The Social Media Marketing Strategies of Luxury Fashion Brands – Impact on Brand Equity

Lüks Moda Markalarının Sosyal Medya Pazarlama Stratejileri- Marka Değeri Üzerindeki Etkisi

ABSTRACT

This research study evaluates the efficacy of social media marketing strategies in positively affecting the components of brand equity and in particular brand salience, brand performance, brand imager, judgements, feelings and brand resonance. The research is done in the luxury fashion segment and for this purpose two brands were selected: Burberry and Hermes. Burberry is often labeled as the leader in social media marketing strategies whereas Hermès ranks low in terms of social visibility and engagement. The assumption of the study was that given these opposite social media strategies the brands' impact on the dimensions of brand equity will be different. The findings from the online survey indicate much stronger brand equity among Burberry's fans than among Hermes' fans.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Brand Equity

ÖZET

Bu araştırma, sosyal medya pazarlama stratejilerinin marka değeri bileşenlerini ve özellikle marka belirginliğini, marka performansını, marka imajını, yargıları, duyguları ve marka rezonansını olumlu yönde etkilemedeki etkinliğini değerlendirmektedir. Araştırma lüks moda segmentinde yapılmış ve bu amaçla iki marka seçilmiştir: Burberry ve Hermes. Burberry genellikle sosyal medya pazarlama stratejilerinde lider olarak etiketlenirken, Hermès sosyal görünürlük ve etkileşim açısından alt sıralarda yer almaktadır. Çalışmanın varsayımı, bu zıt sosyal medya stratejileri göz önüne alındığında markaların marka denkliği boyutları üzerindeki etkisinin farklı olacağıdır. Çevrimiçi anketten elde edilen bulgular, Burberry'nin hayranları arasında Hermes'in hayranlarına kıyasla çok daha güçlü bir marka denkliği olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Medya Pazarlamasi, Marka Değeri

Salih Baran [1]
Marv Khammash [2]

INTRODUCTION

Social media have become inextricable part of our lives and the ways we communication with each other. They have changed the traditional ways of communication in societies, a development which has been possible because of the millions of users of social media sites globally. Businesses and marketers have started to take advantage of this development and are increasingly embracing social media to communicate with the audience. The opportunity to speak directly to customers enables businesses to build relationships with the audience and attain many of their marketing objectives including influencing brand equity. Brands are considered to be based on consumer preferences and therefore one of the core marketer's goal is to positively affect the consumer preferences towards the particular brand. One of the ways in which marketers can influence brand preference is by creating a strong brand equity. Brand equity is considered a very valuable concept in business practice and in academic research because marketers are able to acquire competitive advantage with successful brands (Lassar, Mittal and Sharma 1995, p. 11). High equity provides brand with many competitive advantages, including enjoying reduced marketing costs because of high level of brand awareness and loyalty; more trade leverage with retailers and distributors; ability to charge higher price, ability to launch brand extensions more easily and so forth (Vashisht 2005, p. 148).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

To investigate the literature gap mentioned above, the following research question is developed:

✓ How can the SMM activities of luxury fashion brands impact customer-based brand equity?

To answer this question the following research objectives are formulated:

✓ To examine the effects of brand-created SMM activities on brand salience, brand performance, judgements, feelings towards the brand, brand resonance and brand imagery;

[1]Phd Stdudent, Karadeniz Technical University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Business Administration, Trabzon, Türkiye. ORCID: 0000-0002-9979-2081
[2] Dr. Marv Khammash, University of Sussex, BMEC, Marketing, Brighton, United Kingdom

On the basis of the reviewed literature it is expected that luxury brands SMM activities should have a positive influence on brand equity dimensions. Consequently, the following hypotheses are formulated:

✓ SMM activities of luxury fashion brands have a significant positive influence on brand salience as measured by awareness of the brand;

✓ SMM activities of luxury fashion brands have a significant positive influence on performance as measured by perceived quality, value and uniqueness of the brand;

✓ SMM activities of luxury fashion brands have a significant positive influence on brand imagery as measured by imagery and performance related associations.

✓ SMM activities of luxury fashion brands have a significant positive influence on judgements as measured by evaluations of brand quality and brand consideration;

✓ SMM activities of luxury fashion brands have a significant positive influence on brand feelings as measured by evoking favourable emotions of social approval, self-respect and excitement;

✓ SMM activities of luxury fashion brands have a significant positive influence on brand resonance, including brand loyalty, attachment, community and engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Smm Activities of Luxury Brands

Social media include Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 61). Popular social media sites include Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and so forth. They provide marketers with various opportunities to reach and engage audiences and build stronger relationships with them. SMM designates the use of social networks, online communities and other online media for marketing, sales, public relations and customer service (Barker et al. 2012, p. 3). The main components of SMM are creating buzz; building ways that enable brand fans to promote a message themselves; and encouraging user participation and dialogue (Barker et al. 2012, p. 3). The goals of SMM activities are to build brands, i.e. to increase brand awareness, improve brand perception, to develop ideas for marketing strategies, research consumer behaviour, enhance brand reputation and image and engage consumers in a brand experience (Barker et al. 2012; Tuten 2008, p. 26).

In the luxury segment SMM is still considered a relatively new frontier. While many luxury brands resist from utilising SMM due to the risk of diluting the brand image other luxury brands, such as Burberry and Louis Vuitton are present on social media and try to find new ways of engaging with their fans. Kim and Ko (2012) examined the effects of the SMM activities of luxury fashion brands on customer equity and purchase intention. Their study measured value equity, relationship equity and brand equity. Kim and Ko's study (2012) differs from the present study in two ways. First of all, their concept and dimensions of brand equity is different than the one adopted in the present study and included brand awareness, perceived value, brand personality, brand association, and perceived uniqueness aspects. Secondly, their survey was conducted with Korean consumers whereas the present study is conducted with consumers from different nationalities. The Korean luxury fashion industry is only into its mature stage and therefore the examination of the influence of SMM on brand equity of luxury brands should be replicated in other cultural settings.

Recent studies have continued to explore the dynamic role of social media marketing in various industries, highlighting new strategies and their impacts. A 2021 study by Alalwan et al. investigated the effects of social media advertising features on consumer engagement and purchase intentions. The study found that interactive and visually appealing advertisements significantly enhance consumer engagement, which in turn positively influences purchase intentions. This research emphasizes the importance of creativity and interactivity in social media advertisements to capture consumer attention and drive sales (Alalwan et al., 2021).

Another significant area of recent research focuses on the integration of social media and e-commerce. A 2022 study by Hajli et al. examined how social media platforms facilitate social commerce by enabling users to share product information and recommendations. The study demonstrated that social interactions on platforms like Instagram and Facebook significantly influence purchasing decisions, as consumers often rely on peer reviews and recommendations before making a purchase. This finding underscores the critical role of social media in shaping modern consumer behavior and highlights the need for brands to actively engage in social commerce strategies (Hajli et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the rise of short-form video content has been a prominent trend in social media marketing. A study by Kaur et al. (2023) analyzed the impact of short-form videos on consumer engagement and brand perception. The research revealed that platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels, which prioritize short, engaging videos, are highly effective in increasing brand visibility and engagement. The study found that short-form videos, due to their concise and entertaining nature, are more likely to be shared among users, thereby amplifying brand reach and enhancing consumer engagement (Kaur et al., 2023).

Additionally, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in social media marketing has gained considerable attention. A 2023 study by Dwivedi et al. explored the role of AI in enhancing the effectiveness of social media marketing campaigns. The research highlighted that AI-powered tools can analyze vast amounts of social media data to identify trends, predict consumer behavior, and personalize marketing messages. This capability allows marketers to create more targeted and relevant campaigns, improving customer engagement and conversion rates (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is cross-sectional as it investigates a particular phenomenon, impact of SMM on brand equity dimensions, at a particular time (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009, p. 155). The philosophical stance taken in this dissertation is positivism. This stance was taken because according to the positivist approach the purpose of theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested and thus allow for explanations of laws to be assessed (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 15) which is the approach taken in this dissertation. The emphasis of the positivist research approach is on highly structured methodology aimed at enabling replication, and the end product of such an approach should be law-like generalizations (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009, p. 598). For this reason this chapter seeks to describe the research methods and approaches in as much detail as possible so that the research can be easily replicated. Another characteristic of the positivist approach is that the researcher is independent of, and does not affect nor is affected by, the subject of the research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009, p. 548).

Research Methods

As already indicated this study relied on the mono method, that is, on the use of a single data collection technique (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009, p. 151). The principal data collection method is a questionnaire sent out to customers of luxury fashion brands. Structured, self-completion, online questionnaires consisting of closed-end questions were used to collect data (sample of the questionnaire is to be found in Appendix 1). Standardised questionnaires were used because it allows for relatively easy interpretation of respondents' answers (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009, p. 362). The questionnaire was distributed across social media and per e-mail because of the nature of the research. Namely, as the purpose of this study is to analyse the SMM of luxury fashion brands it is reasonable to distribute the questionnaire on social media. In addition to this, distributing an online questionnaire increased the chances of obtaining a large sample size and more importantly of obtaining a sample that is geographically dispersed. Time and cost considerations were another reason why the questionnaire was distributed and completed online because this type of questionnaire is associated with low cost and fast data collection process.

Two luxury fashion brands present on social media will be included in the survey: Burberry and Hermès. Their SMM strategies differ which will enable us to identify which content categories are most influential on brand equity. According to Refinery 29 and Luxury Daily, Burberry belongs to the most visible brands on social media whereas Hermès belongs to the five least visible brands (Refinery 29, 2015; Luxury Daily 2016). Hermès ranked 18th in Brandwatch's Index, due to the low social visibility and accompanying low engagement (Luxury Daily 2016). Two questionnaires are developed, one for each of the above-mentioned brands. The questionnaires were then posted on the social media fan pages of these brands. In addition to this, the link of the survey was also posted on the researcher's personal social media pages and sent to the researcher's own email list. The questionnaire will be developed on www.surveymonkey.com after which a link with the survey will be generated that will be posted on the Facebook fan pages. Each questionnaire will contain several filter questions in order to ensure the eligibility of participants.

1. The participant should answer that he/she has "Liked" the particular brand's fan page on Facebook/Instagram. When 'liking' a fan page on Facebook or Instagram users are start receiving the content that the brand shares and therefore we can assume that these participants are exposed to the brand's SMM activities.

2. The participant should receive the newsfeed of the particular brand at least once a week.

3. The participant should read the newsfeed from the brand.

4. The participant should have bought a product from the particular brand in the last year. This is necessary in order to be able to evaluate the level of brand loyalty among the participants. A consumer cannot be loyal to a brand if he/she has never used the product.

The items in the questionnaires are developed on the brand equity items developed by Yoo and Donthu (2001) and on Keller's (2003) brand equity categories (see Table 1).

Table 1: Brand equity items

Salience	
	I can recognize Burberry among other competing brands.
	I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of Burberry.
Performance	
	Products of Burberry are worth their price.
	Compared to other fashion brands Burberry products are more unique.
	Compared to other fashion brands Burberry products are more stylish.
Imagery	
	I admire and respect the people who wear Burberry.
Judgments	
Quality	In comparison to alternative brands, Burberry has better quality.
Consideration	I am very likely to recommend Burberry to others.
Feelings	
	Wearing Burberry gives me a feeling of social approval.
	Wearing Burberry gives me a feeling of self-esteem.
	Wearing Burberry gives me a feeling of pride.
Resonance	
Loyalty	I consider myself loyal to Burberry.
	I am willing to pay premium price for Burberry.
Attachment	I really love Burberry.
Community	I identify with people who use this brand.
Engagement	I really like to talk about this brand to others.

Sampling

Convenience sampling was used to collect the sample. The sample of 105 individuals was collected because it was available by virtue of its accessibility (Bryman and Bell 2011, p. 190). Convenience sampling was more likely to generate a larger sample size than other sampling techniques. Convenience sampling was also applied because it allowed for data collection in a very short timescale. To ensure the representativeness of the sample the questionnaires contained filter questions.

Data analysis

The data collected through the online survey was analysed with the statistical software SPSS. The data analysis consists of comparing and looking for relationships between variables. The data will also be analysed by applying bivariate analyses in order to identify potential relationships between specific SMM activities and the dimensions of brand equity (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 347). Simple regression will also be used in order to identify potential causal relationship between different variables.

DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The Smm of Burbery and Hermes

Burberry's Facebook activities will have a greater influence on awareness of the brand than Hermes' activities;

✓ Burberry's Facebook activities will have greater influence on perceived quality, value and uniqueness of the brand than Hermes' activities;

✓ Burberry's Facebook activities will have greater influence on brand imagery and performance related associations than Hermes' activities;

✓ Burberry's Facebook activities will have greater influence on evaluations of brand quality and brand consideration than Hermes' activities;

✓ Burberry's Facebook activities are more likely to evoke favourable emotions of social approval, self-respect and excitement among fans than Hermes' activities;

Demographics Characteristics of the Sample

A total of 154 individuals started the survey, 49 of whom got disqualified because they were filtered out with the filter questions aiming at eliciting answers regarding individuals' experience with the brand or because they skipped all the questions. For this reason, a total of 105 got qualified for the survey and these respondents' answers are used for the statistical analyses presented below. An almost equal number of qualified respondents was achieved for both brands: 52 for the Burberry brand and 53 for the Hermes brand. The reason why similar sample sizes for both brands were obtained was because unequal sample sizes typically affect the accuracy and robustness of the statistical analyses. The majority of the respondents were female: 68 as compared to 37 males. The age of respondents ranged from 18 to 37.
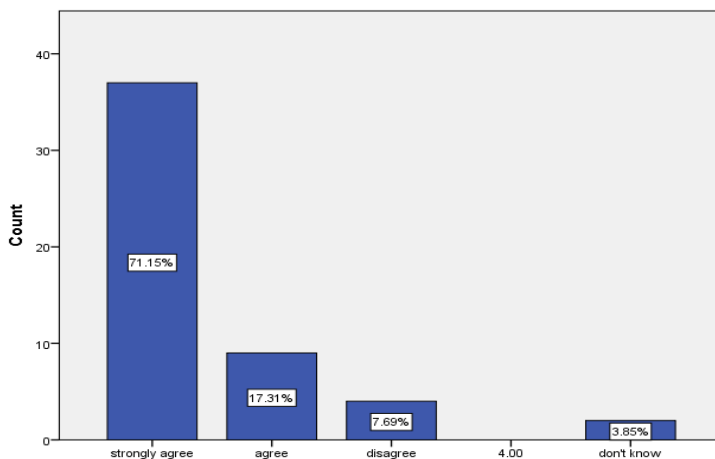
Burberry Respondents

To measure brand salience the questionnaire asked participants how easily they can recognize the specific brand among competing brands and how easily they can recognize the symbol/logo of the specific brand. Cross-tabulation was run in order to display the distribution of answers to the question regarding the ability of the respondents to easily recognize Burberry among competing brands according to gender. All of the 52 Burberry respondents answered that they can easily recognize Burberry among competing brands. The result also indicates that women were more likely to strongly agree with the statement than men.

Table 2: I can easily recognise Burberry among other competing brands

		What is your gender?		Total
		female	male	
I can easily recognize Burberry among other competing brands.	strongly agree	29	9	38
	agree	4	10	14
Total		33	19	52

A similar cross-tabulation was run in regard to the question about the ability to recall Burberry's logo. All but one participant reported to be able to quickly recall the symbol and logo of Burberry and again men appear to be more neutral than women because they were more likely to 'agree' rather than 'strongly agree' with the statement.

To measure brand performance the questionnaire aimed to elicit respondents' perceptions about the respective brand's value for money, uniqueness and stylishness. A very large proportion of the Burberry respondents reported that they find Burberry products more unique and more stylish compared to other fashion brands.

Figure 1: Compared to other fashion brands Burberry products are more unique
Source: Produced by Author

In terms of the value for money attached by respondents illustrates that a very large proportion of the respondents believe that Burberry's products are worth their price.

The last question of the first part of the questionnaire aimed to evaluate brand imagery, and to investigate the ways that respondents think about the respective brand abstractly. This question thus aimed to discover to what extent the respondents admired and respected the people who wear Burberry. The opinion of the respondents differed considerably. A total of 57% either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement whereas 36% disagreed or strongly disagree with the statement.

The second part of the questionnaire focused on the judgements and the feelings of respondents towards the two luxury brands. Concerning the quality perception among the Burberry fans 89% agree and strongly agree with the

statement that Burberry has a better quality than competing fashion brands and 91% said they are very likely to recommend Burberry to others.

In regard to the feelings of the respondents towards Burberry the data was summarized for purpose of simplicity and because of the correlation between the three questions about social approval, self-esteem and pride. As the results show, 41 respondents stated that wearing Burberry gives them a feeling of social approval, which is a very high proportion. 39 of the respondents stated that wearing Burberry gives them a feeling of self-esteem and 40 that wearing Burberry gives them a feeling of pride.

The final section of the questionnaire aimed to collect responses regarding brand resonance. To measure the loyalty of respondents toward Burberry they were asked whether they consider themselves loyal to Burberry; and whether they are willing to pay a premium price. 41 of the respondents answered that they consider themselves loyal to Burberry and that they are willing to pay premium price for Burberry.

In regard to the attachment, community and engagement dimensions the data revealed the following: 48 of the participants reported that they love Burberry but only 14 answered that they identify with the people who use the same brand.

Finally, the results reveal almost half of the Burberry fans (49%) do not like to talk about Burberry to others.
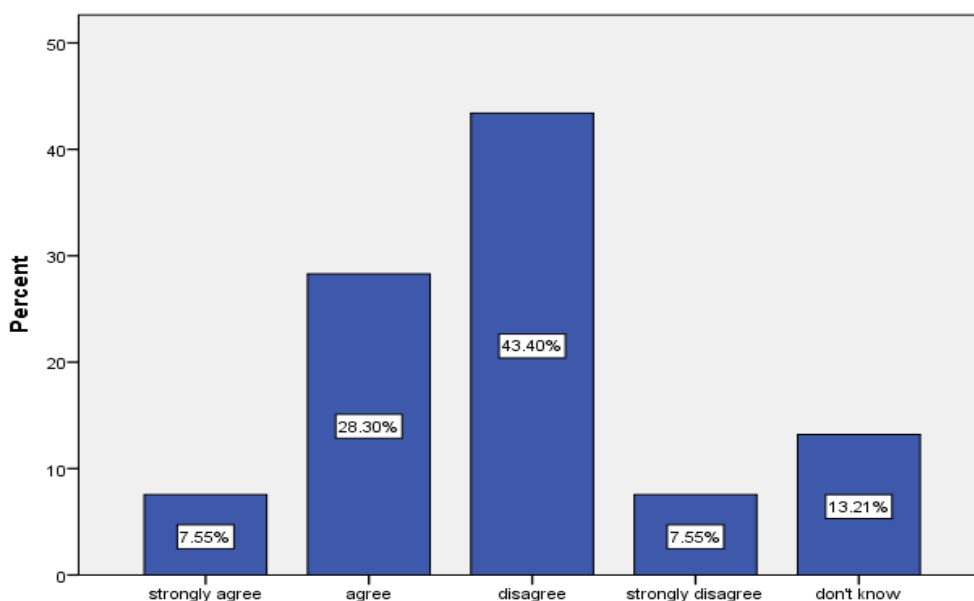
Hermes Respondents

The same descriptive and frequency analyses were conducted with Hermes in order to enable comparability of the findings. While all of the Burberry fans reported that they can easily recognize Burberry among competing brands the Hermes fans answered differently to this question. From the total of 53 Hermes respondents 31 answered that cannot easily recognize the brand among competing brands. The proportion of the respondents that could easily recall Hermes' logo were however higher (36 versus 13 who could not easily recall the logo).

Table 3: I can easily recognise Hermes among other competing brands

		What is your gender?		Total
		female	male	
I can easily recognize Hermes among other competing brands.	strongly agree	2	2	4
	agree	6	5	11
	disagree	23	8	31
	don't know	4	3	7
Total		35	18	53

The findings also differed significantly in terms of brand performance. Half of Hermes respondents disagreed that Hermes products are more unique than the other luxury fashion brands and around 47% disagreed that Hermes products are more stylish than the other fashion brands.

Figure 2: Compared to other fashion brands Hermes products are more unique.
Source: Produced by Author

Similar level of disagreement was established in regard to respondents' perception of the value for money of Hermes. Again, around half of the respondents do not agree that Hermes products are worth their price.

In terms of the brand imagery, the majority of the respondents answered that they do not admire and respect people who wear Hermes (82%), as opposed to 13% who reported that they admire and respect these people.

As implied by 63% of the respondents Hermes is not necessarily perceived as having a better quality than the other fashion brands. Nonetheless, around 42% of them would recommend the brand to others.

Additional to this, the data concerning the feelings of the respondents towards Hermes again show rather different results. Compared to the 41 Burberry respondents only 5 Hermes respondents agreed that wearing this brand gives them a feeling of social approval. Similar results were obtained on the other dimensions as well. Compared to the 39 Burberry respondents, only 7 stated that wearing Hermes gives them a feeling of self-esteem. Compared to the 40 Burberry respondents only 6 Hermes respondents answered that wearing Hermes gives them a feeling of pride.

Hermes respondents' answers regarding brand resonance are as follows; Only around 10% of the respondents answered that they consider themselves loyal to Hermes and that they are willing to pay premium price for the brand.

Finally, in terms of the feelings towards Hermes the results are rather mixed because around 37% reported that they love the brand as against 52% who disagreed with the statement. A large percentage (78%) of them answered that they do not identify themselves with other individuals who wear the brand.

Talking about Hermes to others is not that common according to the results. 89% of respondents reported that they do not really like to talk about the brand to others.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In summary, the above findings indicate that (i) Burberry has much more engaging Facebook marketing strategy; and (ii) that brand salience, performance, imagery, judgements, and loyalty are much stronger among the Burberry fans than among the Hermes fans. On the basis of this it can be concluded that the effective and engaging marketing strategy of Burberry positively influences these brand equity dimensions and thus contributed towards the creation of a stronger brand equity. The findings are thus in line with previous research according to which SMM of luxury brands can impact different dimensions of customer-based brand equity (Godey et al. 2016; Lee and Walkins 2016). On the basis of this, it is recommended that luxury brands can significantly impact the strength of their brand equity by offering engaging, interesting, relevant content on social media on a frequent basis.

One of the limitations of the study is that the questionnaire did not elicit information about the respondents' nationality. As already established by some authors, the impact of SMM on luxury customer-based brand equity as reflected in brand awareness and brand equity differs across different countries (Godey et al. 2016, p. 7). Consequently, this present research study cannot discover whether some country-specific characteristics have moderated the impact of SMM on these aspects of brand equity among the Burberry and Hermes fans. Future studies could incorporate this dimension in order to identify whether nationality could moderate the impact of SMM on brand equity.

In addition to this, another limitation of the study arises from the sampling strategy. The present study sourced the data from fans of Burberry and Hermes only. The rationale for focusing on these two brands only was that the brands have rather opposite social media marketing strategies and consequently the assumptions were made that the impact on brand equity would be different as well. Nonetheless, to be able to make stronger inferences about the impact of social media strategies on brand equity dimensions among luxury fashion brands it is advisable that more brands are included in future studies. Incorporating several luxury brands that pursue different social media strategies would result in even broader and more comprehensive data as to the impact of social media marketing on social media dimensions. In addition to this, such an approach would also be valuable from a methodological perspective. Namely, incorporating several luxury fashion brands would increase the sample size that would thus be more representative of the population of interest and would generate findings that can be more accurately generalized.

TABLOLAR

Table 1: Brand Equity Items Tablo Başlığı.

Table 2: I can easily recognise Burberry among other competing brands.

Table 3: I can easily recognise Hermes among other competing brands

FIGURES:

Figure 1: Compared to other fashion brands Burberry products are more unique

Figure 2: Compared to other fashion brands Burberry products are more unique

Kaynak: Yazar tarafından üretilmiştir.

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