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Effects of Conventional Media Advertisements on Body Image and Self-Esteem among Women in Islamabad

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this current study is to explore the effect advertisements have on the body image and self-esteem of women. Over the years, women have been represented in a stereotypical manner in advertisements which are largely focused on beauty ideals and the thin-ideal. This can significantly affect women's body image perceptions and self-esteem. This study aims to investigate how the perceptions of body image and self-esteem of women are affected by the depiction of appearance ideals, regarding women, in advertisements. A survey was conducted among 216 women between the ages of 18 to 30 years old in Pakistan. It was found that advertisements depicting appearance ideals do effect women's body image and self-esteem; as well as, lead to the internalization of sociocultural ideals regarding appearance. This study found that advertisements caused body dissatisfaction and greater internalization of sociocultural ideals in women. However, women in this study reported higher levels of self-esteem, contrary to other researches. This has been attributed to the increased diversity in the representation of appearance ideals and exposure to moderate-size models. In conclusion, this research confirms the significant effect advertisements have on how young Pakistani women perceive their body image and self-worth.

Keywords: body image, thin-ideal, self-esteem, advertisements, internalization, sociocultural ideals

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Introduction

Conventional mass media has become a very significant part of people's lives with hours and hours being spent using and consuming media. Since mass media usage is spreading widely, it has become a significant factor in the interactions and social perceptions of individuals (Lev, 2008). Mass media has the power to not only influence the behaviors and attitudes of individuals but it is also significantly impactful in the personal, social, and cultural growth and empowerment of people either negatively or positively (Wahab, Othman, & Muhammad, 2017). Within mass media, a very important and influential form of communication is present, which is advertising. Advertising is a form of paid communication that is designed to persuade the audience into purchasing a service or product. As a result, advertisements have a significant effect on the way people behave and how they analyze their lives (Ahmed, Jabbar, Buzdar, Ali, & Irshad, 2014).

Women, in particular, have been depicted in advertisements in a stereotypical manner over the years. Gender-role stereotypes are prevalent in advertisements with women predominantly being depicted in decorative, homemaker roles (Chan & Cheng, 2012). Along with this stereotypical depiction, women's portrayal is significantly focused on beauty and body ideals. Advertisements largely focus on the depiction of the thin-ideal, portraying women as having extremely slender figures, and other beauty ideals. This unrealistic depiction of women in advertisements and the subsequent consumption of such content by females have been linked to body dissatisfaction and lower self-esteem (Hawkins, Richards, Granley, & Stein, 2004) (Miller & Halberstadt, 2005). The use of unrealistically thin models in advertisements not only reinforces societal standards of attractiveness but it also generates desirability for the thin-ideal and acceptance of it in most women (Tiggemann, 2003). Therefore, it is important to understand the role advertisements are playing in the internalization of the thin-ideal and beauty standards among women and its effect on their body image and self-esteem.

From an evolutionary point of view, physical beauty, attractiveness, and body shape have been indicators of healthy physiology and good genes (Kayser & Schwarz, 2017), and it also indicates the absence of diseases and genetic disorders (Ahmadpanah, et al., 2019). This can be seen in the association of bodily features, such as waist-to-hip ratio, with female fertility, mate value, and risk of diseases; the differences in the sizes of waist-to-hip ratio influence how female attractiveness, youthfulness, and healthiness are judged (Singh, 2002). This point of view can help to better understand the sociocultural ideals of beauty and physical attractiveness and their depiction in advertisements. The Western ideal of female beauty and attractiveness is associated with thinness and it is largely depicted in advertisements.

Exposure to such media content and the subsequent acceptance of this portrayal of the ideal woman, considered desirable by society, leads to its internalization among women.

Sociocultural ideals of beauty and appearance influence the way individuals feel about their own appearance and the way they evaluate it (Diedrichs, 2017). Since advertisements predominantly pave the way for the portrayal and consumption of these beauty and body ideals; so, exposure to such advertisements affects the self-esteem and body image of women. This is because individuals have the tendency to compare themselves to others for generating evaluations, as stated by Leon Festinger in his Social Comparison Theory (1954). This social comparison with the thin-ideal portrayed in advertisements has been linked to greater body dissatisfaction (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003) and lower self-esteem (Hawkins, Richards, Granley, & Stein, 2004) in females.

Literature Review

Advertising is a form of communication in which messages are conveyed through a medium like newspaper or television in order to persuade the audience to purchase a service or product (Richards, Daugherty, & Logan, 2009). Over the decades, the art of advertising has developed and become more advanced; therefore, enabling advertisements to have greater influence on the minds of individuals. Through strategic planning, advertisers are able to influence the thought processes and behavior of consumers. In this way, advertisements influence and help create perceptions of beauty, appearances, and attractiveness by consistently portraying a certain type of "ideal" woman, deemed acceptable by society, who is depicted as slender, beautiful, with perfect hair and skin.

Women's Depiction in Advertisements and its Effect on Body Image

Portrayal of physical attractiveness and thin-ideal in media has a significant effect on women. A study conducted revealed that young women in New Zealand were not satisfied and were unhappy with their body image, as they wanted to be thinner as a result of media consumption via television, magazine, and music videos. In this, women significantly internalized the thin-ideal standard which led to women unfavorably comparing themselves with the skinny ideal causing greater body dissatisfaction (Miller & Halberstadt, 2005). It is important to understand that the influence and internalization process of the idea of ideal beauty and appearance portrayed in media starts from a young age. According to Hargreaves and Tiggemann, the portrayal of thin-ideal figures in television commercials causes body dissatisfaction among young adolescent girls. Their findings revealed that adolescent girls who viewed commercials portraying thin female figures

experienced greater body dissatisfaction as compared to the girls who viewed non-appearance commercials (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003). The influence of media exposure on body image is prevalent in Pakistan as well. A study conducted by Jalees and De Run collected data from 193 people to examine the effect media exposure, via television programs and magazines, has on the body image of individuals. In their study, a positive relationship was found between body image and media exposure which means that more exposure to media led to increased concerns about body image (Jalees & De Run, 2014). Moreover, another study revealed that viewing thin images in the media gives rise to negative body image perceptions among women causing greater body dissatisfaction among them (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002).

Women's Depiction in Advertisements and its Effect on Self-Esteem
A study by Hawkins, Richards, Granley, and Stein states that exposure to thin-ideal pictures in magazines increased negative mood states, eating disorder symptoms, and body dissatisfaction whilst decreasing self-esteem in women. In their study, lower self-esteem was reported by women who were exposed to thin-ideal pictures as compared to the women who were shown neutral images (Hawkins, Richards, Granley, & Stein, 2004). Keeping in view the influence of advertisements on perceptions of beauty and attractiveness, a study focused on cosmetic advertisements and their effect on young women's self-esteem revealed that comparison with the models in cosmetic adverts caused low self-esteem in women (Kwan, Ahmad, & Ahmad, 2019). In Pakistan's context, the increased depiction of Western ideals in advertisements has also impacted the self-esteem levels of women. Ali and Shahwar found in their study that the tall and thin portrayal of women in television advertisements creates the desire to achieve thin-ideal and affects the self-esteem of women (Ali & Shahwar, 2011). The examples of attractiveness and beauty are one of the most prominent ideals disseminated by media. According to Russello, exposure to television advertisements leads to women having higher levels of social comparison and lower self-esteem (Russello, 2009). However, on the contrary, Kim and Lennon's study found that there was no relationship between self-esteem and exposure to beauty or fashion magazines. This finding has been attributed to the normal body weights and high levels of self-esteem found in the respondents (Kim & Lennon, 2007).

Women's Depiction in Advertisements and Internalization of Sociocultural Ideals
The evaluation and internalization of body and beauty ideals are strongly affected by sociocultural factors. Dakanalis states that sociocultural factors influence how individuals evaluate themselves in relation to the existing

societal standards and norms of physical appearance and beauty. This can be used to understand the effect of a prominent sociocultural ideal discussed in previous studies i.e. the thin-ideal. This societal standard of a slender, ideal female body can be attributed to the Westernization of beauty ideals. In some Western societies, the thin-ideal has been a focal point for decades since it is viewed as a standard of physical attractiveness. This is evident in the decrease in the body size of models from the 1950s to the 1990s; the body weights of the majority being over 15% below the expected weight (Dakanalis, 2017). This, along with the digital modification of media images makes it near to impossible for women to achieve the desired thin figure in a healthy way; nonetheless, the female thin-ideal is still internalized. Media is a source of creating and enforcing concepts and standards of beauty (Goldman & Waymer, 2014). It is evident through the research present that ideals of beauty and attractiveness in society are largely defined through messages from the media, including advertisements. The most prominent idea of ideal beauty for women is defined as having a slim figure with little body fat. Exposure to advertisements portraying these ideals pressurizes women in wanting to achieve the perfect image of what they should look like in order to conform to existing sociocultural ideals. This conformity comes from humans having a fundamental need for social acceptance as it helps in maintaining long-lasting, positive relationships (DeWall & Bushman, 2011).

Conceptual and Operational Definitions of Variables

Advertisements
Advertising is a type of informative communication with consumers through the use of mass media such as television or newspapers in order to persuade the audience to purchase a service or product (Terkan, 2014). Advertisements can be an announcement, text, picture or video which persuades people to purchase a specific product or service. Conventional advertising is the main types of advertising i.e. newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and billboards.

Body Image
Body image is the perceptions individuals have about their own body i.e. how they view their body; these perceptions differ and may not always meet societal standards of beauty (Tiwari & Kumar, 2015).

Self-Esteem
Self-esteem is evaluating one's own worth i.e. self-concept and sense of an individual's own worth, how skilled and lovable they are as well as their self-regard (Hepper, 2016).

23

The following hypotheses were formulated:

H_1 It is more likely that there is an association between advertisements depicting appearance ideals and the body image perceptions of women.

H_2 It is more likely that there is a relationship between advertisements representing appearance ideals and the self-esteem of women.

H_3 It is more likely that there is an association between advertisements and the internalization of sociocultural ideals regarding appearance.

H_4 It is probable that the body image and self-esteem of women with higher education are more likely to be affected by advertisements depicting appearance ideals.

H_5 There is a greater likelihood that employment status of women effects their body image and self-esteem regarding depiction of appearance ideals in advertisements.

H_6 It is probable that body image and self-esteem of women with higher income level are more likely to be affected by advertisements depicting appearance ideals.

Method

The present study focuses on the depiction of women in advertisements and its subsequent effect on the body image and self-esteem of women. In order to examine the relationship between women's depiction in advertisements with body image and self-esteem, a survey (N = 216) was conducted among young Pakistani women from Islamabad between the age of 18 to 30 years.

Survey

In the research questionnaire, three scales were adopted and self-administered by the researcher. Using 4-point and 5-point Likert scales, three instruments were adopted in order to collect data and these were the Body Areas Satisfaction Scale (BASS) [subscale of Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire's (MBSRQ)], Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) and Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3). The questionnaire consisted of 37 items divided into five parts i.e. demographics, exposure to advertisements, body image, self-esteem, and internalization of sociocultural ideals.

Sample

The target population in this research was women and the sampling frame specified the age group of the sample i.e. women between the ages of 18 to 30 years old. The data was collected from 216 participants. The researcher used non-probability convenience sampling due to the easy accessibility and availability of the respondents. Convenient sampling technique involves

collecting data from samples that are located or available conveniently for the researcher i.e. either through Internet service or location (Edgar & Manz, 2017).

Measures

According to Slater, media exposure is the extent to which the audience has come across a specific media message or content (Slater, 2004). Since advertisements can majorly be found in the media, so using this definition, exposure to advertisements was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1=never" to "5=very often". In this, higher scores indicated greater exposure to advertisements. Moreover, demographic items were also included in the survey regarding the participants' employment, age, income level, and education.

Body Areas Satisfaction Scale (BASS)

The Body Areas Satisfaction Scale is a subscale of the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire (MBSRQ). The MBSRQ is a well-validated scale used for body image assessment and it includes the subscale, Body Areas Satisfaction Scale. This is a 9-item scale that focuses on body satisfaction or dissatisfaction regarding one's bodily, facial, and overall appearance such as weight, face, lower torso, etc. (Cash, 2017). This scale was used to measure the degree of body image satisfaction or dissatisfaction among women. BASS uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1=very dissatisfied" to "5=very satisfied" and a higher score in this shows greater satisfaction with different areas of the body.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE)

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item instrument that measures global self-worth and takes into account both negative and positive feelings about the self. A 4-point Likert scale is used ranging from "1=strongly disagree" to "4=strongly agree". In this, a higher score indicates higher self-esteem. The RSE is one of the most widely used instruments to measure self-esteem (Hawkins, Richards, Granley, & Stein, 2004). The RSE has been used to measure the variable of self-esteem i.e. to assess both negative and positive feelings about the self among the respondents.

Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3)

The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ) was developed to assess the acceptance of societal standards of appearance (Heinberg, Thompson, & Stormer, 1995). The Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire-3 (SATAQ-3) is a revised scale and it focuses on assessing pressures and internalization. This scale was used to measure internalization and awareness of sociocultural ideals and pressures

regarding appearance, including the thin-ideal and beauty ideals. This is a 30-item scale but for this specific research study, only 13 items were used in the questionnaire. The 13 items used from SATAQ-3 were relevant and appropriate for the study. Each item was altered and adjusted in order to accurately analyze the depiction of women in advertisements, particularly. SATAQ-3 uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1=definitely disagree" to "5=definitely agree".

Findings and Discussion

The sample was made up of 216 women between the ages of 18 to 30 years. A majority of the sample, 68.5%, comprised of undergraduates whereas graduates made up 25.5% and postgraduates made up 6.0% of the sample. Moreover, in terms of employment, a large portion of the sample consisted of students i.e. unemployed respondents by 74.1% and professionals i.e. employed respondents made up 25.9% of the sample. Therefore, the sample was largely made up of undergraduate students. Furthermore, in terms of income, the sample mostly comprised respondents with high-income levels (Rs. 151,000 and above) with a total of 58.3% while 41.7% of the sample contained respondents with middle-income levels (less than Rs. 150,000). Overall, young adult undergraduate women from 18 to 30 years with high-income levels made up the sample.

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of Sample*

Demographics		*f*	%
Education	Undergraduate	148	68.5
	Graduate	55	25.5
	Postgraduate	13	6.0
Employment	Student	160	74.1
	Professional	56	25.9
Income	Middle Income (Less than Rs.150,000)	90	41.7
	High Income (Rs. 151,000 and above)	126	58.3

Note: Overall, the sample mostly comprised of students (M=1.259, SD=.439). In regards of education, the sample largely consisted undergraduates (M=1.375, SD=.596). In terms of income level, the sample as a whole had relatively high income (M=1.58, SD=.494) i.e. more than Rs. 151,000. The sample was made up of women between 18-30 years.

Table. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient of Body Image (BASS, Self-Esteem (RSE) and Internalization (SATAQ) with Exposure of Advertisements

Variables	Exposure of Advertisements	Sig. 2 tailed
Body Image (BASS)	-.227[**]	.001
Self-Esteem (RSE)	.173[*]	.011
Internalization (SATAQ)	.257**	.000

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used in order to test H_1: It is more likely that there is an association between advertisements depicting appearance ideals and the body image perceptions of women. With a significant value at *p = .001, H_1* is proven because an association has been identified i.e. advertisements depicting appearance ideals will effect women's body image. Body image can be defined as the self-perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, behaviors, and feelings that individuals have related to their bodies (Bailey, Gammage, & Ingen, 2017). Keeping this in consideration, the findings revealed that in terms of their face (facial features, complexion) and hair (thickness, color, texture) women were mostly satisfied. This can be attributed to the varying notions of feminine beauty across different cultures and generations (Poorani, 2012). However, the participants were mostly dissatisfied with their lower torso (buttocks, thighs, hips, legs) and mid-torso (waist, stomach). This coincides with Rekha and Maran's study which revealed that advertisements depicting appearance ideals such as thinness led to body dissatisfaction among women; whereby, a smaller body size was desired by 76% of the women in the research (Rekha V & Maran, 2012).

Furthermore, at *p = .011,* the result revealed that H_2 has been proven because advertisements depicting appearance ideals such as thinness will create an effect on the self-esteem levels of women. Self-esteem is a way of self-evaluation for individuals in relation to their personal beliefs regarding social relationships, skills, and abilities (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). Overall, the findings revealed higher levels of self-esteem among women. This finding is supported by Semesters and Mandel who found that exposure to media images depicting moderately thin models had a positive effect on the participants' self-esteem (Smeesters & Mandel, 2006). A plausible explanation for this could be attributed to exposure to advertisements depicting moderate-size models. Zotou and Palla found in their study that women's self-esteem did not fluctuate when exposed to advertisements

depicting moderate-weight models (Zotou & Palla, 2012). Moreover, at p = *.000* there was a significant association between advertisements depicting body and beauty ideals and the degree to which women are aware of and internalize these sociocultural ideals; therefore, proving H_3 via a strong correlation between societal ideals of beauty and their internalization among women in this study. This finding is supported by Halliwell and Harvey who found higher levels of internalization of sociocultural attitudes regarding appearance and greater pressure to lose weight among adolescent girls (Halliwell & Harvey, 2006). Moreover, greater internalization of the thin-ideal increases the probability of dieting, fear of fatness, weight awareness as well as restrictive behavior which become predisposing factors for clinical eating disorders to develop (Pokrajac-Bulian, Ambrosi-Randić, & Kukić, 2008).

In addition, the researcher conducted one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) in order to measure education with body image and self-esteem. It was found that at *p = .118,* education does not affect how women perceive their body image. Also, at *p = .744,* the education level of women does not determine or effect their self-esteem levels. The current study found a non-significant relationship; whereby, body image and self-esteem of women with higher education are not affected by advertisements depicting appearance ideals such as the thin-ideal. Therefore, H_4 has not been proven.

Table 2: *Education and Body Image One-Way ANOVA*

Measure	Undergraduate		Graduate		Postgraduate		$F_{(6,210)}$	p	η^2
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Body Image (BASS)	29.95	6.447	31.56	6.916	33.07	7.772	2.161	.118	.020

Furthermore, an independent samples t-test was conducted to measure the effect of employment status on women's body image and self-esteem. When tested against body image, the findings revealed that there was no positive correlation between employment and body image *(p = .762).* However, at *p = .033* a significant association between employment and the self-esteem levels of women was found via advertisements depicting beauty and body ideals. So, employment status of women did not have an effect on their body image regarding appearance ideals in advertisements. Contrary to this finding, a study reported greater concerns about body image perceptions among working women in which the respondents' found themselves as too heavy (Emslie, Hunt, & Macintyre, 2001). Moreover, when employment status was tested against self-esteem in the independent samples t-test then a positive correlation was found between them. This means that employment status does have an effect on the respondents' self-esteem. In one research it was reported that self-esteem effected the participants' job-related success

and welfare (Kuster, Orth, & Meier, 2013). In conclusion, H_5 has been partially proven due to one significant and one non-significant correlation found between the variables.

Table 2: Employment and Self-Esteem Independent Samples T-Test

Variable	Student (n = 160)		Professional (n = 56)		*t (216)*	*p*	95% CI		*Cohen's*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			*LL*	*UL*	
Self-Esteem (RSE)	28.63	3.782	27.48	3.319	2.160	.033	.0950	2.215	0.3232

Moreover, an independent samples t-test was conducted to measure the relationship between income and body image as well as self-esteem. It was revealed that at *p = .380* income levels of women do not affect their body image perceptions in terms of advertisements depicting body and beauty ideals. However, at *p = .035,* it was revealed that income level has a positive relationship with the self-esteem of women in this study. The findings revealed a non-significant relationship between the income level of women and their body image perceptions. Contrary to this finding, it was revealed in a study that among low-income women, greater body dissatisfaction was reported and women desired a lean figure (Kops, Bessel, Knauth, Caleffi, & Wendland, 2018). However, a positive correlation was found between self-esteem and income. This finding is supported by research in which a significant relationship between socioeconomic status (income) and self-esteem among young adults was found (Twenge & Campbell, 2002). Most of the respondents in this current study have high-income levels; therefore, it is plausible that high income positively correlates with the worth of oneself among women resulting in higher self-esteem. Hence, due to one non-significant relationship and one positive correlation H_6 has been partially proven.

Table 3: Income and Body Image Independent Samples T-Test

Variable	Middle Income (n = 90)		High Income (n = 126)		*t (216)*	*p*	95% CI		*Cohen's d*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			*LL*	*UL*	
Body Image (BASS)	31.04	7.387	30.20	6.142	.881	.380	-1.040	2.717	0.1236

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to find the effect appearance related advertisements have on the body image and self-esteem of young Pakistani women. The researcher's findings revealed that women had higher body dissatisfaction with their mid and lower torso, in particular, but displayed greater satisfaction with their face and hair. Moreover, it was found that depiction of appearance ideals such as thinness actually led to higher levels of self-esteem among the participants. Also, the participants' responses revealed that women greatly internalized the sociocultural ideals of physical appearance and beauty.

Most of the research conducted regarding this specific topic is mainly focused in the United States (Patterson, O'Malley, & Story, 2009). Hence, there is a lack of cultural and cross-cultural research on the topic which makes it difficult to generalize the results to a larger population. So, a more diverse sample must be studied in different cultural contexts to create a better understanding. In Pakistan, particularly, limited research has been done on body image and self-esteem regarding the thin-ideal. Hence, this research is significant because it examines data collected from Pakistani women which highlights their experiences and this research also assists in filling the literature gap present on this topic in South Asia.

Moreover, no significant relationship was found between education and body image as well as self-esteem. However, employment and income had a positive correlation with self-esteem. On the other hand, employment and income had a non-significant relationship with body image. Even though culture influences the experiences of women regarding Western beauty pressures, it is important to remember that the unattainable Western beauty norms and standards like the thin-ideal, particularly those portrayed in advertisements, significantly affect how girls and women view their bodies (Mckay, Moore, & Kubik, 2018).

Media has the power to create and enforce beauty standards (Goldman & Waymer, 2014) and from a very young age, girls are aware of and interact with advertisements depicting appearance ideals. This causes them to internalize these standards of what an ideal body should look like and makes them strive to change their own bodies to meet an impossible standard. This internalization eventually causes greater body dissatisfaction and lower levels of self-esteem in girls as it has been reported that adolescent girls experienced body dissatisfaction when exposed to advertisements depicting the thin-ideal (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003).

Women are driven to achieve, what society has labeled, the ideal body type depicted in advertisements by engaging in social comparisons. They make negative evaluations of their appearances by comparing themselves with those that they feel and believe are better than them. So, advertisements

depicting body ideals pressurize women to achieve the perfect image so as to conform to existing sociocultural ideals. This conformity stems from a fundamental need, in humans, for social acceptance in order to create and maintain positive and long-lasting relationships (DeWall & Bushman, 2011).

Therefore, for girls and women who do not have the "ideal" body type, a narrative largely created by advertisements depicting appearance ideals, the portrayal of body and beauty ideals can cause body image disturbance (Low, et al., 2003). As research indicates, body image concerns and dissatisfaction can lead to the development of eating disorders. Hence, this study can help to better understand young Pakistani women's perceptions of their body image and self-esteem. Through the exploration of this intricate relationship between body image, self-esteem, and sociocultural ideals, this study sheds light on the experiences of Pakistani women and promotes a deeper understanding of the complexities of body image attitudes and self-worth among young women in Pakistan.

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33

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35

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