A Systematic Review of Strategic Brand Management in Educational Institution: Towards an Integrative Approach

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study presents a comprehensive systematic review that delves into the multifaceted elements underpinning strategic brand management within the educational context. The primary objective was to examine and synthesize evidence-informed exploration, shedding light on the essential components of strategic brand management in educational institutions. Utilizing a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, we meticulously extracted and screened 25 scientific articles from the Scopus and Web of Science (WOS) databases. The results of the data analysis spotlight the critical elements of strategic brand management within the educational context, underscoring their influential presence in shaping the educational landscape. These underlying elements comprise: (1) strategic partnerships with industry and alumni, (2) continuous improvement, adaptation, and innovation, (3) community engagement and public relations, and (4) an exceptional student, faculty, and staff experience.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic brand management is a systematic and well-structured managerial approach that focuses on nurturing a robust portfolio of effective brands. This entails identifying and establishing brand positioning and values, strategically planning and executing brand marketing programs, assessing and interpreting brand performance, and consistently working to foster and preserve brand equity (Heding et al., 2020; Iyer et al., 2018; Jelinek, 2018; Keller & Brexendorf, 2019; Paul, 2019). Brand-conscious organizations commonly adopt this systematic process, reflecting entities that recognize the distinct value and significance of brand and branding endeavors (Abin et al., 2022; Kowaas et al., 2023; Lebo & Mandagi, 2023; Maulana et al., 2023). The pursuit of strategic brand management is driven by anticipated benefits such as improved customer satisfaction, attitude, attachment, engagement, purchase intention, and loyalty (Banjarnahor et al., 2023a; Hasibuan et al., 2023; Kainde & Mandagi, 2023; Mandagi & Aseng, 2021; Rantung et al., 2023). Aligning with these principles underscores how organizations seek to gain

advantages by developing and sustaining strong and impactful brand identities through strategic brand management practices

In the contemporary educational landscape, institutions operate within a highly competitive environment, emphasizing the necessity of cultivating and maintaining a robust brand identity (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023; Kelejan et al., 2022; Marhareita et al., 2023). Faced with escalating competitive pressures, institutions feel compelled to embrace more strategic and holistic marketing and branding initiatives (Marhareita et al., 2023; Anjel et al., 2022; Clark, 2023). As a result, the relevance of brand management and strategy concepts has significantly increased in educational settings. The evolving dynamics of education, characterized by heightened competition, globalization imperatives, and the pervasive influence of the digital era, emphasize the necessity for educational institutions to adopt strategic brand management practices (Anjel et al., 2022; Marhareita et al., 2023). This paradigm shift highlights a recognition of the strategic imperative for educational entities not only to excel in academic offerings but also to strategically position (Lomer et al., 2018) and differentiate themselves in a dynamic and hyper-competitive educational landscape (Jonathan et al., 2023). Acknowledging this imperative reflects a conscious effort by educational institutions to navigate and thrive in an environment where strategic branding, not just academic excellence, plays a pivotal role in sustaining and enhancing institutional reputation and competitiveness (Clark et al., 2020; Salgado & Vela, 2019)

In the context of educational institutions, strategic brand management has emerged as a growing area of scholarly investigation. In particular, extant literature on strategic brand management within higher education delineates into two school of thoughts. The first research strand encapsulates the antecedents and consequences inherent in various brand concepts. Research stream within this strand strive to discern and scrutinize the determinants and outcomes associated with diverse brand concepts, including brand image, attitude, trust, awareness and loyalty (e.g., Anjel et al., 2022; Kainde & Mandagi, 2023; Kaushal & Ali , 2020; Marhareita et al., 2023; Manggopa et al., 2023 Saydan & Dülek, 2019). Conversely, the second research strand focuses on establishing frameworks for strategic brand management within education. Scholars in this domain endeavor to craft strategic frameworks, concepts and blueprint designed to provide a structured guide for the strategic administration of brands in the realm of higher education (e.g., Clark et al., 2020; Lomer et al., 2018; Salgado & Vela, 2019; Matongolo et al., 2018).

Traditionally regarded as bastions of academic excellence, educational institutions are now compelled to view themselves as brands with distinctive identities (Marhareita et al., 2023). A robust brand presence has become a strategic imperative, influencing factors such as student enrollment, faculty recruitment, and overall institutional reputation (Kaushal & Ali, 2020). Despite the growing recognition of the significance of brand management and strategy in the educational sector, there exists a noticeable gap in comprehensive reviews that systematically explore and analyze the elements of strategic brand management in the context of educational institutions (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023). Furthermore, the lack of existing systematic reviews focusing on the intersection of brand dynamics and education underscores the novelty and importance of this research.

The present study aims to bridge this gap by conducting a systematic review of the elements of brand management and strategy in educational institutions. The rationale behind this study is rooted in the need to provide educators, administrators, and stakeholders with evidence-informed insights into what constitutes strategic brand management, contributing to the overall success and sustainability of educational institutions. Understanding the multifaceted elements of brand management in the educational context is crucial for institutions seeking to navigate the complexities of the modern educational landscape. By conducting a thorough examination of the available literature, this study seeks to contribute to the academic discourse, offering a comprehensive understanding of the underlying elements of strategic brand management in education. In doing so, it aims to guide educational institutions in making informed decisions to enhance their brand, reputation, and competitiveness in an increasingly competitive and dynamic educational environment.

2. METHOD

The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology was employed in this study to systematically gather and critically evaluate existing research relevant to the selected topic within the designated field of study. This method allowed for the systematic identification and analysis of pertinent literature, ultimately aiming to deepen the understanding of the chosen subject matter. The SLR process involved a comprehensive investigation that encompassed various objectives, such as the identification, examination, evaluation, and interpretation of all existing research within the chosen domain of interest, with a specific focus on addressing relevant research questions. The stages involved in the SLR methodology employed in this study were effectively summarized in Figure 1.
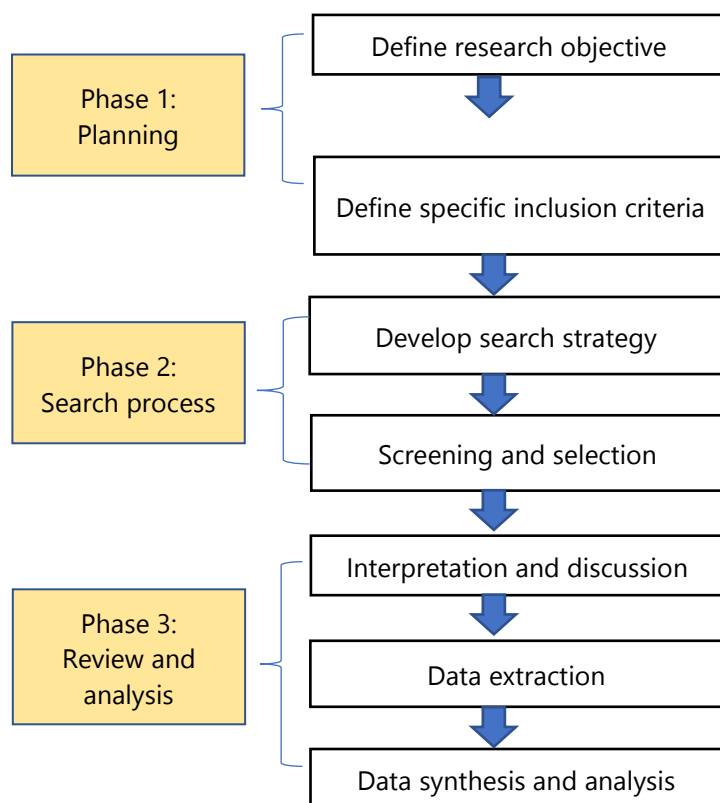

Figure 1. Steps in the SLR Process

The research process commences with the formulation of a precise research question or objective to provide direction to the investigation. In this study, the central research question is articulated as follows: "What are the underlying elements of strategic branding in the educational context?" This well-crafted question seeks to delve into the diverse effects and outcomes of servant leadership practices within the dynamic and evolving landscape of education. By concentrating on this specific inquiry, the systematic literature review aims to furnish comprehensive insights and a nuanced understanding of this pivotal aspect of servant leadership within educational institutions.

The subsequent phase entails the meticulous development of rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria. This protocol serves as a carefully planned framework delineating the methods and procedures to be adhered to throughout the review process. The establishment of explicit criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of studies holds paramount importance. The inclusion criteria for articles in this study includes empirical articles, and the sources are limited to the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases. The publication time frame for inclusion spans from 2015 to 2023. The research design parameter specifies a focus on quantitative studies. The keywords employed for article selection

encompass "Brand management+ education institution" and "brand strategy+ education institution." In essence, articles meeting these criteria are deemed suitable for inclusion in the study, providing a targeted and specified approach to article selection

The third phase of the research process involved conducting a thorough and exhaustive search for pertinent sources addressing the research question and relevant references pertaining to the selected topic. The objective was to gather high-quality materials meticulously, ensuring the credibility and robustness of the research. This process entailed a comprehensive exploration of the Scopus and Web of Science (WOS) databases to identify pertinent articles from reputable journals. Initially, approximately 40 relevant articles were extracted from these databases.

Subsequently, in the fourth phase, the focus shifted to reviewing and selecting articles based on their alignment with the pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This critical step was crucial in ensuring the appropriateness of the gathered data for the systematic literature review. The selection process was guided by specific criteria that facilitated the determination of whether a study should be included in the analysis. By rigorously applying these criteria, the researchers curated a comprehensive and fitting collection of 25 articles for the analysis, effectively narrowing down the initial pool of 40 articles.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results derived from a systematic analysis of the relevant literature underscore the diverse elements intricately linked to strategic brand management within an educational framework. These encompass four underlying elements: strategic partnership, continuous improvement, community engagement, and brand experience as display in Figure 2. The subsequent sections, further scrutinizes each of these components, offering an in-depth exploration that contributes to a comprehensive comprehension of the intricate and multidimensional nature of strategic brand management within the educational institution.

Figure 2. A Framework for the Underlying Elements of Strategic
Brand Management in Educational Institutions

a. Strategic Partnership

Strategic partnerships within the context of educational institutions, as evidenced in the related literature, encompass two main categories: industry connections and alumni engagement. Industry connections emphasize the establishment of collaborations with industries to enhance institutional credibility and provide real-world opportunities for students. Simultaneously, alumni engagement plays a crucial role, focusing on fostering robust relationships with alumni to create brand advocates and leverage their success stories. These strategic initiatives contribute to the institution's overall brand presence, credibility, and its capacity to offer students a comprehensive and impactful educational experience, bridging academic theory with real-world applications. The following subsections delve into each of these two sub-components in more detail.

Industry Connections, Collaborations, and Partnership

In the domain of strategic brand management within educational institutions, the establishment of strategic connections, collaborations, and partnerships with external parties, especially industries, plays a critical role in enhancing the institution's credibility and providing tangible opportunities for graduates (Ankrah & Omar, 2015; Miotto et al., 2020). Building and nurturing these partnerships with industries and businesses significantly contribute to elevating the credibility of educational institutions (Miotto et al., 2020). Collaborative initiatives with reputable companies impart authenticity and relevance to the institution's programs, serving as external validations of its commitment to delivering education aligned with industry standards (Ankrah & Omar, 2015). As a result, prospective students, faculty, and other stakeholders perceive the institution as a trustworthy and reliable source of education and training (Jonathan et al., 2023).

This emphasis on industry connections, collaborations, and partnership aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of external collaborations in educational brand management. For example, partnership**s** with industries contribute to the overall competitiveness and perceived quality of educational institutions (Ankrah & Omar, 2015; Miotto et al., 2020; Veleva & Bodkin, 2018). These findings reinforce the idea that strategic brand management in education extends beyond traditional academic realms, necessitating proactive engagement with external stakeholders. Strategic partnerships with industries not only enhance the credibility of the institution but also create valuable opportunities for students to gain real-world exposure and experience (Miotto et al., 2020; Ankrah & Omar, 2015). Initiatives such as internships, joint research projects, and industry-sponsored events provide practical insights into students' chosen fields, enriching their educational experience and positioning the institution as one that actively prepares them for the professional world (Ankrah & Omar, 2015). Additionally, industry connections often lead to increased placement opportunities, reinforcing the institution's commitment to the success of its students beyond academic boundaries (Veleva & Bodkin, 2018).

Furthermore, university-industry collaborations and partnerships were identified as key factors for institutional reputation and credibility (Miotto et al., 2020). This strengthens the argument that industry connections not only benefit students but also serve as a potent branding tool for the institution itself. In essence, the strategic emphasis on industry connections emerges as a vital element, weaving a coherent narrative of credibility enhancement, educational enrichment, and institutional competitiveness within the educational landscape.

Alumni Engagement

Alumni engagement within the realm of educational brand management not only stands as a testament to the institution's educational quality but also plays a pivotal role in shaping a sustainable and positive brand image, thereby crafting the institution's narrative in a competitive educational landscape (Drezner & Pizmony-Levy, 2021). This emphasis on alumni engagement is corroborated by previous research, underscoring the enduring impact that alumni can have on an institution's brand image (e.g., Iskhakova et al., 2017; Schlesinger et al., 2023; Shen & Sha, 2020). Establishing strong relationships with alumni extends beyond the creation of brand advocates; it serves as a dynamic strategy for fostering loyalty (Iskhakova et al., 2017). These success narratives not only highlight the tangible outcomes of the institution's educational offerings but also significantly contribute to the overall branding of the institution.

Moreover, Iskhakova et al. (2017) emphasize the role of alumni engagement in cultivating a sense of community and loyalty. The positive relationships formed with alumni create a network of individuals deeply invested in the institution's ongoing success, likely to contribute to its reputation through word-of-mouth and active support (Schlesinger et al., 2023; Shen & Sha, 2020). This aligns seamlessly with the notion that alumni, functioning as brand advocates, play a vital role in shaping the narrative of an institution, influencing perceptions among prospective students, current faculty, and the broader community (Drezner & Pizmony-Levy, 2021). Alumni engagement is not merely a post-

graduation formality; it constitutes an ongoing process beneficial to both parties involved. Educational institutions that actively engage their alumni in meaningful ways tend to experience a positive ripple effect on their brand equity, with increased support translating into enhanced institutional credibility.

Furthermore, the strategic implications of alumni engagement extend beyond the immediate alumni base. As demonstrated by Stephenson & Yerger (2015), alumni can evolve into influential ambassadors, actively contributing to the institution's marketing efforts and attracting prospective students. This amplification of reach and impact fortifies the institution's brand narrative, thereby reinforcing its standing in the broader educational landscape.

b.   Continuous Improvement

The emphasis on continuous improvement within educational brand management, as manifested through the strategic imperatives of adaptability and innovation, aligns seamlessly with prior research in the field. These components not only reinforce each other but also build upon existing scholarly contributions, reflecting a cohesive narrative in the pursuit of excellence within educational institutions.

Adaptability

Adaptability is a crucial concept in the field of education, as it reflects the need for educational institutions to continuously improve and stay relevant in the face of evolving trends. This aligns with the findings of Jonathan et al. (2023) and Kelejan et al. (2022), who emphasize the importance of institutional responsiveness to changing educational landscapes. By adapting their programs to meet current market demands and student needs, educational institutions can ensure their long-term success and remain relevant in the ever-changing world of education.

The dynamic nature of educational markets further underscores the importance of adaptability. As highlighted by Marhareita et al. (2022) and Manggopa et al. (2023), educational markets are constantly evolving, and institutions that are able to adapt to these changes are better positioned to thrive. These scholars argue that adaptability allows institutions to navigate the complexities of a fluctuating educational environment, ultimately contributing to their long-term success.

There are several key ways in which educational institutions can demonstrate adaptability. One approach is to regularly review and update their curriculum to ensure that it is aligned with current market demands and industry expectations (Jonathan et al., 2023). This may involve incorporating new courses or programs that are relevant to emerging fields, or revising existing courses to reflect the latest developments in their respective disciplines. Additionally, educational institutions can adopt flexible teaching and learning methods that cater to the diverse needs of their students. This could involve the use of blended learning models, personalized learning plans, or technology-based learning tools.

Innovation

The second dimension of continuous improvement, innovation, is a theme that resonates with the previous studies (Jonathan et al., 2023; Kelejan et al., 2022; Kainde & Mandagi, 2023). These researchers assert that embracing innovation in teaching methods, technologies, and program offerings is pivotal for institutions aiming to stay competitive. The integration of innovative approaches not only enhances the overall quality of education but also positions the institution as a leader in educational advancements. Furthermore, fostering a culture of innovation and creativity within the institution can also encourage adaptability (Tierney & Lanford, 2016), which can be achieved by providing faculty and staff with opportunities for professional development, supporting research and development initiatives, and encouraging collaboration between different departments and disciplines. By creating an environment that is open to new ideas and change, educational institutions can better prepare themselves for the challenges of the future.

Furthermore, previous studies documented a positive correlation between innovation and institutional competitiveness (Miotto et al., 2020; Lomer et al., 2018, Mykhailyshyn et al., 2018). Educational institutions that proactively embrace innovative practices are perceived as more attractive

to students and stakeholders, reinforcing the notion that innovation is a key driver of sustained competitive advantage (Jonathan et al., 2023).

c.   Community Engagement

One integral aspect of community engagement in educational brand management entails active participation in community service initiatives. Educational institutions contribute to local and global communities through diverse outreach programs and partnerships (Lomer et al., 2018; Marhareita et al., 2022; Kainde & Mandagi, 2023). Engaging in community service not only fulfills the institution's social responsibility but also establishes a positive and robust institutional brand beyond academic boundaries (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023). Such activities encompass volunteer programs, collaborative projects with community organizations, and initiatives addressing societal challenges. Through these endeavors, educational institutions not only contribute to societal well-being but also strengthen their brand image by being recognized as socially responsible entities (Ankrah & Omar, 2015).

Another crucial facet of community engagement in educational brand management involves building positive relationships with media outlets. Effective public relations strategies are essential for managing the institution's public image and conveying its mission, values, and achievements to a broader audience (Reddi, 2019; Poluan et al., 2022). Educational institutions actively engage with media outlets to disseminate information about academic achievements, impactful research, and community contributions. Positive media coverage enhances the institution's visibility, credibility, and reputation (Kaushal et al., 2020; Mandagi et al., 2023; Walean et al., 2023). Establishing a strong relationship with the media ensures accurate and favorable representation, contributing to a positive perception of the institution among stakeholders (Maulana et al., 2023; Sijabat et al., 2022; Warbung et al., 2022), including prospective students, faculty, and the broader community.

The integration of community service and public relations creates a symbiotic relationship that reinforces the institution's brand. By engaging in community service, educational institutions demonstrate a commitment to social responsibility, aligning their values with those of the communities they serve (Cress et al., 2023; Banjarnahor et al., 2023). Positive relationships with media outlets then amplify these efforts, bringing visibility to the institution's community engagement initiatives. This integrated approach not only enhances the institution's brand image but also fosters a sense of pride and connection among internal and external stakeholders (Marhareita et al., 2022; Saydan et al., 2019; Waworuntu et al., 2022).

Moreover, the significance of positive public relations in shaping institutional reputation has been explored by Miotto et al. (2020) and Kaushal et al. (2020). Their research reinforces the argument that effective communication, partnership, and collaboration with media outlets are integral to managing an institution's public image and, by extension, its brand. This interconnectedness underscores the need for educational institutions to strategically integrate community engagement into their brand management efforts to create a positive and lasting impact on their stakeholders and the wider community (Lomer et al., 2018; Matongolo et al., 2018).

d.   Brand Experience

The brand experience within educational institutions is intricately intertwined with both student and faculty dimensions, contributing significantly to the institution's overall strength. Achieving brand excellence requires prioritizing a positive and enriching student journey through engaging academic programs, supportive services, and vibrant campus life (Marhareita et al., 2022). Likewise, cultivating a nurturing and stimulating work environment for faculty and staff, fostering professional development opportunities, and recognizing their contributions all contribute to a robust institutional brand (Jonathan et al., 2023). This holistic approach to brand building not only enhances the institution's reputation and attracts talented individuals, but also establishes a foundation for sustained success and fosters a dynamic and engaged educational community.

Student Experience

Within the realm of strategic brand management in educational institutions, the concept of brand experience transcends mere academic delivery, encompassing the student's entire journey from admission to graduation (Jonathan et al., 2023). This entails a deliberate and holistic approach to curating an environment that fosters positive and enriching educational encounters (Kelejan et al., 2022).

The objective extends beyond simply imparting knowledge; it aims to create an immersive and memorable experience for students. Every touchpoint, from welcoming and streamlined admission processes to engaging academic programs, extracurricular activities, and comprehensive support services, is meticulously designed to contribute positively to the student's overall experience (Kelejan et al., 2022).

Investing in positive student experiences yields benefits that extend far beyond the individual. It acts as a catalyst for powerful organic marketing through word-of-mouth. Satisfied students become brand advocates, readily sharing their positive experiences with peers, prospective students, and even on digital platforms (Kelejan et al., 2022; Salgado et al., 2019). This organic dissemination of positive sentiment translates directly to enhanced brand image and reputation (Abin et al., 2022; Schlesinger et al., 2023; Marhareita et al., 2022; Saydan & Dülek, 2049).

Furthermore, the focus on enhancing the student experience transcends the student body, fostering unwavering alumni loyalty (Schlesinger et al., 2023; Iskhakova et al., 2017). Satisfied graduates maintain a powerful connection with their alma mater, often becoming active contributors, generous donors, or passionate advocates within their professional and personal networks (Schlesinger et al., 2023; Iskhakova et al., 2017; Drezner & Pizmony-Levy, 2021; Stephenson & Yerger, 2015).

Faculty and Staff Satisfaction

The brand experience of educational institutions extends beyond attracting and retaining students to encompass the well-being of faculty and staff. A positive working environment for these crucial members is directly linked to shaping a positive and thriving institutional culture, as research by Waworuntu et al. (2022), Wulur & Mandagi (2023), and Rampen et al. (2023) demonstrates. This entails fostering conditions that promote job satisfaction, professional development opportunities, and a strong sense of belonging among faculty and staff (Waworuntu et al., 2022). This is because institutions recognize that a content and motivated faculty and staff directly influence the overall brand perception (Rampen et al., 2023).

Cultivating a positive work environment involves several key factors, including robust professional development opportunities, transparent communication, consistent recognition of achievements, and a supportive leadership structure (Kainde & Mandagi, 2023; Mandagi et al., 2023; Pasuhuk & Mandagi, 2023). When faculty and staff feel valued and supported, they are more likely to be engaged in their roles, which demonstrably improves the quality of education and services provided (Wulur & Mandagi, 2023). Furthermore, satisfied faculty and staff become valuable ambassadors for the institution, contributing to a positive internal culture that translates into a stronger external reputation (Waworuntu et al., 2022; Pasuhuk & Mandagi, 2023; Matongolo et al., 2018)

4. CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate the multidimensional components of strategic brand management within the context of educational institutions, aiming to provide a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of its intricate nature. Through a systematic analysis of pertinent literature in the field of educational brand management, the research uncovers a multifaceted landscape, incorporating strategic partnership, continuous improvement, community engagement, and brand experience as foundational elements. The research findings underscore the pivotal role of industry connections and alumni engagement in augmenting institutional credibility, offering tangible opportunities for students, and fostering a sustainable brand presence. These strategic initiatives not only cultivate brand

advocates but also harness the success stories of alumni, positively influencing the institution's credibility and enriching the overall educational experience.

Moreover, adaptability and innovation emerge as fundamental tenets in educational brand management, enabling institutions to remain competitive amid evolving educational landscapes. The dynamic nature of educational markets emphasizes the significance of adaptability and innovation in navigating complexities and ensuring long-term success. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of active participation in community service initiatives and effective engagement with media outlets. Through community service, institutions fulfill their social responsibility, establish a positive presence, and enhance brand image. Positive relationships with the media contribute to visibility, credibility, and reputation. Lastly, the brand experience, intricately linked to both student and faculty dimensions, plays a crucial role in enhancing overall brand strength. Prioritizing a positive journey for students and cultivating a supportive working environment for faculty members contribute to institutional reputation and positive engagement within the educational community.

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