

Selling Principles: Influencing Principles of Marketing Students' Perceptions of and Attitudes toward Marketing as a Discipline

John P. Camey and Janice K. Williams

Many marketing departments have experienced decreasing enrollments in marketing courses and difficulty recruiting students into the marketing major. This article examines and validates the Principles of Marketing class as significantly influencing students' overall perceptions of and attitudes toward marketing and the pursuit of marketing as their major or minor field of study. Contrary to expectations, the authors find that students leave the typical Principles of Marketing class with lowered perceptions and attitudes regarding the marketing discipline. A straightforward pedagogical approach to reversing this outcome is demonstrated.

Keywords: marketing; principles; student; pedagogy; perception

Attracting students to the marketing major has been a topic of discussion for a number of years (Hugstad 1997; LaBarbera and Simonoff 1999). Unfortunately, discussion has been almost the sole focus on this issue. Little has been done to improve the situation in marketing departments across the country. In fact, little has been required because colleges of business were in a growth cycle from the 1970s to the early 1990s (Green 1994).

Things have changed, however. The American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (1998) reported that the number of undergraduate degrees in business peaked in 1992 and has declined every year since. In addition to facing a shrinking student demand, colleges of business (and departments within the colleges) find themselves competing for shrinking university resources. Given these circumstances, it is time to reexamine the difficulties faced by the marketing discipline and identify implementable actions to help remedy the situation.

LaBarbera and Simonoff (1999) suggested that the marketing profession has not been proactive in attracting the most gifted students. Many of the better business students choose a major that has an image of a rigorous and professional career

path. Career opportunities and salaries are significant factors in the selection of a business major for these students (Cebula and Lopes 1982; Keillor, Bush, and Bush 1995; Newell, Titus, and West 1996; Swanson and Tokar 1991; Swenson et al. 1993). Most business students select majors before their sophomore year of college, and career factors have greater importance on their choice of major compared to other factors including course work, curriculum, and faculty reputation (Newell, Titus, and West 1996). When it comes to selecting courses and lecturers, business students often prefer disciplines that are active and concrete such as finance and accounting (Nulty and Barrett 1996). The classes in these majors have more active, hands-on assignments with answers that are clearly right or wrong. Marketing classes tend toward more abstract discussions of marketing theories and anecdotal illustrations of their application. Marketing majors, compared to students selecting other business majors, decide on a major later during their academic careers (Newell, Titus, and West 1996). Students who are nonmarketing majors have typically selected their majors before taking any marketing courses and are influenced to a significant degree by lower division classes when making their degree selections (Keillor, Bush, and Bush 1995; Newell, Titus, and West 1996). It has been suggested (Hugstad 1997) that marketing is often a "default major for those business majors who cannot successfully complete accounting or finance programs" (p. 6). An alternative explanation for this later choice of marketing as a major might be that it is simply an acknowledgment of the fact that they selected the wrong major initially and their dissatisfaction with that earlier choice has motivated them to change majors.

John P. Camey is the assistant dean and an associate professor of marketing in the College of Business Administration at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond. Janice K. Williams is an associate professor of marketing in the College of Business Administration at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond.

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STUDY DESIGN

The preceding discussion leads to three research questions, which are addressed in this study.

- RQ1: How do student attitudes toward marketing change during the Principles of Marketing class?
- RQ2: Can the Principles of Marketing instructor positively influence student attitudes toward marketing?
- RQ3: Are there choice factors or criteria that students apply when evaluating the Principles of Marketing class?

The following discussion describes the research approach and expected answers to these research questions.

The data in this study were collected using a two-part instrument first developed as the result of a previous study of student attitudes toward the marketing discipline (Camey and Williams 2002). The first section of the instrument consists of 15 items on a Likert-type scale that examine student beliefs about marketing in general and the expected impact of the material learned in a Principles of Marketing class on their education and personal life (see Table 1). These items were based on a review of similar studies conducted in marketing and other disciplines (Krishnan et al. 1999; LaBarbera and Simonoff 1999).

The second section of the instrument was used to collect classification information from the subjects. This information included the subject's major, minor (if any), previous exposure to marketing, classification (freshman, sophomore, etc.), sex, and age group.

The first research question (RQ1) was addressed in a one-semester study that included eight sections of Principles of Marketing taught by seven different instructors at two universities. Initial (pretest) data were collected at the first meeting of each class before the course syllabus was made available and before students were exposed to any lecture material. Class instructors were kept blind to both the purpose of the study and the survey items during the semester. Posttest data were collected during the last week of the semester. It was anticipated that after students had become more knowledgeable about marketing as a discipline, they would have more positive attitudes about marketing and marketers.

The second question (RQ2) was addressed through an experiment using two sections of Principles of Marketing and two instructors. One of these instructors participated in both of the RQ1 and RQ2 studies. Pre- and posttest data were collected in the same way as in the RQ1 study. In this study, however, class instructors were made aware of the purpose of the study and the survey items. The instructors were asked, during the course of the semester, to include statements in their lectures in support of the survey items. For example, the simple statement made in the course of class discussion, "Mar-

One serious problem that has been identified is the perception of the marketing discipline by marketing faculty. A potential obstacle to attracting students into the marketing discipline is that marketing departments may not perceive the need to improve the standing of marketing as an undergraduate major (Hugstad 1997). A study by Tom, O'Grady and Swanson (1995) suggests that there is a discrepancy between the perceived status ranking of the marketing major within and outside of the marketing department. They further found that within the marketing department, both student majors and faculty perceive the status ranking of the marketing major to be inflated compared with the relative status ranking of marketing majors by students from other departments. The critical factors used by respondents to formulate the prestige rankings of the majors were public perception and demand for graduates. In support of this, Swenson et al. (1993) found that careers in marketing, such as personal selling, have a negative image among many students.

On the positive side, it has been found that students do understand that marketing offers a wider variety of career opportunities in comparison with other majors (Keillor, Bush, and Bush 1995; Newell, Titus, and West 1996). In addition, this research stream has shown that it is important to reach undecided students with information regarding majors early in their academic careers. Students often make educational choices based on the opportunities, or choice points, that are presented to them (Bailey 1974; Harvey 1984; Roberts 1974). If the marketing discipline is to improve its standing among students, it is important to identify and take advantage of these choice points to positively influence student decisions. One such choice point that affords access to most business students is the Principles of Marketing class.

Principles of Marketing is a required course in most, if not all, business programs. Logically, this class presents the most significant as well as convenient opportunity to influence student attitudes toward marketing as a discipline and as their choice of major. Most students enter this class with no real knowledge of the subject matter or the types of career opportunities available to marketing majors (LaBarbera and Simonoff 1999). Their initial perceptions and attitudes regarding marketing and marketers will typically be much the same as those of any layperson. It would be anticipated that on completion of the class, these attitudes should change as an outcome of being exposed to the depth of activities performed by marketers and to the theoretical underpinnings of the discipline. How much student attitudes are altered would also be a function of the influence of the course instructor. This article describes a study that reexamines student attitudes toward marketing and identifies ways in which students may be influenced regarding the marketing discipline.

TABLE 1
SECTION I ITEMS:
ATTITUDE TOWARD THE DISCIPLINE ON A
5-POINT LIKERT-TYPE SCALE
(1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE, 5 = STRONGLY AGREE)

For each of the following statements, indicate how much you agree or disagree.

- Some marketing should be required for all majors.
 The material learned in this course will be useful in my future career.
 Marketing courses are challenging.
 Marketers are less ethical than people in other fields of business.
 The study of marketing requires mathematical calculations.
 Marketing would be a good major for me.
 The study of marketing is interesting.
 I would not take this course if it were not required.
 Material learned in marketing classes is useful in day-to-day life.
 A career in marketing would be desirable.
 I would consider marketing as a minor.
 Marketers are less ethical than those who work outside the business world.
 A marketing career would be interesting.
 Material learned in this course will be useful in other classes in my degree program.
 The study of marketing is theory based.

keting is really interesting and what you learn in this class will help you in other classes," would support both survey items 7 and 14. It was expected that these supporting statements during the course of the semester would result in even more positive attitudes toward marketing. The final research question (RQ3) was addressed through factor analysis of the combined data from RQ1 and RQ2.

Subjects

The number of subjects in this study was quite high. Approximately 438 students were surveyed in the pretest with approximately 364 in the posttest survey. All of the subjects in this study were students enrolled in Principles of Marketing at a 4-year university. As expected in a core class, student majors were broadly distributed. The largest number of majors was information systems (15%), followed in order by accounting (13%), general business (13%), marketing (12%), management (10.5%), finance (8%), and economics (2%). The remaining subjects (26.5%) were nonbusiness majors from other colleges and students who had not yet declared a major. Approximately 85% of the subjects had no previous marketing-related courses.

The majority of students in the study were classified as juniors (49%) or sophomores (23%). The remainder was composed of seniors (21%), freshmen (4%), and other (2%). Fifty-three percent of the students were women and 47% men. Most of the subjects were in the 20-25 age group (71%)

or the 26-30 age group (12%). Only 10% were younger than 20 years, and approximately 7% were older than 30.

RESULTS

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

How do student attitudes toward marketing change during the Principles of Marketing class?

The pretest-attitude item means were compared to the posttest means using the independent samples *t* test. The results of this analysis are reported in Tables 2, 3, and 4, and prove to be both interesting and surprising. The expected outcome in response to RQ1 was rejected. Interestingly, Krishnan et al. 1999 found similar results in their study of introductory finance students.

The expected outcome was that on completion of the Principles of Marketing class, students would have more positive attitudes about marketing and marketers. As the overall results reported in Table 2 demonstrate, this was not the case. In general, student attitudes did not improve. No survey items had a statistically significant positive shift in attitude toward marketing or marketers. Five of the items were statistically significant in the negative direction.

Based on the statistically significant items, we could conclude that on completion of the typical Principles of Marketing class, students are

- less likely to believe that marketing should be required for all majors,
- less likely to believe that material learned in Principles of Marketing will be useful in their career,
- less likely to believe that the study of marketing requires mathematical calculations,
- less likely to believe the material learned in Principles of Marketing is useful in day-to-day life, and
- less likely to consider marketing as a minor.

In a study of this type, there are innumerable potentially alternative explanatory factors that could be offered such as delivery style, time of day, media usage habits, and personal experiences of the subjects. As noted previously, the sample size used in this portion of the study was quite large. A large sample was selected specifically to address these issues because it should be expected that all of these alternative factors would be distributed randomly among students and sections. This expectation appears to have been validated since the results found in response to RQ1 were reasonably consistent among all majors, sections, and instructors. Only economics majors failed to produce statistical significance on any item. Their relatively small numbers (less than ten), however, render the statistics for this major unreliable. Among students who identified their major as "other," attitudes eroded to a statistically significant degree on ten of the fifteen

TABLE 2
RESEARCH QUESTION 1
ITEM MEANS AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL: ALL MAJORS

| Survey Items | All Majors | | Significance |
|---|------------|----------|--------------|
| | Pretest | Posttest | |
| Sample size (for first survey item; approximately the same for all items) | 438 | 364 | |
| Some marketing should be required for all majors. | 4.22 | 3.30 | 0.00 |
| The material learned in this course will be useful in my career. | 4.16 | 3.81 | 0.00 |
| Marketing courses are challenging. | 3.61 | 3.62 | NS |
| Marketers are less ethical than people in other fields of business. (reverse) | 2.41 | 2.30 | NS |
| The study of marketing requires mathematical calculations. | 3.38 | 3.07 | 0.00 |
| Marketing would be a good major for me. | 2.94 | 2.97 | NS |
| The study of marketing is interesting. | 3.56 | 3.58 | NS |
| I would not take this course if it were not required. (reverse) | 2.62 | 2.71 | NS |
| Material learned in marketing classes is useful in day-to-day-life. | 3.93 | 3.65 | 0.00 |
| A career in marketing would be desirable. | 3.24 | 3.12 | NS |
| I would consider marketing as a minor. | 3.20 | 3.03 | 0.06 |
| Marketers are less ethical than those who work outside the business world. (reverse) | 2.40 | 2.34 | NS |
| A marketing career would be interesting. | 3.43 | 3.32 | NS |
| Material learned in this course will be useful in other classes in my degree program. | 3.68 | 3.59 | NS |
| The study of marketing is theory based. | 3.13 | 3.10 | NS |

TABLE 3
RESEARCH QUESTION 1
ITEM MEANS AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL: "OTHER" MAJORS

| Survey Items | "Other" Majors | | Significance |
|---|----------------|----------|--------------|
| | Pretest | Posttest | |
| Sample size (for first survey item; approximately the same for all items) | 123 | 83 | |
| Some marketing should be required for all majors. | 4.32 | 3.05 | 0.00 |
| The material learned in this course will be useful in my career. | 4.06 | 3.59 | 0.00 |
| Marketing courses are challenging. | 3.52 | 3.71 | NS |
| Marketers are less ethical than people in other fields of business. (reverse) | 2.48 | 2.24 | 0.08 |
| The study of marketing requires mathematical calculations. | 3.36 | 3.18 | NS |
| Marketing would be a good major for me. | 2.84 | 2.55 | 0.09 |
| The study of marketing is interesting. | 3.48 | 3.36 | NS |
| I would not take this course if it were not required. (reverse) | 2.53 | 2.93 | 0.04 |
| Material learned in marketing classes is useful in day-to-day-life. | 3.89 | 3.65 | 0.06 |
| A career in marketing would be desirable. | 3.22 | 2.90 | 0.06 |
| I would consider marketing as a minor. | 3.21 | 2.86 | 0.06 |
| Marketers are less ethical than those who work outside the business world. (reverse) | 2.49 | 2.43 | NS |
| A marketing career would be interesting. | 3.36 | 3.05 | 0.07 |
| Material learned in this course will be useful in other classes in my degree program. | 3.55 | 3.17 | 0.02 |
| The study of marketing is theory based. | 3.19 | 2.95 | 0.08 |

items. Even marketing majors finished the class less likely to believe that marketing should be required for all majors or that the study of marketing requires mathematical calculations. Statistical data for "other" majors and marketing majors are presented in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

Can the Principles of Marketing instructor positively influence student attitudes toward marketing?

As described previously, investigation of RQ2 was conducted as an experiment in two sections of Principles of Marketing. The instructors in these sections were asked to make statements as part of the class lecture that supported the desired response to the questionnaire items. Data analysis was again accomplished by comparing the pretest attitude item means to the posttest means using the independent samples *t* test. Results of the RQ2 data analysis were consistent with expectations and are presented in Table 5.



TABLE 4
RESEARCH QUESTION 1
ITEM MEANS AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL: MARKETING MAJORS

| <i>Survey Items</i> | <i>Marketing Majors</i> | | <i>Significance</i> |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | <i>Pretest</i> | <i>Posttest</i> | |
| Sample size (for first survey item; approximately the same for all items) | 47 | 51 | |
| Some marketing should be required for all majors. | 4.38 | 3.69 | 0.00 |
| The material learned in this course will be useful in my career. | 4.57 | 4.37 | NS |
| Marketing courses are challenging. | 3.91 | 3.98 | NS |
| Marketers are less ethical than people in other fields of business. (reverse) | 2.15 | 2.32 | NS |
| The study of marketing requires mathematical calculations. | 3.43 | 3.02 | 0.04 |
| Marketing would be a good major for me. | 4.47 | 4.57 | NS |
| The study of marketing is interesting. | 4.23 | 4.39 | NS |
| I would not take this course if it were not required. (reverse) | 1.98 | 2.18 | NS |
| Material learned in marketing classes is useful in day-to-day-life. | 4.13 | 4.02 | NS |
| A career in marketing would be desirable. | 4.45 | 4.45 | NS |
| I would consider marketing as a minor. | 3.89 | 3.84 | NS |
| Marketers are less ethical than those who work outside the business world. (reverse) | 1.98 | 1.96 | NS |
| A marketing career would be interesting. | 4.45 | 4.34 | NS |
| Material learned in this course will be useful in other classes in my degree program. | 4.43 | 4.47 | NS |
| The study of marketing is theory based. | 3.19 | 3.32 | NS |

TABLE 5
RESEARCH QUESTION 2
ITEM MEANS AND SIGNIFICANCE LEVEL: ALL MAJORS

| <i>Survey Items</i> | <i>All Majors</i> | | <i>Significance</i> |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | <i>Pretest</i> | <i>Posttest</i> | |
| Sample size (for first survey item, approximately the same for all items) | 63 | 56 | |
| Some marketing should be required for all majors. | 3.15 | 3.66 | 0.01 |
| The material learned in this course will be useful in my career. | 3.92 | 3.95 | NS |
| Marketing courses are challenging. | 3.61 | 3.66 | NS |
| Marketers are less ethical than people in other fields of business. (reverse) | 2.60 | 2.48 | NS |
| The study of marketing requires mathematical calculations. | 3.21 | 3.18 | NS |
| Marketing would be a good major for me. | 3.14 | 3.36 | NS |
| The study of marketing is interesting. | 3.65 | 3.70 | NS |
| I would not take this course if it were not required. (reverse) | 2.75 | 2.56 | NS |
| Material learned in marketing classes is useful in day-to-day-life. | 3.71 | 3.96 | NS |
| A career in marketing would be desirable. | 3.35 | 3.32 | NS |
| I would consider marketing as a minor. | 2.76 | 3.18 | 0.06 |
| Marketers are less ethical than those who work outside the business world. (reverse) | 2.60 | 2.38 | NS |
| A marketing career would be interesting. | 3.27 | 3.61 | 0.09 |
| Material learned in this course will be useful in other classes in my degree program. | 3.44 | 3.70 | NS |
| The study of marketing is theory based. | 3.14 | 2.91 | NS |

The expected outcome for RQ2 was that exposure during the course of the semester to specific, assertive statements supporting the surveyed attitude items would result in a more positive student attitude change than was found in RQ1. When viewed in relation to the negative results found in response to RQ1, the changes found in response to RQ2 are dramatic. No survey items had a significant negative shift. Three items were statistically significant in the positive direction.

Based on the statistically significant items on this research question, we could now propose the following conclusion. When the instructor makes positive statements about marketing and marketers, students will be

- more likely to believe that marketing should be required for all majors,
- more likely to consider adopting marketing as a minor, and

TABLE 6
FACTOR LOADINGS AND ALPHAS:
STUDENT EVALUATION DIMENSIONS

| <i>Factor 1: Personal Impact (Loading), Alpha = .88</i> | |
|--|--|
| Marketing would be a good major for me. (.849) | |
| A marketing career would be interesting. (.848) | |
| A career in marketing would be desirable. (.829) | |
| I would consider marketing as a minor. (.768) | |
| The study of marketing is interesting. (.730) | |
| Material learned in this course will be useful in other classes in my degree program. (.569) | |
| I would not take this course if it were not required. (-.535) (reverse coded for alpha) | |
| <i>Factor 2: Educational Impact (Loading), Alpha = .74</i> | |
| Marketing courses are challenging. (.700) | |
| The material learned in this course will be useful in my future career. (.678) | |
| Some marketing should be required for all majors. (.674) | |
| Material learned in marketing classes is useful in day-to-day life. (.583) | |
| The study of marketing requires mathematical calculations. (.396) (deleted from alpha) | |
| The study of marketing is theory based. (.362) (deleted from alpha) | |
| <i>Factor 3: Ethical Perception (Loading), Alpha = .78</i> | |
| Marketers are less ethical than those who work outside the business world. (.862) | |
| Marketers are less ethical than people in other fields of business. (.858) | |

- more likely to believe that a career in marketing would be interesting.

Research Question 3 (RQ3)

Are there choice factors or criteria that students apply when evaluating the Principles of Marketing class?

The combined data from RQ1 and RQ2 were examined in an exploratory factor analysis to identify underlying choice criteria. The method of extraction was principal components analysis using varimax rotation. The objective of varimax rotation is to produce a simple, orthogonal solution in which the factors extracted are uncorrelated. The structure and factor loadings resulting from this analysis are presented in Table 6. Three factors were extracted and have been tentatively identified as Personal Impact, Educational Impact, and Ethical Perception. All but two questionnaire items loaded heavily and clearly on one factor. The two exceptions are from the Educational Impact factor (factor 2). These items and their loadings are the following:

“The study of marketing requires mathematical calculations.” (.396)

“The study of marketing is theory based.” (.362)

The loading for these factors is less than .5, which indicates that both should be dropped from consideration as potential scale items.

These findings are supported in the reliability check of the factors for use as subscales. Reliability was evaluated on the basis of the Cronbach's alpha produced as a result of the SPSS Reliability Analysis (Norusis 1994). The generally accepted minimum alpha value for scale reliability is .7. The items associated with the Personal Impact factor (factor 1) produced a Cronbach's alpha of .88. The alpha for all items associated with the Educational Impact factor (factor 2) is .66. When the two items identified above were removed, alpha improved to .74. The two-item scale for ethical perception yielded an alpha of .78. The factor loadings and associated scale alphas are presented with the factor loadings in Table 6.

CONCLUSIONS

On the procedural level, the results of this study tentatively identify an instrument for measuring student perceptions of and attitudes toward the marketing discipline. Each of the subscales identified in the instrument was found to have sufficient reliability (alpha) to warrant consideration for independent use. This is the first time that these scales have been evaluated, and they should be further subjected to a confirmatory analysis. This instrument was validated using Principles of Marketing students among multiple institutions and multiple instructors. While the results from this study are promising, the instrument and conclusions may not apply to other disciplines or institutions. Researchers who choose to use this instrument in other disciplines should evaluate and validate it as part of their analysis.

The more important finding of this study addresses the issue of attracting and maintaining marketing majors. Although marketing may not be the first choice of majors for business students, the study results indicate that students entering a Principles of Marketing class had a generally positive perception of marketing and marketers. All items had a positive valence (mean = 3.54) with the exception of item f, “Marketing would be a good major for me.” The slightly negative mean (2.94) of this item is not particularly surprising since most students identified a previously chosen major. What was surprising was that student perceptions of marketing and marketers were more negative after completion of the Principles of Marketing class. This outcome suggests that one explanation of why we have a difficult time attracting and holding majors is that their generally positive expectations regarding marketing as a discipline are disconfirmed by their experience in the Principles of Marketing class. Further investigation should look more closely at how this entry-level

marketing class is taught to try to discern why this negative shift in attitude toward marketing occurs.

The Principles of Marketing class is often taught by new junior faculty or by adjuncts who rely solely on publisher-provided course materials. Even when taught by more senior faculty, it may be that the "inflated self-image of the faculty" (Hugstad 1997) regarding the discipline leads them to assume that everyone finds marketing as interesting and important as they do. Oddly enough, it is entirely possible that those who teach marketing forget that they need to "sell" the discipline to the students. Our study found that "selling" marketing by simply making positive statements regarding the marketing discipline resulted in dramatically different results in the posttest.

Recent articles have suggested a number of approaches for making marketing more attractive. One approach is to use a variety of inreach and outreach programs to communicate with students and their parents at the earliest opportunity (LaBarbera and Simonoff 1999). Hugstad (1997) suggested aggressively "selling" the marketing major throughout the campus and within the college. He also noted that this might result in "fear or animosity from other business school departments or other units on or off campus" (p. 12). Other marketing educators have suggested a new model for marketing education that would transform business and marketing education to the "professional school perspective" found in medical and law schools (Schibrowsky, Peltier, and Boyt 2002).

The results of our study suggest that the solution may be less involved than the extensive changes suggested above. Student attitudes toward marketing as a discipline can be improved if teaching faculty will apply their knowledge of marketing in their classroom presentations. They should apply accepted theories of attitude change and influence in their classroom presentation to "sell" marketing as a viable and competitive discipline. If professors genuinely believe that the discipline is an important, dynamic component in the global marketplace, then classroom exposure should present supporting evidence that marketing is a useful, relevant, and desirable major.

In addition to selling marketing as a discipline, efforts to make it more interesting and desirable as a major and career should be included as well. Marketing faculty cannot just deliver the same lecture every semester using yellowed notes and outdated PowerPoint presentations and assume that the students will "figure it out." It is imperative to practice what is taught and use the "tools of the trade" in the classroom. In-class activities and exercises that demonstrate what has been taught can help make the Principles of Marketing class more active, concrete, and relevant. Beyond simply telling students that marketing is an interesting and relevant discipline, lectur-

ers must *make* it interesting and relevant. Principles of Marketing instructors should use "selling principles" to "sell" the value of the discipline.

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