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ORIGINAL

Exploring the influence of sensory brand recognition on brand loyalty within the quick service restaurant industry: an analysis of branded food retailers in Kerala

Exploración de la influencia del reconocimiento sensorial de la marca en la fidelidad a la marca en el sector de los restaurantes de servicio rápido: un análisis de los minoristas de alimentos de marca en Kerala

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive business landscape, organized retail establishments are facing formidable challenges from online counterparts, while fast-food retailers are also facing the pressure. The rise in popularity of online food delivery apps has compelled organized restaurant businesses to swiftly adapt and innovate to thrive in this new business environment. When customers order food through online, the differentiating factor primarily is the taste of the food. However, when customers physically visit a restaurant, their experience is influenced by four additional sensory elements present in the retail outlet: sight, smell, sound, and touch. These sensory elements are intentionally employed by companies to position and distinguish their brand from competitors. This study intends to investigate how these sensory components affect consumers' perceptions of quality, which in turn affect purchase intentions. The study focuses on a selection of internationally recognized retail food outlets, with a significant presence across the globe, that have established locations in three major cities in Kerala: Kochi, Trivandrum, and Kozhikode.

Keywords: Sensory Brand Recognition; Visual Information Possesses; Fast Food Businesses.

RESUMEN

En el competitivo panorama empresarial actual, los establecimientos minoristas organizados se enfrentan a formidables desafíos por parte de sus homólogos en línea, mientras que los minoristas de comida rápida también se enfrentan a la presión. El aumento de la popularidad de las aplicaciones de entrega de comida por Internet ha obligado a las empresas de restauración organizada a adaptarse rápidamente e innovar para prosperar en este nuevo entorno empresarial. Cuando los clientes piden comida por Internet, el factor diferenciador es principalmente el sabor de la comida. Sin embargo, cuando los clientes visitan físicamente un restaurante, su experiencia se ve influida por cuatro elementos sensoriales adicionales presentes en el punto de venta: la vista, el olfato, el oído y el tacto. Estos elementos sensoriales son empleados intencionadamente por las empresas para posicionar y distinguir su marca de la competencia. Este estudio pretende investigar cómo afectan estos componentes sensoriales a las percepciones de calidad de los consumidores, que a su vez influyen en las intenciones de compra. El estudio se centra en una selección de establecimientos de venta de alimentos al por menor reconocidos internacionalmente, con una presencia significativa en todo el mundo, que se han establecido en tres grandes ciudades de Kerala: Kochi, Trivandrum y Kozhikode.

Palabras clave: Reconocimiento Sensorial de Marca; Posesiones de Información Visual; Negocios de Comida Rápida.

INTRODUCTION

Retail businesses worldwide are struggling to keep their businesses afloat because of the threat from their online counterparts and in that the fast-food business is also not an exemption. Restaurants need to create distinctive positioning strategies to set themselves apart from other fast-food brands if they want to survive in a highly competitive climate. Because all the senses can be engaged holistically in a physical retail space, atmospherics can be used as a differentiating factor which can be employed to attract and engage the customers and thereby create unique images in the customer's minds.⁽²⁰⁾ Fast food businesses can tactically manipulate customers' decisions and thought processes by harnessing the five senses of touch, smell, taste, sight, and sound. Sensory elements are widely used by fast food retail brands to create brand awareness and thereby brand familiarity. This study tries to understand the impact of brand awareness which is created through sensory elements on purchase intention in fast food outlets with special reference to the Kerala market.⁽⁵⁸⁾

Literature review

According⁽⁶⁰⁾, store managers will have to look beyond the products and focus on the customer experience as a result of the increased rivalry in all formats of retail operations. Brand⁽¹¹⁾ stated that store atmospherics enhances the pleasurable aspects of in-person retail shopping, fostering extended stays, increased expenditures, and heightened revisit likelihood among customers.⁽³¹⁾ The utilization of all five senses together or in different combinations enables the crafting of lasting customer experiences, contributing to the establishment of brand identity and fostering strong brand recall. Sensory marketing can be a powerful tool for differentiating a company's retail space from competitors. According to research on sensory marketing, there are five main areas where sensory stimuli can be produced and used to sway consumer behaviour. According⁽²²⁾ the five senses are visual (seeing), olfactory (smelling), auditory (hearing), tactile (touching), and gustatory (tasting).

Visual factors

Visual information possesses a remarkable ability to capture an individual's attention effortlessly. In contrast to tactile information, which necessitates active engagement from the customer, visual information is always pervasive and accessible. Elder⁽²⁸⁾ The dominance of visual perception in human cognition is evident, as it accounts for a significant majority, over 90 %, of the information processed daily. This highlights the profound impact that visual stimuli have on our understanding of the world. Numerous studies have been done on how ambient lighting affects people's food choices⁽³⁾. Biswas⁽⁸⁾ Bellizzi⁽⁷⁾ studied the influence of the use of colour in retail environments. The relationship between colour and shopping behaviour was established⁽⁶⁾ in their study. According⁽⁴⁶⁾ Customers may receive different messages or see distinct images from various colour schemes. A shopper's purchase behaviour is influenced by the music playing in the background of the stores. Yalch⁽⁷³⁾, Smith⁽⁶⁵⁾, Doyle⁽²⁴⁾ discovered that even the meaning people give to a font has a similar impact to the meaning they give to the product's name. Exploring the world of visual aesthetic experience has been the focus of the corpus of study that has already been done on the role of visual information on consumer behaviour. Crilly⁽¹⁸⁾; Desmet⁽¹⁹⁾; Creusen⁽¹⁷⁾; Venkatesh⁽⁷²⁾ ; Bloch⁽⁹⁾.

Auditory factors (hearing)

Research has shown that sound can be a powerful tool for communication and can subconsciously influence customers' thoughts and behaviours.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Marketers have successfully used sound to influence consumers' perceptions of their brands, from the enduring jingle of a brand commercial to the unmistakable alert tone of an Apple phone. By using a variety of sounds, businesses have been able to create a distinct auditory identity and influence customer judgments and behaviours. According to these findings, sound can have a major influence on the entire consumer experience and should be carefully taken into account by marketers. According⁽²⁶⁾, the correct music being played directly affects consumer behaviour. Chebat⁽¹⁴⁾ studied the function of ambient music and its significance in consumer purchase. According to ⁽⁷⁴⁾, marketers frequently employ music to give customers a sound experience. The impact of music may be evaluated about type, tempo, and volume. According to⁽⁵¹⁾, the pace of shopping is frequently correlated with the tempo of the music; slower music can result in longer shopping sessions and higher consumption levels, whilst quicker music can heighten energy and boost positive attitudes. The genre of music also has an impact on consumer behaviour, which affects not just perceptions of time and pace but also the products being chosen.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Businesses should choose music that fits the tastes of the target demographic if they want to use it in this way effectively.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Last but not least, the level of the music can influence how long patrons stay in a store, with quieter music resulting in longer stays compared to loud music.⁽⁷⁴⁾ These results imply that music can be strategically used by marketers to affect consumer behaviour and enhance the shopping experience.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Olfactory factors (smell)

The olfactory system, responsible for our sense of smell, is unique in that it operates constantly, even when

we are not aware of it. According to⁽⁴⁹⁾, this system is crucial to human mood because up to 75 % of our emotions are thought to be impacted by smell. Multiple aspects have been noted⁽³⁷⁾ as contributing to the development of a particular olfactory experience. Product congruence, or how well the scent complements the retail item or setting, is one aspect. For example, if a store has a dominant colour theme of yellow, an orange scent might be more congruent than a grape scent. Another factor is intensity, which describes the strength of the scent. Additionally, a scent can be classified as either feminine or masculine. Eatables, drinks, perfumes and even cars are just a few examples of products whose aromas can be used as indicators of customer quality and attribute evaluation.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The scent also plays a big part in these products. Milotic⁽⁵²⁾. The smell in these circumstances may or may not be caused by the product, given that modern technology makes it possible to use synthetic odours. Bosmans⁽¹⁰⁾. When the effects of scents in the retail environment were investigated, it was found that various places with and without scent had different valuations and behavioural patterns. Spangenberg, Crowley⁽⁶⁶⁾. These findings show the benefits of employing smells in the store atmosphere and provide managers in retail and service organisations with suggestions. According to a study conducted by Rockefeller University in New York it is extremely crucial to notice that 35 % of what we smell is remembered by humans. In a different study, ambient smell was found to have a favourable impact on customer behaviour⁽⁵³⁾. It was discovered that ambient smell improved consumer memory and brand recognition while also lengthening the time they spent viewing stimuli.

Tactile factors (touch)

Humans obtain tactile information through touch using their tactile senses. Properties including temperature, vibration, softness, texture, shape, composition, and normal forces can all be perceived as characteristics. MI⁽⁶⁹⁾ In contrast to vision, smell, hearing, and taste, which depend on the presence of a medium between the sensory apparatus and the stimuli, touch involves direct contact with the skin and is frequently described as a close or “proximal” sense⁽⁴⁵⁾. It is asserted that aspects of touch have a major impact on customer judgement, attitudes, and impulse purchase behaviour by a study⁽⁵⁷⁾. Hedonistic touch and utilitarian touch are the two categories of touch. Consumers utilise the utilitarian touch to learn more about a product. Consumers who engage in hedonistic touch do so to explore a product or to produce sensory effects. Touch is a special sense because, unlike other senses, it can only be experienced through direct touch with the skin, the biggest organ in the human body⁽⁴⁵⁾. Elements of touch will influence consumer attitude, judgement, and impulse purchase behaviour, according to ⁽⁵⁷⁾. According to ⁽⁴⁴⁾, the sense of touch can directly influence how a product is rated overall. They demonstrated how consumers’ perceptions of food quality are frequently skewed by the physical characteristics of the serving container. As an illustration, drinking from a thin glass makes buyers think the product is of low quality. According to research ⁽⁴⁷⁾, customers’ perceptions of the food’s naturalness are influenced by how rough the packaging is. In public settings, where a variety of environmental circumstances may potentially have an impact on consumers’ experiences, taste perception is possible ⁽³³⁾. Multiple senses are likely to interact with one another and affect how consumers see things and make decisions⁽⁵⁾. Free samples are one of the best ways to encourage consumer trials and purchases in the food industry, according to⁽⁶²⁾ When touch and visual information are given together, tactile information predominates over visual information, according to research⁽³⁴⁾, Lederman⁽⁴⁸⁾.

Gustative factors (taste)

According to⁽⁴⁾, meals and beverages are the most frequently marketed by gustative means. Because these goods are edible and must be eaten, marketers appeal to consumers’ sense of taste to stand out from the competition. According to⁽⁴²⁾, the taste buds, or peripheral chemosensory organs, are dispersed in the epithelium of the taste protuberances of the palate, epiglottis, tongue, throat and larynx and are responsible for gustatory perception. According to⁽⁵⁹⁾, numerous products, such as toys, infant bottles, pacifiers, cigarettes, and pharmaceuticals, employ flavour as a reliable method of classification. However, there is often relatively limited research on how customers’ preference for fast food restaurants is impacted by gustative marketing strategies. Namkung⁽⁵⁴⁾, Uddin⁽⁷¹⁾, Donkoh⁽²³⁾, Huang⁽³⁶⁾, Samoggia⁽⁶⁴⁾, Nwachukwu⁽⁵⁵⁾. According to⁽¹³⁾, the food business has created laboratories where it explores new trends and creates new tastes for consumers to match consumer expectations. According to⁽⁵⁹⁾, consumers associate the four primary gustatory sensations of sweet, sour, bitter, and salty with the colours red, green, blue, and yellow, respectively. Many food firms use this tactic because consumers frequently equate vivid hues with flavour or good taste.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Free tastings and other sorts of sampling can be used by marketing managers to entice customers, and these kinds of promotional events encourage people to purchase the product after they’ve decided that they like it.⁽⁶¹⁾

Brand awareness

Simply said, brand awareness refers to people’s knowledge and ability to recognise a certain brand or identify it⁽⁴¹⁾. The brand name evokes memories in the minds of consumers. Aaker⁽²⁾ Consumers link the brand

name to the associated brand knowledge, which ultimately results in the development of brand equity^(40,1). Brand awareness, according to⁽¹⁾, may be divided into four categories: Being Unaware, Brand Recognition, Brand Recall, and Top-of-Mind Awareness⁽²⁵⁾ claimed that successful brands are linked to specific elements, such as high-quality products, distinctive qualities, and supplementary values. According to research⁽²⁹⁾, brand recognition among the target market has a significant effect on consumers' cognitive purchasing decisions. According to⁽⁶²⁾, brand awareness refers to customers' ability to distinguish one brand from other brands. Hoyer⁽³⁵⁾ examined the role of brand awareness in customers' decision-making and concluded that it was a very important factor. According to ⁽³⁹⁾, brand awareness is the primary and most important element in any brand-related search and the consumer can identify and remember a brand under various circumstances.

Brand loyalty

Consumer psychology and marketing studies have shown that people's level of satisfaction has a substantial impact on what they buy and their behavioural intentions. Kang⁽³⁸⁾; Brunne⁽¹²⁾. According to⁽⁷⁰⁾, pleased consumers are essential for developing brand loyalty and generating repeat business in the fiercely competitive food sector. Businesses strive to attract and retain customers by providing high-quality food and services. According to⁽⁵⁴⁾, the quality of the cuisine is a significant factor in determining customer satisfaction and repeat business.⁽¹⁵⁾ This suggests that food service providers should concentrate on supplying high-quality meals that live up to their client's expectations.⁽⁴³⁾ By doing this, businesses may build a solid reputation for their company and draw in loyal customers who will buy from them again. According to^(32,16), both concrete and intangible elements are essential for fostering client loyalty in the restaurant sector. This shows that important determinants of patrons' restaurant preferences and loyalty include the variety of food categories offered, the quality of the fare, and the degree of service. Gee⁽³⁰⁾ assert that keeping current clients is a more successful strategy for companies than trying to draw in new clients to make up for lost ones. Saleem⁽⁶³⁾ assert that developing trusting relationships with patrons and offering top-notch service is crucial in the restaurant business. According to⁽²⁷⁾, understanding how patrons choose a restaurant is essential for the restaurant business. This suggests that eateries must recognise and evaluate the elements that affect patrons' decision-making processes, such as the quality of the cuisine, the ambience, the price, the location, and the level of customer service. By doing this, restaurants may attract new customers and keep their current ones by adjusting their menu choices to fit the demands and tastes of their target market.

Problem statement

The goal of this research is to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Do sensory aspects and brand awareness have a connection?
2. Is there a connection between customer purchase intent and brand awareness?
3. Do sensory elements in a store ultimately affect customers' intentions to buy?

Objectives of the Study

The study's objectives are to determine the degree to which brand knowledge influences consumers' intention to make a purchase as well as the effect that sensory components have on brand awareness. Based on this, the following goals were developed:

1. Measuring the impact of sensory marketing techniques in fast food restaurants on brand recognition in Kochi.
2. Determining the connection between brand awareness and intention to buy in Kochi.
3. Examine the relationship between sensory components and consumer propensity to buy.

The Hypothesis of the Study

- H1 - The use of visual elements increases brand awareness.
- H2 - Auditory components have a beneficial effect on brand recognition.
- H3- Gustatory Elements enhance brand awareness.
- H4 - Olfactory components enhance brand recognition.
- H5 - Tactile elements help increase brand recognition.
- H6 - Brand loyalty is positively impacted by brand awareness

METHOD

A cross-sectional survey methodology is used for this study's research design.

Sample

To gather information from patrons of branded retail food establishments selling fast food in Kerala, the study would employ a convenience sample technique. A sample size calculator will be used to establish the

sample size, which is anticipated to be 600 individuals.

Data Collection

A self-administered questionnaire was used to gather information on consumer impressions on sensory components and brand loyalty for branded retail food outlets in Kerala's three largest cities for fast food.⁽³²⁾ To evaluate the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted. The survey will be carried out in person and online. Trivandrum, Kochi, and Kozhikode were three of the major cities in Kerala where respondents for this study were chosen using a multistage sampling technique. 600 questionnaires were distributed in all, 200 in each city. Those who responded were picked based on how frequently they ate at fast food joints. The study examined the effects of endogenous factors like brand awareness and customer loyalty as well as external factors like visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, and tactile aspects.⁽²¹⁾ The study employed an estimated population proportion of 0,5 and a 95 % confidence level with a 5 % margin of error.

Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods will both be used in the data analysis. The characteristics of the sample and a summary of the survey results will be provided using descriptive statistics. The relationship between brand loyalty and brand awareness generated by sensory aspects will be investigated using inferential statistics. The predictors of brand loyalty will be discovered using multiple regression analysis.

Limitations

Since the study will only focus on fast-food patrons of branded retail food outlets in Kerala, it's possible that the findings will not apply to patrons of other fast-food chains or other geographic areas. Additionally, social desirability bias may affect self-reported statistics.

RESULTS

Table 1. Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,917	7

Table 1 shows the reliability is taken for visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, tactile factors, Brand awareness and Brand Loyalty. Cronbach alpha shows ,917, which states that these variables are reliable for further decision-making.

The variables' normality will be tested in the next attempt to choose the type of statistical test that will be used throughout the investigation.

Table 2. Normality test						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Visual	,325	195	,543	,299	195	,439
Auditory	,276	195	,321	,496	195	,277
Gustatory	,218	195	,477	,539	195	,185
Olfactory	,314	195	,219	,719	195	,963
Tactile	,322	195	,987	,553	195	,471
Brand awareness	,283	195	,888	,428	195	,662
Brand loyalty	,274	195	,659	,350	195	,582
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

Table 2 presents the normality table indicates that all the variables included in the study have significance values larger than 0,05, indicating that they are all normally distributed. The researcher is then able to use a parametric test.

Establishing the link between brand loyalty and brand awareness

Ho: BA and BL have no meaningful relationship.

H1: BA and BL have a considerable relationship.

Regression Results with Brand Awareness as,

Table 3. Predictor variable		
Dependent Variable	R square	Sig.
Brand Loyalty	,875	0,03

Table 3 shows the result of predictor Variable, considering that the p values are less than 0,05, H1 is acceptable. This indicates a relationship between BA and BL. Additionally, the R square displays ,875, indicating that the independent variable (BA) accounts for 87,5 % of the variance in the dependent variable (BL). This indicates that BA has a favourable effect on brand loyalty.

Proving the link between visual components and brand awareness

Ho: VE and BA do not significantly relate to one another.

H1: VE and BA have a significant relationship.

Table 4. Regression results with visual elements as predictor variable		
Dependent Variable	R square	Sig.
Brand Awareness	,287	0,04

Table 4 displays the result of regression H1 is approved because the p-values are less than 0,05. This indicates a relationship between VE and BA. The R square also displays ,287, indicating that the independent variable (VE) accounts for 28,7 % of the variation in the dependent variable (BA).

Proving the link between auditory components and brand awareness

Ho: AE and BA do not have a meaningful relationship.

H1: AE and BA have a considerable relationship.

Regression Results with Auditory Elements as,

Table 5. Predictor variable		
Dependent Variable	R square	Sig.
Brand Awareness	,459	0,17

Table 5 presents the result of Predictor Variable, considering that the p values are greater than 0,05, H0 is accepted. This implies that AE and BA are unrelated to one another. Additionally, the R square displays ,459, indicating that the independent variable (VE) accounts for 45,9 % of the variation in the dependent variable (BA). An interpretation of square seems unneeded because there is no relationship.

Establishing a relation between Gustatory Elements with Brand Awareness

Ho: GE and BA do not significantly relate to one another.

H1: GE and BA have a considerable relationship.

Table 6. Regression Results with Gustatory Elements as Predictor Variable		
Dependent Variable	R square	Sig.
Brand Awareness	,693	0,00

Table 6 presents the result of Regression, considering that the p values are less than 0,05, H1 is acceptable. This implies that GE and BA are related to one another. Additionally, the R square displays ,693, indicating that the independent variable (GE) accounts for 69,3 % of the variance in the dependent variable (BA).

Establishing the Relation between Olfactory Elements with Brand Awareness

Ho: The relationship between OE and BA is insignificant.

H1: OE and BA have a significant relationship.

Table 7. Regression Results with Olfactory Elements as Predictor Variable		
Dependent Variable	R square	Sig.
Brand Awareness	,784	0,01

Table 7 presents the result of Regression Results with Olfactory Elements, considering that the p values are less than 0,05, H1 is acceptable. This indicates that OE and BA are related to one another. Additionally, the R square displays ,784, indicating that the independent variable (OE) accounts for 78,4 % of the variance in the dependent variable (BA).

Establishing the relation between Tactile Elements with Brand Awareness

Ho: TE and BA do not have a significant relationship.

H1: TE and BA have a considerable relationship.

Table 8. Regression Results with Tactile Elements as Predictor Variable

Dependent Variable	R square	Sig.
Brand Awareness	,951	0,00

Table 8 shows Regression Results with Tactile Elements as Predictor variable, considering that the p values are less than 0,05, H1 is acceptable. This implies that TE and BA are related to one another. Additionally, the R square displays ,951, indicating that the independent variable (TE) accounts for 95,1 % of the variation in the dependent variable (BA).

SUGGESTIONS

1. According to the study, there is a considerable correlation between brand awareness and brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is increased when brand awareness is generated through sensory aspects, whether on purpose or accidentally. Customers frequently choose to dine at restaurants that they are familiar with and have visited previously.
2. It was discovered that visual elements significantly affected brand recognition. Retail establishments should therefore place a greater emphasis on visual components including design, packaging, style, colour, lighting, theme, graphics, outside, and interiors.
3. Auditory elements had no impact on brand awareness. Although the literature evaluation suggested that sound had an impact on our emotions and psychological well-being, this study demonstrates the opposite. Managers should not disregard this area, either, as a lot of listening is unconscious and customers might remember and link the stores' music and ambient sounds to their memories of them. A constant influence in our lives is sound. Customers actively give it meaning through interpretation, dialogue, and self-expression rather than just passively experiencing it. Previous studies have shown that music can affect customers' conscious and unconscious behaviour, thus it should not be taken for granted.
4. Olfactory components, often known as smell factors, are thought to have a significant impact on brand awareness. Even after a long time, customers could recall fragrance quite efficiently. Companies are becoming more conscious of this issue as they realise how much a customer's living environment affects their sensory experience and overall well-being. The findings unequivocally demonstrate the significance of fragrance perception for consumer experiences, memories, and well-being.
5. The findings made it abundantly evident that gustatory characteristics have a significant impact on brand awareness. One of the most important qualities that will make a lasting impact on customers is the food's flavour. Restaurants should pay close attention to the quality and flavour of the cuisine and use flavour as a differentiator.
6. It has been discovered that touch characteristics significantly affect brand awareness. When other senses are unable to do so, the touch sense can intensify experiences. Touch has a significance that goes beyond simple physical contact and is essential to many facets of human life. Tactile marketing strengthens and improves the one-on-one communication between a business and its clients. Brand awareness is greatly influenced by the materials used, the surfaces' textures, the shapes of the products, and the environment's temperature.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate whether brand awareness created through sensory elements results in brand loyalty among customers of branded retail food outlets in Kerala for fast food. The findings suggest that sensory elements, such as the visual appeal of the brand and the smell of the food, are important in creating brand awareness, which can lead to brand loyalty. The study also discovered that brand loyalty was significantly influenced by the quality of the furniture, the spatial layout, and the food's flavour. Although the study's findings were not significantly influenced by background music and sounds, they do have significance for marketers of branded retail food establishments in Kerala fast food. By understanding the role of sensory elements in creating brand awareness and loyalty, marketers can develop strategies to enhance the customer experience, such as improving the visual appeal of the brand and creating a distinct smell that customers associate with the brand. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of providing high-quality food, service, and value for money, which are essential for building and maintaining brand loyalty.

Overall, the study offers insightful information about the elements that affect brand loyalty in Kerala's fast-food sector. Based on these results, future studies might examine how additional elements, such as social media and marketing communication, affect brand loyalty in this sector.

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FINANCING

None.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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