantification of variable as follows:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree

4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

4.3 Data Presentation, Analysis and Evaluation

Data has been presented using tables. Meanwhile descriptive analysis was used for data analysis. Hence under the descriptive analysis, mean and standard deviation were derived from the analysis of 172 samples. Independent sample t-Test was run to test whether or not Gender has impact on Service Brand Communication. ANOVA was run in order to determine whether or not age, education and religion have an impact on Service Brand Communication. Statistical package of SPSS 22.0 has been used for this purpose. Furthermore criteria shown in table were adopted to evaluate mean values. This was established to determine the degree of Service Brand Communication.

Table 1. Decision rule for univariate analysis

Range	Decision attributes
$1 \leq X_i \leq 2.5$	Low level
$2.5 < X_i \leq 3.5$	Moderate level
$3.5 < X_i \leq 5.0$	High level

Source- Formed for this research

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Sample Profile

07 registered PPEI in Batticaloa district have been selected for this study. It consists of 200 students from those 07 institutes as per the Table 2. Hence 172 students were responded to the questionnaires and the response rate of this study is 86%.

5.2 Descriptive Statistics

Univariate analysis was carried out for evaluating the attributes of variables as individually based on the responses. Here, the frequency, mean values and standard deviation of variables were considered for analysis. Mean values have been distributed based on Likert's scale which represent "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" of between 1 to 5. Meanwhile mean values were evaluated based on the established evaluative criteria which range from "Low level" to "High level".

5.3 Findings and Discussion of Service Brand Communication in Private Professional Educational Institutes in Batticaloa District

This section provides findings and discussion on Service Brand Communication in PPEI in Batticaloa District in order to meet the first objective of this study. It is the examination of the Service Brand Communication.

As presented in Table 3, all Service Brand Communication variables have shown the mean values more than 3.5. It fall under the evaluative category of high level. It has shown that the mean level of 4.11 and Standard Deviation as 0.55 through the analysis of survey. In addition to that, most of the respondents expressed the common opinion regarding the Service Brand Communication (SD = 0.55).

This explores the level of each dimension of Service Brand Communication (Personal Interactive Communication and Marketing Mix Communication) in PPEI in Batticaloa District. Univariate analysis was performed to find out the results.

Findings confirmed that the Personal Interactive Communication has the mean of 4.19 and Marketing Mix Communication with the mean value of 4.04. This findings reveals that the PPEI in Batticaloa District are having high level of Service Brand Communication since the mean value of Service Brand Communication construct is 4.11. It clearly shows that the Private professional educational institutes use its Brand Communication at a high level to attract and retain the students towards their Institutes.

5.4 Findings and Discussion of Whether or not Gender, Age, Education and Religion have Impact on Service Brand Communication

This section presents the details of responded entities. Thus, gender, age, education and religion have been described in detail.

5.5 Independent Sample t-Test

Independent sample t-Test was run to test whether or not Gender has impact on Service Brand Communication.

Table 2. Response rate

No	Registered private professional educational institutes	Number of students	Proportion	Number of sample selected	Number of respondents	Response rate
1	Institute 01	165	16%	32	27	84%
2	Institute 02	210	20%	40	37	93%
3	Institute 03	200	19%	38	35	92%
4	Institute 04	145	14%	28	17	61%
5	Institute 05	90	9%	18	17	94%
6	Institute 06	100	10%	20	18	90%
7	Institute 07	120	12%	24	21	88%
Overall		1030	100%	200	172	86%

*Source-Data analysis***Table 3. Summary of the findings on service brand communication**

Dimensions of SBC	Mean	Std. deviation
Personal interactive communication	4.19	0.59
Marketing mix communication	4.04	0.65
Service brand communication	4.11	0.55

*Source-Data analysis***5.5.1 Gender * Service Brand Communication**

The Table 4 indicates that 122 males have a mean of 4.04 and SD as .570 in Service Brand Communication. 50 females have mean of 4.31 and SD as .442 in Service Brand Communication.

The Levene's test for equality of variance indicates variance for males and females do not differ significantly (p -value, $0.139 > 0.05$) in Service Brand Communication from each other. This result (the equal variances assumed t-test) compares the mean level between males and females respondents. The p -value, 0.003 of the independent samples t-test is smaller than the significance level, 0.05. It could be concluded that the perceived Service Brand Communication of males significantly differ from the females. Therefore there is a difference in perceived Service Brand Communication among males and females.

5.5.2 One - way ANOVA

ANOVA was run in order to determine whether or not age, education and religion

have an impact on Service Brand Communication.

The descriptive table gives the mean value and SD of different age group of respondents. Age group of 25-31 has the highest mean 4.13 and age group of 18-24 has the mean 4.12. The lowest age group 32-38 has the mean level of 3.90 respectively.

Leven's test for homogeneity of variance with a significance value of 0.371 ($P > 0.05$) indicates that variance for Service Brand Communication for each of the age group do not differs significantly.

ANOVA table provides the F-value. It is used as a test of significance differences in mean level across the different age groups. The P -value 0.765 indicates that no significant difference between the mean values of four age groups. Therefore it can be concluded that there is no differences in perceived Service Brand Communication of the respondents across four age groups.

5.5.3 Level of education * Service Brand Communication

Based on the Education level the respondents, the students who are with G.C.E A/L qualification have the highest mean level (4.21). Furthermore the students, who did the Professional Courses has the higher level of mean (4.13). Accordingly undergraduate's respondent have the mean level of 3.98. Based on the decision criteria they all have high level perceived brand communication except the G.C.E O/L students.

Table 4. Gender * Service Brand Communication cross tabulation

Group statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Service brand communication	Male	122	4.04	.570	.052
	Female	50	4.31	.442	.063

(Source: Survey data)

Table 5. Independent sample t-Test

Service Brand Communication	Independent samples test								
	Levene's test for equality of variances			t-test for equality of means					
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.208	.139	-2.986	170	.003	-.269	.090	-.447	-.091
Equal variances not assumed			-3.317	116.641	.001	-.269	.081	-.430	-.108

Table 6. Age range * Service Brand Communication cross tabulation

Discriptives				
Service Brand Communication				
AGE range	N	Mean	Std. deviation	
Below 18	2	4.05	.106	
18-24	138	4.12	.567	
25-31	25	4.13	.508	
32-38	7	3.90	.406	
Total	172	4.11	.549	

(Source: Survey data)

Table 7. Test of homogeneity of variances (age range)

Test of homogeneity of variances			
Service Brand Communication			
Levene statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1.053	3	168	.371

(Source: Survey data)

Table 8. ANOVA (age range)

ANOVA					
Service Brand Communication					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	.350	3	.117	.383	.765
Within groups	51.162	168	.305		
Total	51.512	171			

(Source: Survey data)

Table 9. Level of education * Service Brand Communication - cross tabulation

Discriptives			
Service Brand Communication			
Level of education	N	Mean	SD
G.C.E O/L	4	3.35	1.165
G.C.E A/L	107	4.21	.522
Under graduates	25	3.98	.506
Graduates	10	3.69	.373
Professionals	25	4.13	.475
Others	1	3.88	.
Total	172	4.11	.549

(Source: Survey data)

Table 10. Test of homogeneity of variances (level of education)

Test of homogeneity of variances			
Service Brand Communication			
levene statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
3.103 ^a	4	166	.017

a. Groups with only one case are ignored in computing the test of homogeneity of variance for Service Brand Communication.

(Source: Survey data)

Leven's test for homogeneity of variance with a significance value of 0. 017 (P<0.05) indicates that variance for perceived Service Brand Communication in each level of the education groups.

Table 11. ANOVA (level of education)

ANOVA					
Service Brand Communication					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	5.736	5	1.147	4.160	.001
Within groups	45.777	166	.276		
Total	51.512	171			

(Source: Survey data)

The P-value 0.001 indicates that difference between means of six levels of education groups are highly significant and therefore it can be concluded that there is a difference in perceived Service Brand Communication among the respondents across the level of education.

5.5.4 Religion * Service Brand Communication

The descriptive table gives the mean and SD of various religion of respondents. Hence the Hindu respondents have the highest mean of 4.21 and Christian respondents have the mean of 4.11. Furthermore Islam respondents have the low mean levels of 4.00 respectively.

Leven's test for homogeneity of variance with a significance value of 0.536 (P>0.05) indicates that the variance for Service Brand Communication in each of the religion groups do not differ significantly.

The P-value 0.075 indicates that no significant difference between the mean values of religion and therefore it can be concluded that there is no differences in perceived Service Brand Communication of the respondents across the religion.

Table 12. Religion * Service Brand Communication cross tabulation

Descriptive			
Service brand communication			
Religion	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Hindu	85	4.21	.552
Christians	22	4.11	.442
Islam	65	4.00	.563
Total	172	4.11	.549

(Source: Survey data)

Table 13. Test of homogeneity of variances (religion)

Test of homogeneity of variances			
Service Brand Communication			
Levene statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.626	2	169	.536

(Source: Survey data)

Table 14. ANOVA (Religion)

ANOVA					
Service Brand Communication					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	1.556	2	.778	2.632	.075
Within groups	49.957	169	.296		
Total	51.512	171			

(Source: Survey data)

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Communication is essential for any institutions and the institutions can't achieve its objective without a certain level of enthusiasm, experience, advertisements and publicities. Service Brand Communications are at high level in PPEI in Batticaloa district based on the findings of this study. It reveals that, the Private educational institutions are maintaining good Service Brand Communications to attract and retain the students.

Furthermore, the finding among the Service Brand Communications dimensions has been shown the Private professional educational institutes have high level of Personnel Interactive Communication with students, which confirm that the educational institutes are highly interacted with their students in communicating their brands. The results of this study revealed that the good Personnel Interactive Communication and Marketing Mix Communication are important factor in determining service brand communication. Many PPIE were faced failures due to the brand communication inability to address the awareness on the products of educational institutes in an effective and consistent manner. Therefore, brand communication structures must be designed to

improve the quality of communicating the brand of professional educational institution.

6.1 Recommendations

The findings shown that the Personnel Interactive Communication has higher value in PPEI. It is recommended that the institution should concentrate on the recruitment of employees, who should have strong communication skill to interact with customers in order to maintain the effective Personnel Interactive Communication. Because effective communication is vital for the success in various situations. A trainer with effective communication skill may assist the institutional staff to improve the communications with students of the educational institutes.

It is necessary to ensure the practice of different method of communications between the individuals with the different educational qualifications in order to meet the mission and goals of the educational institutes. Through that the employees have to ensure the enough enthusiasm, warmth and care during the service process with customers.

Furthermore the findings of this study suggest that the service enterprises are necessary to devote themselves to internal marketing (i.e., training, motivating) for enhancing personal interactive communication. Individuals should experience the communications training to develop and improve their communication skills related to various roles in educational institutes. For example, the employees with more professional knowledge and organizational commitment have the less resistance when they communicate with consumers. Furthermore, sophisticated designs of service brand communication are needed due to the direct effect of affective attitude on behavioral responses, to inspire consumers' emotion.

Consumers are gradually mature, they also would like to get enough product knowledge through advertising and publicities. Therefore it is recommended to use further print and digital marketing tools by the institutions. Thus, the educational institutes have to concentrate more on Marketing Mix Communication (MMC) because MMC should, in a more detailed way, depict the brand and product information without too much sophisticated exaggeration in brand expression.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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