



## The Enrollment Magnet: How Educational Marketing and Institutional Quality Shape Student Interest in Vocational Schools

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### Abstract :

Increasing competition among educational institutions has encouraged schools to adopt more strategic approaches in communicating the value of their educational services. Educational marketing is no longer limited to promotional activities; it has become an integral part of how schools build credibility and present the relevance of their programs to prospective students and their families. This study examines how educational service marketing strategies are implemented, how school stakeholders contribute to promotional efforts, and what factors influence prospective students' interest in vocational education. A qualitative research approach was employed using in-depth interviews, documentation, and field observations to capture the perspectives of individuals involved in school marketing and educational management. The findings show that educational marketing is carried out through a combination of direct outreach activities, such as visits to feeder schools and open house events, alongside the use of social media to broaden information dissemination. These efforts are reinforced by the participation of teachers, alumni, and students who contribute to shaping a credible institutional image. In addition, prospective students' decisions are influenced by several institutional characteristics, including the clarity of vocational programs, affordable tuition fees, accessible location, alumni experiences, and the availability of practical learning facilities. These findings offer practical implications for educational managers in designing marketing strategies that integrate stakeholder involvement with the strengthening of educational services.

## INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions today operate in an increasingly competitive environment where schools must not only provide quality education but also communicate their institutional strengths effectively to attract prospective students. This challenge is particularly evident in vocational education, where schools compete to demonstrate their relevance to labor market needs and the employability of their graduates (Balakrishnan et al., 2025; Schueller, 2023; et al., 2022). According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), vocational education plays a crucial role in preparing human resources with practical competencies needed in the global workforce, yet enrollment in

vocational programs in many developing countries remains uneven due to public perceptions and limited institutional visibility (Avis, 2023; Kevin Otieno, 2024; et al., 2022). Vocational schools (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK*) are expected to produce graduates who are ready to work, continue their studies, or develop entrepreneurial skills (Dantes, 2024; Verdina & Pramono, 2025; Yarmanto et al., 2025). However, many vocational institutions still face challenges in attracting prospective students because of strong competition among schools and varying perceptions of vocational education quality (Edy & Sumarta, 2025; Raj Murtajaa Nursaidin & Rivaldo Priadi Putra, 2025; et al., 2023). These conditions require schools to adopt strategic approaches in marketing educational services to communicate their advantages and build public trust. Consequently, marketing strategies in educational institutions are no longer limited to promotional activities but have evolved into a broader process of shaping institutional image and strengthening relationships with stakeholders.

Recent studies highlight the growing importance of educational marketing in strengthening school competitiveness and increasing student enrollment. Research in educational management emphasizes that effective marketing strategies involve both communication efforts and the demonstration of institutional quality (Gadhvi & Bhatt, 2023; Rashkova et al., 2024; Zhao, 2024). For instance, Eposi (2023) argues that educational service marketing is closely related to how institutions communicate their educational value to society while maintaining service quality that meets stakeholders' expectations. Similarly, studies on school marketing communication suggest that digital media has become an essential tool for educational promotion because it enables institutions to reach wider audiences efficiently (Kovalchuk et al., 2023; Lievens & Blažević, 2021; Padilla Torres, 2024). Other research also indicates that stakeholder involvement plays an important role in strengthening the credibility of school promotion, particularly when teachers, students, and alumni actively participate in disseminating information about institutional experiences and achievements. In addition, Aboalghanam (2025) emphasize that educational marketing strategies should integrate service quality, institutional reputation, and communication practices to build sustainable relationships with prospective students and their families. These studies collectively suggest that marketing educational services involves not only promotional techniques but also institutional characteristics that influence public perception.

Despite the growing body of research on educational marketing, several gaps remain in understanding how marketing strategies interact with internal institutional factors in shaping students' enrollment decisions. Many studies focus primarily on promotional communication or digital marketing practices without sufficiently examining how internal aspects such as program relevance, learning facilities, and stakeholder involvement contribute to the effectiveness of marketing strategies. In the context of vocational education, this limitation becomes particularly important because prospective students often evaluate schools not only based on promotional messages but also on the perceived alignment between vocational programs and employment opportunities. Therefore, there is a need for research that explores educational marketing from a more comprehensive perspective that integrates promotional strategies with internal institutional characteristics. This study addresses this gap by examining how marketing strategies are implemented at SMKS 3 Idhata Curup and how these strategies interact with institutional factors that influence prospective students' interest. By focusing on a vocational school context, this research provides a more contextualized understanding of educational marketing practices within secondary vocational education.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the marketing strategies used by SMKS 3 Idhata Curup in promoting its educational services and increasing prospective students' interest in enrolling at the institution. Specifically, the research seeks to explore three interconnected aspects: the strategies used by the school to promote its educational programs, the role of stakeholders such as teachers, alumni, and students in supporting promotional activities, and the key factors that influence prospective students' decisions when choosing the school. By examining these aspects through a qualitative research approach, this study provides a deeper understanding of how marketing strategies operate within the institutional context of vocational education. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of educational marketing practices by highlighting the importance of aligning promotional communication with the quality and relevance of educational services offered by schools.

This study argues that the effectiveness of educational marketing strategies is closely linked to the integration between promotional communication and internal institutional quality. Marketing activities that rely solely on promotional techniques may attract initial attention but are unlikely to sustain students' interest if they are not supported by credible institutional characteristics. In vocational schools, the clarity of vocational programs, the availability of practical learning facilities, and the involvement of school stakeholders become important elements that shape prospective students' perceptions of educational value. Therefore, this research focuses on understanding how promotional strategies, stakeholder participation, and institutional quality interact in influencing prospective students' interest. By examining these relationships, the study aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on educational marketing in vocational schools and to offer insights for improving marketing practices in educational institutions facing similar competitive challenges.

Given the increasing competition among educational institutions and the growing importance of institutional reputation, understanding how schools effectively market their educational services has become an important area of research in educational management. Studies that integrate marketing strategies with institutional characteristics can provide valuable insights for policymakers and school administrators seeking to improve enrollment outcomes and strengthen institutional sustainability. Therefore, this study not only contributes to academic discussions on educational marketing but also offers practical implications for vocational schools aiming to enhance their attractiveness and relevance in the contemporary educational landscape.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the marketing strategies of educational services implemented at SMKS 3 Idhata Curup and their role in increasing prospective students' interest in vocational education. Qualitative research is considered appropriate because it enables researchers to understand social phenomena in depth through the perspectives and experiences of individuals involved in the studied context (Littman, 2025; McLean et al., 2025; Warwick, 2022). This research specifically adopts a case study approach, which focuses on investigating a particular phenomenon within its real-life setting (Dilger et al., 2021; Domingos et al., 2022; Hayes-Gill, 2021). The case study design allows researchers to examine the strategies used by the school in promoting its educational services and how these strategies influence public perception and decision-making regarding school choice. The research was conducted at SMKS 3 Idhata Curup, a vocational school that actively implements various promotional strategies to attract prospective students. The selection of this setting provides an opportunity to

analyze educational marketing practices in a real institutional context. Through this design, the research aims to generate a detailed and contextual understanding of how marketing strategies, stakeholder involvement, and institutional characteristics contribute to increasing student interest.

Data were collected through several qualitative data collection techniques, including in-depth interviews, documentation, and limited field observations. In-depth interviews were conducted with school stakeholders who are directly involved in school promotion activities and educational management. These interviews enabled the researcher to obtain detailed information about marketing strategies, stakeholder roles, and factors influencing students' interest in choosing the school. Documentation was also used to support interview findings, including promotional posters, school social media content, and institutional records related to student admissions. The researcher acted as the primary instrument in collecting and interpreting the data while maintaining close interaction with the informants (Mohler & Rudman, 2022; Stige et al., 2025; Yoon & Uliassi, 2022). This research was conducted at SMKS 3 Idhata Curup for approximately three months during the period of new student admission activities. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researcher applied member checking and data triangulation by comparing information obtained from different informants and supporting documents (Motulsky, 2021; Vella, 2024). The informants involved in this study are presented in Table 2.

**Table 1. Research Informants and Interview Codes**

<b>Informant</b>	<b>Interview Code</b>	<b>Role/Function</b>
Promotion Staff	I1	Responsible for implementing school promotional strategies and outreach activities to junior high schools
Teacher	I2	Assists in disseminating information about school programs and supports promotional activities
Promotion Teacher	I3	Participates in school socialization programs and direct promotion to prospective students
School Staff	I4	Provides institutional information and supports administrative aspects of school promotion
Teacher (Social Media Supervisor)	I5	Guides students in producing promotional social media content
School Staff	I6	Provides information regarding vocational programs offered by the school
Administrative Staff	I7	Explains information related to tuition fees and school administrative procedures
Teacher	I8	Provides information related to school accessibility and learning activities
School Staff	I9	Explains alumni experiences and their influence on school reputation
Vocational Teacher	I10	Provides explanations regarding practical facilities and vocational learning activities

The data collected in this study were analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman (Marx & de Swardt, 2023). This analytical process consists of three interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by selecting, focusing, and organizing relevant information obtained from interviews, documentation, and field observations. This process helped the researcher identify key themes related to educational marketing strategies, stakeholder involvement, and factors influencing prospective students' interest. The next stage involved presenting the data in an organized form, such as

narrative descriptions, visual illustrations, and tables, allowing patterns and relationships among the findings to become clearer. Finally, conclusions were drawn through a continuous interpretation of the data, supported by comparisons between different sources of information. To strengthen the credibility of the research findings, the researcher conducted member checking by confirming the interview results with the informants and applied triangulation by comparing interview data with documentation and field findings. These procedures ensure that the interpretation of the data accurately reflects the realities of the research setting.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Marketing Strategy for Educational Services

Marketing of educational services is a series of efforts made by educational institutions to introduce the excellence of institutions to the community while building the trust of prospective students and parents. In the context of vocational schools, this strategy not only serves as a means of promotion, but also as a communication medium that shows the quality of educational programs, learning facilities, and future graduate prospects. Education marketing strategies usually combine a direct communication approach with the use of broader information media so that the message conveyed can reach the community effectively. This approach allows schools to build relationships with prospective students from the beginning while affirming the institution's identity in the midst of increasingly competitive environment among schools. In practice, educational institutions utilize various promotional media, ranging from socialization activities, information dissemination through print media, to the use of digital media as a means of public communication. The combination of these various methods aims to strengthen the image of the school while increasing public interest in choosing the educational institutions offered.

The results of interviews with informants show that marketing activities carried out by schools mostly use a direct approach to prospective students. Promotion is carried out through visits to junior high schools which are the main source of prospective new students. In this activity, the school introduced expertise programs, learning facilities, and various activities owned by the school. As expressed by one of the informants: "The strategy carried out by schools is usually to come directly to the junior high school to introduce the school program. In addition, we also hold activities such as open houses and try outs so that students can see firsthand the learning atmosphere at this school." (I1, 2025). This statement was reinforced by another informant who explained that promotional activities were not only carried out directly, but also used information media to spread promotional messages to the public.

"The school also uses social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp Broadcast to convey information about school activities and new student registration." (I2, 2025). The information from the informants shows that the marketing strategy applied does not depend on one method alone. The school combines a direct communication approach with the dissemination of information through digital media so that the promotional reach becomes wider. Through this approach, schools can explain the advantages of educational programs more clearly while building closer communication relationships with prospective students and parents.

The use of social media serves as an additional means that helps expand the dissemination of information. However, the use of digital media is still in the development

stage because it has not been managed professionally and does not have a scheduled publication pattern. This condition shows that school marketing strategies are still dominated by direct communication approaches combined with simple information media. The promotional practice is also strengthened through the use of visual media that is disseminated to the public, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Promotional Poster for the New Student Admission System of SMKS 3 Idhata Curup

(source: Instagram account @smkidhatacurup)

Figure 1 shows a number of educational programs available at schools, such as Fashion Design and Production, Hospitality, and Nursing and Caregiving Support Services. In addition, information about extracurricular activities, learning facilities, and scholarship programs are also displayed as part of efforts to attract the attention of prospective students. The presentation of information in visual form makes it easier for the public to get an overview of the school's profile while strengthening the image of educational institutions in the surrounding environment.

### The Role of School Stakeholders in Marketing

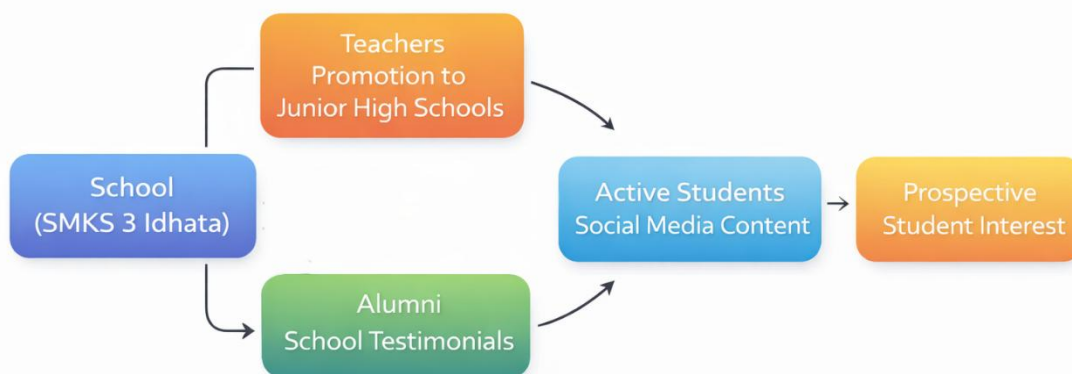
Marketing of educational services does not only depend on promotional activities carried out by the school management, but also involves various elements within the educational institution itself. The involvement of these actors creates a communication network that is able to expand the dissemination of information about schools to the public. In the context of vocational schools, the active participation of teachers, alumni, and students is an important part of building the image of educational institutions while strengthening the confidence of prospective students in the quality of schools. The presence of these parties not only serves as a conveyor of information, but also as a direct representation of the learning experience and school life that can be seen by the public.

Information obtained from the informant shows that school promotion activities involve the active role of teachers in conveying information to prospective students. Teachers not only play the role of teaching staff, but also participate in school

socialization activities to various junior high schools which are the primary source of prospective students. "Teachers participate in promotional activities at junior high schools and help explain school programs to students and teachers at their schools." (I3, 2025). The involvement of teachers is an important part of building more personal communication with prospective students. Through this direct interaction, information about expertise programs, learning activities, and opportunities owned by schools can be conveyed more clearly and convincingly. In addition to teachers, alumni also contribute to school promotion activities through the delivery of their experiences while studying at SMKS 3 Idhata. The stories of experiences conveyed by alumni are often a consideration for prospective students and parents in determining school choices. "Testimonials from alumni are usually quite influential because prospective students can learn about the learning experience directly from those who have studied here." (I4, 2025).

This information shows that the alumni experience can be a source of information that is trusted by the community. The success of alumni after completing their education is often seen as tangible evidence of the quality of the school. The role of active students is also seen in promotional activities that utilize social media as a means of disseminating school information. Students are involved in the creation of various content that displays learning activities, extracurricular activities, and the atmosphere of the school environment. "Students are also involved in creating school social media content such as documentation of learning activities or student activities which are then shared through the school's social media account." (I5, 2025).

The involvement of students in these activities shows that school promotion is not only carried out through the delivery of formal information, but also through a real picture of school life that can be seen directly by the community. Content created by students often displays more natural activities so that they can attract the attention of prospective students. The relationship between these various parties forms a pattern of cooperation that complements each other in school promotion activities. Teachers play a role in conveying information directly to prospective students, alumni provide an overview of the educational experiences they have lived, while students actively show the dynamics of school life through various social media content. The role relationship between these parties can be seen in **Figure 2** which illustrates the involvement of teachers, alumni, and students in school marketing activities.



**Figure 2. Stakeholder Collaboration in Marketing of Educational Services**

The flow of involvement in Figure 2 shows that school marketing activities do not run separately, but through interrelated cooperation between various elements within the school environment. The information conveyed through direct promotional activities

is strengthened by alumni testimonials and various social media content featuring student activities. This pattern of involvement indirectly helps to strengthen the school's image in the eyes of the community and increase the interest of prospective students in the educational institution.

### **Factors Determining the Interest of Prospective Students**

The interest of prospective students in choosing an educational institution does not arise suddenly, but is formed through various considerations related to the quality of the educational program, the economic condition of the family, and the picture of the future after completing education. In the context of vocational schools, these decisions are usually influenced by the extent to which the school is able to offer expertise programs that are relevant to the needs of the world of work, the availability of adequate learning facilities, and the accessibility of educational institutions for the surrounding community. These considerations are the basis for prospective students and parents in determining the choice of a school that is considered to be able to provide educational benefits as well as better future opportunities.

Information obtained from informants shows that the existence of a clear expertise program is one of the main reasons for prospective students to choose SMKS 3 Idhata. The expertise program offered is considered to be able to provide an overview of the skills that will be acquired during the education period. "The vocational program in this school is quite clear and directly leads to skills that can be used after graduating." (I6, 2025). The statement shows that the clarity of the direction of education is an important consideration for prospective students. Skills programs that are oriented to the world of work provide the belief that the education taken is not only theoretical, but also directly related to skills that can be used after completing education.

In addition, the cost of education is also one of the considerations that often arise in the school selection process. The informant explained that the affordability of the cost makes this school more accessible to the surrounding community. "The tuition fees here are still relatively affordable, so many parents consider this school for their children." (I7, 2025). The information shows that the family's economic condition also influences decisions in making educational choices. The relatively affordable cost provides an opportunity for more students to continue their education without facing too great a financial burden.

In addition to these two considerations, practical facilities are also an important part that affects prospective students' views on the quality of the school. "The available practical facilities help students learn directly so that they are better prepared when entering the workforce." (I10, 2025). The existence of practical facilities allows students to obtain a more applicative learning experience so that the learning process does not only take place in the classroom, but also through practical activities related to work skills.

These various considerations show that the decision to choose a school is not only influenced by one factor, but by several interrelated aspects. Educational programs, tuition fees, location, alumni experience, and learning facilities are elements that together shape the perception of prospective students on the quality of educational institutions. A summary of the various factors that affect the interest of prospective students in choosing SMKS 3 Idhata can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the interest of prospective students in choosing SMKS 3 Idhata is formed through a combination of various considerations related to the quality of education and social conditions of the community. Information about educational

programs, alumni experiences, and learning facilities provides an overview of the educational process that students will undergo. At the same time, considerations regarding the cost and location of the school show that accessibility factors also have a role in determining educational choices for the surrounding community. These findings indicate that the marketing of educational services is not only shaped by promotional strategies but also by stakeholder involvement and various considerations that influence prospective students' decision-making.

**Table 2. Factors Influencing the Interest of Prospective Students in Choosing SMKS 3 Idhata**

Factors	Forms of Consideration for Prospective Students	Impact on School Interest
Expertise Programs	A clear and work-oriented skills program	Giving students confidence that the school can support their future careers
Tuition Fees	The cost of education is relatively affordable for the surrounding community	Improve accessibility for prospective students from diverse economic backgrounds
School Location	The location of the school is easily accessible from the student's residence	Facilitate student mobility in participating in learning activities
Testimony of Alumni	Positive experiences of alumni during their education at school	Increase the trust of prospective students and parents in the quality of the school
Practice Facilities	Availability of adequate practice spaces and learning facilities	Provide an overview of the school's readiness to support students' skills

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the marketing of educational services at SMKS 3 Idhata is shaped by a combination of promotional strategies and internal institutional factors that influence prospective students' decisions. The study reveals that direct promotion to junior high schools, open house activities, and the use of social media constitute the main strategies used by the school to introduce its educational programs. These strategies are further strengthened by the active involvement of school stakeholders such as teachers, alumni, and students, who collectively contribute to the dissemination of information about the school. In addition to promotional strategies, the decision of prospective students to choose the school is also influenced by several internal factors, including the clarity of vocational programs, affordable tuition fees, accessible school location, alumni testimonials, and the availability of practical learning facilities. These elements demonstrate that the attractiveness of vocational schools is not determined solely by marketing communication, but also by the perceived quality and relevance of educational services offered. The interaction between promotional efforts and institutional quality ultimately shapes the public perception of the school and influences prospective students' interest in enrolling.

The results of this study support previous research emphasizing the importance of marketing strategies in increasing the attractiveness of educational institutions. Edy & Sumarta (2025) explains that educational marketing plays a strategic role in introducing institutional strengths while building public trust in the quality of educational services. Similarly, Raj (2025) highlights that communication strategies in school promotion significantly influence prospective students' decisions, particularly when supported by effective information dissemination through digital media. The findings also align with Gadhvi & Bhatt (2023), who found that the use of social media platforms contributes to expanding the reach of school promotion and improving institutional visibility among

potential students. Furthermore, the involvement of alumni and students in promotional activities confirms the argument proposed by Avis (2023) that a positive institutional image is often built through experiences and testimonials from stakeholders who are directly connected to the institution. However, this study extends previous findings by showing that marketing effectiveness is closely linked with internal institutional quality, particularly vocational program relevance and practical learning facilities. These factors demonstrate that successful educational marketing requires not only communication strategies but also strong institutional characteristics.

This study contributes to the field of educational management by demonstrating that effective marketing of educational services in vocational schools requires an integration between promotional strategies and internal institutional quality. Previous studies on educational marketing often focus primarily on promotional communication or digital marketing strategies. In contrast, this research highlights the importance of combining marketing efforts with institutional characteristics such as program relevance, learning facilities, and stakeholder participation. The findings suggest that teachers, alumni, and students play a significant role as informal ambassadors of the school, strengthening promotional messages through authentic experiences and interactions with prospective students. From an educational management perspective, this study emphasizes that marketing strategies should not be separated from the quality of educational services provided by the institution. In the context of vocational education, the relevance of vocational programs and the availability of practical facilities become essential components that influence students' perceptions of future career opportunities. Therefore, this research provides a broader perspective on educational marketing by demonstrating that institutional credibility and stakeholder collaboration are key elements in building sustainable school attractiveness.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating marketing strategies with institutional quality in increasing prospective students' interest in vocational education. Promotional strategies such as direct outreach, open house activities, and digital communication through social media are effective tools for introducing school programs to the community. However, these strategies become more influential when supported by strong internal characteristics of the institution, including relevant vocational programs, adequate learning facilities, and positive alumni experiences. The involvement of teachers, alumni, and students further strengthens the credibility of promotional messages and helps create a more authentic representation of school life. These findings indicate that educational marketing should be understood as a holistic process that combines communication strategies with the actual quality of educational services. For educational institutions, particularly vocational schools, this implies the need to continuously improve both promotional strategies and internal program quality. Future research may explore how digital marketing strategies and industry partnerships can further enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of vocational education institutions in the broader educational landscape.

## CONCLUSION

The increasing competition among educational institutions requires schools to develop effective strategies not only to promote their programs but also to strengthen public trust in the quality of the educational services they provide. This study addressed the question of how educational service marketing strategies are implemented at SMKS 3 Idhata and how these strategies contribute to increasing the interest of prospective

students. The findings indicate that the school applies a combination of direct promotional activities and digital communication strategies, supported by the involvement of teachers, alumni, and students in disseminating information about the institution. In addition, the decision of prospective students to enroll in the school is influenced by several key factors, including the clarity of vocational programs, affordable tuition fees, accessible school location, alumni experiences, and the availability of practical learning facilities. These findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of educational marketing strategies is closely related to the perceived quality and relevance of the educational services offered by the institution.

The broader implications of these findings highlight that educational marketing should be understood as a comprehensive process that integrates promotional communication with institutional quality. Schools are not only required to disseminate information about their programs but also to ensure that the educational services provided meet the expectations of prospective students and their families. The involvement of various school stakeholders further strengthens the credibility of promotional efforts and helps build a positive institutional image within the community. These insights suggest that vocational schools need to continuously improve both their marketing strategies and the quality of their educational programs to remain competitive in an increasingly dynamic educational environment. Future studies may further examine the role of digital marketing innovation, industry partnerships, and community engagement in strengthening the sustainability and attractiveness of vocational education institutions.

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