THE USE OF WEBSITES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR CONSUMER PRODUCTS IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

Today, internet has demonstrated its dominant influence on marketing communication industry. Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, if used properly, could become very powerful PR tools since they enable consumers to swap ideas, post comments, or participate in activities and events while sharing their wider interests online.

This study aims to explore the potential use of social network in Thailand. As Thai consumers are still new to this media, they are in developing stage of adopting digital technology in to their daily life. Therefore, to understand how they interact with new media tools, this study use content analysis method to investigate web contents of popular websites among Thai consumer, namely Google, Facebook, Sanook, Pantip, and Jeban, focusing on five selected new products; 1) Nano-Powder formula detergent, 2) Kaffir lime shampoo for hair loss prevention, 3) Baby powder lotion, 4) Foaming hand wash, and 5) Basic low-priced detergent.

The findings reveal that, Thai consumers tend to search for information regarding their interests on the internet, which they consider as customary medium that provides them greater quantity of information compared to other media sources, as they would begin their search by using search engine, specifically Google.

Another noteworthy result reveals that consumers tend to use internet to search for solutions regarding their aesthetic appearances and minor health issues. Therefore, products with innovative technologies which deliver exact solutions that they need will exude more potential and gain better recognition from consumer online and social networks than mainstream household products.

INTRODUCTION

The number of internet users in Thailand has significantly increased. According to statistics, the estimated number of internet users has escalated from 2.3 millions in 2000 to 13.4 millions in 2009 (http://www.internetworldstats.com/, 2552). In accordance with studied result in 2009 by TNS Research International, the leading market insight consulting enterprise, which revealed rapid growth of internet usage in Thailand due to more open-minded attitude among internet users, especially teenagers, young workforce and workforce groups.

During the early years of internet (Web 1.0), most advertising and PR professionals tended to utilize one-way communication methods to reach their audiences, namely E-Newsletters,

Viral Marketing and E-Blasts. Nonetheless, most of these contents ended up being devalued as "junks" by their recipients. In accordance with Benjarongkij, et al. (2009), who have studied "The use of viral communications through forward mails and the recipients' responses" The finding revealed selective behavior among the majority of e-mail recipients when it comes to apprehending the contents within their e-mails, as they would only read e-mails from known senders. The reason why the recipients ignored other e-mails was because they were too lazy to read and viewed forward mails as personal. Thus since the contents were considered trivial to them, the majority of this sample group would neither read nor forward those emails to other recipients.

Consequently, as Web 2.0 has arrived, social network has begun to fully expand. Knowledge of entrepreneurs and agencies has been developed as online media in "Social Networking" forms. According to a recent report of Association of National Advertisers (2009), 66% of marketers worldwide were using social media to reach their customers in 2009. The top social networking websites these marketers picked were: Facebook (74%), YouTube (65%), Twitter (63%), and LinkedIn (60%). Comparing to the report in 2007, which revealed that only 20% of marketers were using social network, the social network usage among marketers today has grown simultaneously with the expansion of social network itself.

Within this rapidly changing trend of online-world communication, marketers and PR professionals need to accustom themselves to the dynamic environment. Larry Weber (2007) has compared traditional and social network marketing as followed.

1) Traditional marketing emphasizes one-way communication to broadcast brand's information, while social network marketing emphasizes relationship-building conversations to gain recognition and trust in the brand.
2) Brand Equity: Traditional marketing emphasizes brand recognition building, while social network marketing lays emphasis more on how products/services are endorsed by customer-to-customer recommendations.
3) Market Segmentation and Targeting: Traditional marketing emphasizes demographic attributes, while social network marketing emphasizes consumer's behaviors, attitudes and interests.
4) Communication: Traditional marketing emphasizes one-way communication, while social network marketing emphasizes consumer's conversations, recommendations and interchanges of information.
5) Contents: Traditional marketing emphasizes official brand information, while social network marketing emphasizes fusion of both official information and information contributed by members of social network.

Based on the above information, several foreign and domestic business enterprises today (2010) tend to harvest maximum benefits from online social networks. This is because of social network's popularity, as the number of social network users has extensively escalated, today's business enterprises are focusing more on target market penetration. And as consumer behaviors has evolved, the segmentations of target's ages and personal interests are now more precisely classified. Business enterprises can now explore the needs of each customer group and use these data to enhance their products/services launch. They can now communicate with their audience and evaluate their responses more punctually.

Some business enterprises are now using social network as tool to tighten relationship with their customers. Whenever customers have inquiries, the organizations can deliver informative solutions constantly, which is another approach to build strong image for the organizations.

Due to these shifting trends of advertising and public relation, researcher would like to study the efficiency and effectiveness of PR 2.0 media, which causes two-way communication that

generates interaction between organizations and their audiences. The results of this research will be used as a model to develop marketing communication in the future.

OBJECTIVES
1. To study the potential use of social network in Thailand, focusing on five selected new innovative consumer products which are; 1) Nano-Powder formula detergent, 2) Kaffir lime (or Ma-gruud in Thai) shampoo for hair loss prevention, 3) Baby powder lotion, 4) Foaming hand wash, and 5) Basic low-priced detergent.

2. To study the importance, efficiency, effectiveness, strengths and weaknesses, including trends of traditional and social media marketing.

SCOPE OF RESEARCH
In this study, researcher has analyzed the contents using in-depth analysis of Social Media contents from popular websites among target groups, namely Google, Sanook, Pantip, Facebook, Jeban (cosmetic site), Woman.mthai (health), and analysis of Social Media used by product competitors, during six weeks of research period.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS
The findings will be used as fundamental principle to develop communication techniques in online society which will further support marketing, advertising and public relation knowledge as a whole.

RELATED CONCEPTS AND THEORIES
PR 2.0 is the way public relation professionals utilize and deploy internet tools to advance communication techniques in order to reach target audiences faster and more expansively.

Due to two-way communication attribute of Social Media, this leads to holistic exploitation of communication process from data and consumer interest survey, distribution of information, to evaluation of communication results to support and update further studies.

Diffusion of Innovation refers to a launch of new product which is perceived as never-before-seen by the market. This begins among an "Innovator" group, who like to give new product a trial. Since price issue is not the main concern for this group, if new product manages to catch their interests, the news will be spread to other groups quickly. These word-of-mouth recommendations will eventually lead to fad and creation of product imitations to compete in the market. But as soon as the product craze reaches its saturation point, its popularity will decline and be eclipsed once newer products hit the market. This infinite diffusion of innovation is comparable to product life cycle.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
This qualitative research is done by content analysis based on recorded frequency of public relation events of Social Media from popular websites, namely Google, Hi5, Sanook, Hotmail / MSN, Pantip, Kapook, Jeban (Cosmetic site), Women.mthai (Health) etc.

RESEARCH RESULTS
Subject 1: The potential of marketing through new media and Social Network using 5 new selected consumer products

The finding based on content analysis of the marketing potential through Social Network using 5 new selected consumer products, which are Nano-Powder formula detergent, Kaffir lime shampoo for hair loss prevention, baby powder lotion, foaming hand wash, and basic low-priced detergent, reveals varied responses from consumers.

Nano-Powder formula detergent case
Nano-Powder formula detergent is formulated to reduce bacteria-causing odors and leave clothes smelling fresh, even though hanging them out to dry at night takes longer in the absence of sunlight.
The findings reveal that consumers on Social Network have been discussing about "Nano-powder formula detergent" most on website http://topicstock.pantip.com where over 13 messages were found, followed by http://pantip.com/cafe/family/ which two messages were found, while other messages were found on http://twitter.com , http://looktung.net/board/, http://community.momypedia.com/ , http://pantip.com/cafe/home/, http://pantip.com/cafe/wahkor/, with one message found in each site.

After word-by-word analysis of the messages collected from the websites, researcher found that most consumers on Social Network have expressed satisfaction toward "Nano-powder formula detergent" at level 3 ("Providing Information Only" stage) as appeared on http://topicstock.pantip.com with 13 messages.

Basic low-priced detergent case
Basic low-priced detergent is a straight forward, economical detergent, which aim at lower income consumers.
The findings reveal that consumers on Social Network have been discussing about "Basic low-priced detergent" only on http://twitter.com where 3 messages were found.

After word-by-word analysis of the messages collected from the websites, researcher found that most consumers on Social Network have expressed satisfaction toward "Basic low-priced detergent" at level 5 ("Very Satisfied" stage) as shown in 2 messages on http://twitter.com.

Kaffir lime shampoo for hair loss prevention case
Kaffir lime (or Ma-gruud in Thai) is used extensively in Thai cooking. Both the zest and leaves are very useful. Thai people believed the juice is excellent hair rinse to prevent hair from falling out.
The findings reveal that consumers on Social Network have been discussing about "Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo" most on http://www.jeban.com/ where over 31 messages were found, followed by http://topicstock.pantip.com/lumpini where 17 messages were found and http://guymarket.exteen.com/ where 16 messages were found, respectively.

After word-by-word analysis of the messages collected from the websites, researcher found that most consumers on Social Network have expressed satisfaction toward "Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo" at level 5 ("Very Satisfied" stage) as shown in over 23 messages on http://www.jeban.com/

Below are examples of collected messages regarding "Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo":
"I have been using this shampoo continually and my newly-grown hair appears to be darker, thicker and much healthier comparing to my old mousey-brown hair. I can confirm that it actually works. But you must use it continuously and it won't fail you." (From http://www.jeban.com)

"This kaffir lime shampoo is so nice. I've tried it and my hair seems to fall a lot less. Plus it smells great too. Just give it a try!" (From http://dek-d.com/board/)

Baby powder lotion case
The powder in a form of lotion which has 5 benefits: Dust-free, anti-rash, moisturizing, clinically proven, and dermatologist-test.
The findings reveal that consumers on Social Network have been discussing about "Baby powder lotion" most on http://www.pantip.com/cafe/woman where 3 messages were found,

followed by http://talk.mthai.com/ and http://www.pantown.com/ where 2 messages were found, while other messages were found on http://acnethai.com/ http://www.saranair.com http://dek-d.com/, http://www.atriumtech.com/, http://www.horapa.com/, http://www.pantip.com/cafe/family , and http://community.momypedia.com with one message found in each site.

After word-by-word analysis of the messages collected from the websites, researcher found that most consumers on Social Network have expressed satisfaction toward "Baby powder lotion" at level 4 ("Satisfied" stage) as shown in http://www.pantip.com/cafe/woman , http://talk.mthai.com/ and http://www.pantown.com/ with 2 messages found in each site.

Foaming hand wash case
Foaming hand wash dispenses soft, creamy foam with anti-bacteria and antiseptic ingredients when pressed and stays on hand, allowing them to clean all parts of their hands thoroughly. The findings reveal that consumers on Social Network have been discussing about "Foaming hand wash case" most on http://www.pantip.com/cafe/woman and http://www.pantip.com/café/famely   where 2 messages were found in each site, followed by http://www.212cafe.com   http://www.jeban.com   and http://maomao.diaryis.com with one message found in each site.

After word-by-word analysis of the messages collected from the websites, researcher found that most consumers on Social Network have expressed satisfaction toward "Foaming hand wash case" at level 4 ("Satisfied" stage) as showed in http://www.pantip.com/cafe/woman, http://www.pantip.com/café/famely and http://maomao.diaryis.com with one message found in each site.

From statistical number of websites and analysis of all posted messages, the findings reveal that websites related to "Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo" and "Baby powder lotion" had been linked to the most (10 sites), followed by websites related to "Nano-powder formula detergent" (7 sites). While the product that had been discussed about most was "Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo" (87 messages) followed by "Nano-powder formula detergent" (20 messages) and "Baby powder lotion" (14 messages), respectively. (See Figure 1).
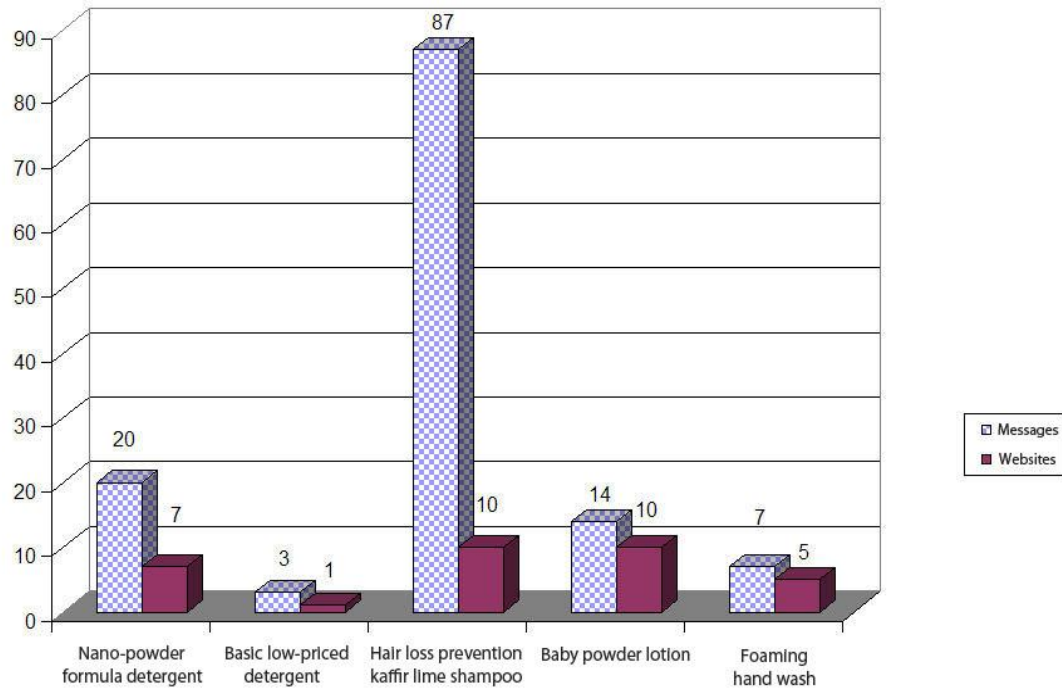
Figure 1: Numbers of websites and numbers of messages discussed about 5 selected products

The outcomes reveal that Thai Social Network consumers have noteworthy attentiveness to find solutions regarding their aesthetic appearances and minor health issues (i.e. hair, respiratory allergy). Therefore, products with innovative technologies that can deliver the exact solutions to these consumers will exude more potential and gain better recognition from consumers online than mainstream household products.

Moreover, this also revealed potential and ideal technique of marketing communication through Social Network which varied among 5 selected products, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Potential of Social Network marketing used in 5 selected products

Products	Potential of PR 2.0	Target Consumers	Media Objectives	Ideal Media	Core Themes
Nano-powder formula detergent	Highly recommended	- Women - Homemakers, College students who do night time laundry. - Level B+,B	1. Aware 2. Search 3.Research 4.Engagement/ Buy	1. Mass Media (TV) 2. Online Media (Facebook, Hi5,WebBlog)	- Emphasis on providing information of innovative technologies
Basic low-priced detergent	Not recommended	- Women - Level C+	1. Aware	1. Mass Media (TV) 2. Online Media (Facebook, Hi5,)	- Emphasis on sharing users' experiences
Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo	Highly recommended	- Men - People over 25 years old - Level B, C+	1. Aware 2.Search 3.Research 4.Engagement/ Buy	1. Mass Media (TV) 2. Online Media (WebBlog)	- Emphasis on providing knowledge and hair-care consultation
Baby powder lotion	Recommended	- Women - Homemakers - Level B+,B	1. Aware 2.Search 3.Research 4.Engagement/ Buy	1. Mass Media (TV) 2. Online Media (WebBlog)	- Emphasis on providing knowledge regarding respiratory healthcare with innovative technologies
Foaming hand wash	Recommended	- Women and Men - Level B+,B	1. Aware 2.Search 3.Research 4.Engagement/ Buy	1. Mass Media (TV) 2. Online Media (Facebook, Hi5,)	- Emphasis on providing information of innovative manufacturing technologies

Subject 2: Importance, efficiency, effectiveness, strengths and weaknesses, including trends of traditional and Social Media marketing

The findings of this research identify Social Media marketing's efficiencies which are:
1. "Low-cost" requirement
When making comparisons between offline media and online media, offline media i.e. television, radio, newspapers require certain budget in order to publish and broadcast information as followed.
        • TV broadcasting during prime-time costs approximately 450,000 baht per minute.
        • Radio broadcasting contract costs approximately 500,000 baht per month.
        • Full-page ad on Thai-Rath newspapers costs approximately 700,000 baht per ad.
Alternatively, online media is much less costly option since companies can create and distribute their own media. The only cost requirement is on human resource.

2. Time and place independence
Social Media marketing is also independent of time and place since products are promoted on websites which offer limitless virtual space. Alternatively, marketers can utilize search engine to optimize website popularity and ranking. Also, company's information online is always accessible to consumers anytime, anywhere with internet.

As for effectiveness of Social Network Marketing, they can be measured from quantitative and qualitative goals.

1. Quantitative goal are the number of Social Media websites where target consumers join, the numbers of "links" or "posts" which target consumers have read or posted their comments. This method remarkably saves advertising and public relation cost, as seen from the results of content analysis which found that websites related to "Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo" and "Baby powder lotion" had been linked to the most (10 sites), followed by websites related to "Nano-powder formula detergent" (7 sites). While the product that had been discussed about most was "Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo" (87 messages) followed by "Nano-powder formula detergent" (20 messages) and "Baby powder lotion" (14 messages), respectively.

2. Qualitative goal considered from the tone of messages posted by consumers within two-ways communication, whether they are positive (like) or negative (dislike) toward the products/services. From compilation of messages that gave reviews on selected products, the findings show that most messages contain positive reviews or recommendations. Especially, for "Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo" which has over 50 messages that expressed satisfaction at level 5 ("Very Satisfied").

All in all, the hype of Social Network in 2010 is still going strong, whether it is Facebook, Hi5 or MySpace, since the undeniable perks of social media are their "Low-cost" and "Time and place independence" attributes, especially for those seeking information or trying to state their opinions in the cyber world.

However, as the real influencers of Social Network are consumers, not the company, the noteworthy constraint for business companies is their inability to fully administer online contents and monitor all the content posters and their agendas.

Evidently, traditional marketing relies more on mainstream media. Public relations and marketing representatives have to publish and broadcast the news through mass media. The contents need emphasis on catchiness to attract and enhance consumers' attitude toward the product/service.

However, as the target consumer groups are classified by demographic attributes such as age, gender, education level, income etc., which do not encourage social group assembly due to its one-way communication business-to-customer manner. This restricts individual to make further interaction with the companies in order to develop sense of belonging to the group Social Network has accordingly become "Alternative Media" to fulfill the gap between companies and consumers, generate interactions, and develop sense of unity. These will lead to mutual trust between companies and consumers that affect consumer purchase decision eventually.

However, business firms should acknowledge their declining authority to control the contents and communication channels online, since Social Network is accessible for everyone to join the conversations, whether it is among individual-to-individual, individual-to-group, group-to-individual, or group-to-group. More participants in conversation signify higher level of success. The gatherings of individuals into particular interest groups online have existed ever since the internet was text-based only. As these groups have expanded their learning and interactive activities, businesses begin to recognize the influences of online-society to individuals hence seize this opportunity to enter the joint influence. Thus, the rule of thumb of internet marketing is; communication from organizations to individuals should generate interactions, not one-sided contents like "Banner on the internet" which lack responsiveness and ability to bond with consumers.

DISCUSSION
The findings of research on media exposure behaviors of PR 2.0 consumers reveal that; Thai consumers today tend to find information of their interests on the internet, which they

consider as customary medium that provides them greater quantity of information compared to other sources, as they would begin their search by using search engine namely Google. From the findings of VentureBeat Digital Media, "Google" is the most popular search engine among internet users, ranked at No. 1 with 61.6% popularity, followed by Yahoo! (20.4%), Microsoft (9.1%), AOL (4.6%), and Ask (4.3%), respectively.

From statistical number of websites and analysis of messages posted by consumers, the findings reveal that websites related to "Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo" and "Baby powder lotion" had been linked to the most, followed by "Nano-powder formula detergent". While the most discussed product was "Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo", followed by "Nano-powder formula detergent", and "Baby powder lotion", respectively. This reflects noteworthy attentiveness of Thai Social Network consumers to find solutions regarding their health issues simultaneously with adopting new technologies. In accordance with the concept of "Diffusion of Innovation" by Katz, Levin and Hamilton regarding adoption of new ideas and methodologies through media or other communication channels by individuals or groups, which levels of adoption, are determined by social structure, cultural system and social norms.

From the findings of collaborative research by OTX and DEI Worldwide, the global popularity of Social Media has driven it to become key information resource for consumers, as most consumers tend to seek product/brand reviews from Social Media websites along with information from official websites of the product/brand manufacture. Statistically, 7 out of 10 consumers seek product/brand information from Social Media websites i.e. webboards, online groups/communities or blogs. Besides, over 49% of these consumers would count on the information from Social Media websites when making their purchase decision. Therefore, it is time for business companies to make serious strategic moves, even if their retails are not online-based, as consumers today constantly have online conversations regarding products and brands before making their next purchase.

As for assessment of effectiveness and achievement of Social Media Marketing strategies, organizations must first acknowledge the infrastructure of Social Media that distribute contents to our society in various ways. It has arisen from basic human needs to interact with others and the needs to see-and-be-seen socially. As diversity of the media expands, it generates various types of statistics, types of media consumer groups, and leads to intuitive selection of media. The results of these interactions are "mutual relationships among conversation participants" which can be enduring or temporary. However, though the end-results may not necessarily produce "financial profit" i.e. expected revenue, these relationships can indirectly bring benefits to the companies since the gathering of people would naturally leads to mass persuasion and generates trustworthy word-of-mouth, which at the end makes ideal marketing scheme.

Therefore, in order to assess effectiveness and achievement of Social Media Marketing strategies, the first thing to be considered is the "Quality" of consumer's attitudes toward products/organizations whether they are positive or negative. Furthermore, organizations should integrate or expand their online channels for consumers to access the data in order to expand their customer bases in the long run.

RECOMMENDATIONS
In terms of marketing
• Marketers and researchers have to develop products that comprise outstanding technological selling point to meet what consumers need at certain time.

In terms of advertising and public relation
• In order to pursue Social Media Marketing scheme, advertising and PR professionals need to know "who" is talking about the company and "where" the conversation is taking place.

Regardless of how small or "niche" the conversation groups are, they can influence and persuade prospective consumers to make purchase decision based on information from Social Network. Therefore, the company must have tools to monitor these conversations specifically "who", "where" and "How" they are talking about the company.

• Advertising and PR professionals have to push company's Social Media ranking to the top 3 on top search engines i.e. Google in order to gain easier access for prospective consumers.

• Advertising and PR professionals need to arrange aggressive strategies to take over the PR spaces online and certify them before competitors or anyone can distribute misleading information. This can be done by purchasing banners on web search or web log where target consumers usually are in order to expand hyperlinks to access company website or weblog.

• Some concerns regarding Social Media Marketing are the clarity of product information and credibility of testimonials provided. Thus, advertising and PR professionals must select the contents carefully i.e. use both static images and videos in product demonstration for ease of understanding and visual appeal, especially for health-related and technological products. (See table 2)

Table 2 Summary of key consumer's concerns and suggested contents for Social Network marketing communication of 5 selected products.

Products	Key Consumer's Concerns	Suggested Contents
Nano-powder formula detergent	- Product properties - Testimonials from real consumers	- Emphasis on providing information of innovative technologies - General care
Basic low-priced detergent	- Product details - Product quality	- Emphasis on sharing users' experiences - General care
Hair loss prevention kaffir lime shampoo	- Effectiveness of the product (before-after use) - Causes, symptoms and solutions for hair-loss problem - Product ingredients - Testimonials from public figure consumers - Price and product range	- Emphasis on providing knowledge and hair-care consultation - Personal care
Baby powder lotion	- Effectiveness of the product after use - Product ingredients - Long-lasting fragrance - Testimonials from real consumers - Trail product giveaway	- Emphasis on providing knowledge regarding respiratory healthcare with innovative technologies - Personal care
Foaming hand wash	- Product ingredients - Product safety - Product use - Manufacturing technology - Testimonials from real consumers	- Emphasis on providing information of innovative manufacturing technologies - General care

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