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COMMUNICATING WITH RESIDENTS OF HOST DESTINATIONS:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF A DISPERSED MEGA-EVENT

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ABSTRACT
In 2006, the Commonwealth Games were hosted by the State of Victoria, Australia. This study examined the efficacy of the communication channels that were used to disseminate information to residents in three regions across Victoria about the community events that were associated with the 2006 Commonwealth Games (Games, hereafter). It also explored residents' preferred communication channels regarding community events in each of the regions. The Games were a "dispersed mega-event". That is, while they were largely staged in the City of Melbourne, parts of them were dispersed to other areas of the State of Victoria. While this is a newer model of event delivery, it is one that has been taken up quite well in the context of mega-events. The dispersed mega-event, however, raises challenges for event organisers and marketers including how to communicate with larger and more diverse communities than what might be the case of a single-location event. Focus groups were conducted with residents in three host destinations. Results suggested that traditional methods of disseminating event information were ineffective. Participants in this study reported a preference for (passively) receiving information about events in their respective communities through existing infrastructure and social networks. They reported a desire to receive information in places that are sympathetic with their lifestyles—such as at sport clubs, on public transport, at schools and childcare facilities, and at supermarkets. However, there were differences in the perceived efficacy of some of these methods among the destinations. Implications for practitioners are discussed, as well as implications for further research.

Keywords: mega-event, dispersed, marketing, Commonwealth Games

INTRODUCTION
Special events, including mega-events, have a range of social outcomes for the residents of their host destinations. These can be positive (e.g., generating patriotism (Waitt, 2003) and negative (e.g., housing evictions (Olds, 1998); increased levels of crime in host destinations (Barker, Page, & Meyer, 2002)). As such, there is increasing recognition by governments around the globe, that special events have the potential to mobilise social policy within host communities (Chalip, 2006). The analysis of “mobilisation strategies” through leverage analysis, is however nascent, and gaps in knowledge about this aspect of event management remain. In leverage analysis, the event outcomes themselves are not important in-and-of themselves (as they are in impact research), but are instead pertinent to the degree it provides information about which particular implementation strategies and tactics have been effective.
McCartney (2006) argued that in order for mega-events to generate positive benefits for the residents of their host destinations, residents need to actively participate in them. This is a challenge; the 20th century has seen the rise of the mega-event as a spectacle for gazing upon. Rothenbuhler (1988) noted that the Olympic Games, for example, are mostly enjoyed as social experiences, many of which are enjoyed in, what has become the centre of the home, the lounge room – almost always equipped with a television upon which to gaze. Indeed, audiences of the telecasts of the Olympic Games, for example, have steadily increased since television was first launched in the late 1930's, and have particularly grown in the past decade (Chalip, Green, & Hill, 2003). In the case of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, for example, 'nine out of every ten individuals on the planet over the age of four with access to television watched some part of the Games' (IOC, 2001). Hence, participation in events, particularly mega-events, has most often become passive rather than active, and live.

Various models of consumer behaviour highlight the need to create awareness of products or services on offer before consumption can eventuate. Smith (2006) noted that multiple channels are available to event organisers for the distribution of information about events, including print and broadcast media, direct mail, internet, travel providers, and word-of-mouth. If inappropriate channels are employed for the dissemination of information about events, it makes sense that less than ideal levels of awareness, and resulting participation, may result. Accordingly, participation in events will likely be less than ideal. The use, and the role, of marketing communications in enhancing residents' awareness of events is, therefore, paramount in leveraging the social outcomes of events for residents of host destinations.

Research questions driving this study were: How can event managers and marketers communicate with residents of host destinations to promote participation in mega-events? Do residents need to be communicated with differently than what is currently the case to promote participation in mega-events? These research questions are explored within the context of 2006 Commonwealth Games (Games), which were hosted by the State of Victoria, Australia. The paper has two key aims. First, the paper aims to examine the efficacy of the distribution channels that were used to disseminate information to residents about the community events that were associated with the Games. Second, the paper aims to identify residents' preferred methods of communication regarding community events so that their participation in future mega-events is enhanced.

The study compliments an existing line of inquiry that has been useful in understanding the types of information that are used by event attendees when they make decisions to attend events, and how frequently that information is used. Previous research in this area has shed light on the ways in which event-related information is distributed to event tourists (Hall, O'Sullivan, & O'Sullivan, 2003; Pearce, Tan, & Schott, 2004; Shanka & Taylor, 2004; Smith, 2006), and to residents of host destinations (Gitelson and Kerstetter, 2000). Previous studies have noted the utility of traditional methods of communication for event tourists (Pearce et al., 2004; Smith, 2006), such as print and broadcast media and the internet. Gitelson and Kerstetter (2000), for example, found that 70% of residents of one host destination relied on personal experience to guide their decision-making regarding event attendance. Smith (2006) found that the Internet is not readily used for decision-making in relation to event attendance.

Despite these contributions to knowledge, little information has been gained as to why different sources of information are used by event attendees. Moreover, little information has been gained about event attendees who are also residents of the host destination. This study specifically focuses on residents of a host destination. It was thought that an investigation with this focus would inform event managers and marketers as to how they can effectively inform host destination residents about events in their local communities.
Furthermore, the 2006 Commonwealth Games were a “dispersed mega-event”. That is, while the Games were largely staged in the City of Melbourne, parts of them were dispersed to other areas of the State of Victoria. This is a newer model of event delivery and one which appears to have been readily adopted within the context of mega-events (see, for example, the 2006 World Cup Soccer and Fanfest which was delivered in 12 German destinations). This model of event delivery has potential to address some of the challenges associated with large-scale events, such as crowding and limitations of stadia capacity. The dispersed mega-event, however, raises other challenges for event organisers and marketers, including how to communicate with larger and more diverse communities than what might be the case of a single-location event. Very little research has been undertaken on the dispersed mega-event. Thus, this study initiates a new line of inquiry in event research.

The paper continues by providing some background to the Games was the basis of the case study analysis. The method employed for this study is then described, the results and a discussion of them presented, and conclusions are then made based on the information that was gained from this study. Recommendations are made for further research on this topic. Limitations of the study are also acknowledged.

THE 2006 COMMONWEALTH GAMES
The Commonwealth Games are staged every four years in British Commonwealth destinations. The Victorian State Government secured the 2006 Commonwealth Games in 1999 through a bid process, and in 2002, established:

- the Office of Commonwealth Games Coordination (OCGC) to manage all bodies relating to the Games,
- M2006 as the organisation to deliver the Games.

While M2006 was focussed on event logistics, the OCGC’s role focused on policy development and its implementation (OCGC, 2006). The OCGC’s policy agenda was aimed at ensuring that all Victorians, not only Melburnians, were provided with opportunities to participate in the Games. As such much of the program was hosted by the City of Melbourne (the Central Business District (CBD) municipality), however, some of the program (athletic and non-athletic) was hosted in regional Victoria, including Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong. The Games were held in March 2006.

*Equal First* was the over-arching social policy developed by the OCGC for the purpose of enhancing participation in the community events associated with the Games, particularly of Victorian communities, and beyond into Commonwealth countries. The policy documentation stated that the Games would be “…remembered as a celebration of diversity within Victorian communities and across the Commonwealth. People of all cultures, ages and abilities will feel welcome to attend Games events and participate in related activities” (OCGC, 2004a, p.2). The policy document included five key themes: communicating for diversity; accessible events; inclusive employment, training and volunteering opportunities; connecting and celebrating our cultures; and active and inclusive communities. As such, the Victorian State Government used the Games as an impetus to develop and implement social policies related to community social engagement, accessibility, and inclusion, not only for the City of Melbourne, but also for local communities throughout the State of Victoria (Kellett, Hede, & Chalip, 2006). One of the unique features of the Games was that events were delivered in regional areas, as well as in the City of Melbourne, to encourage State-wide participation in the Games and its related activities. Importantly, festival-like events were staged in each of the regional areas, delivered by the local
municipalities under the auspice of *Equal First*, to leverage the social outcomes of the Games. This study focuses specifically on these events, rather than the athletic competitions.

**METHOD**

The aims of this paper were to examine how effective the deployed communication channels were at disseminating information to residents about the community events associated with the Games; and to identify residents’ preferred methods of communication regarding community events. Given the exploratory nature of this topic, a qualitative approach was adopted. Information is provided about the research setting and the data collection methods used for this study.

**RESEARCH SETTING**

Three Victorian regions were examined in this study, namely City of Port Phillip (CPP), the City of Greater Geelong (CGG) and the City of Greater Bendigo (CGB). These three regions were chosen as they represented a cross-section of Victorian regions that hosted both official athletic events and non-athletic events (i.e. community events). A brief socio-demographic profile of each of the regions is provided.

The CPP is an inner metropolitan city located on Port Phillip Bay, within five kilometres of Melbourne’s CBD, covering approximately 20.6 square kilometres. Almost three-quarters of the residents live in units/apartments or semi-detached dwellings; and almost half of the residents live alone (City of Port Phillip, 2003). Nearly half of the one person householders are aged between 25 and 44 years. Due to its inner city location and availability of public transport options, almost 30% of the residents travel to work by public transport, although 67% of households have a motor vehicle (City of Port Phillip, 2003 p. 58).

The CPP is one of the most active metropolitan destinations for events in the State of Victoria outside the City of Melbourne. The CPP is host to the Australian Grand Prix, and a variety of cultural, art, and sporting events throughout the year. During the 2006 Commonwealth Games, the CPP hosted the triathlon event, and was part of the route for the road cycling and marathon events. The CPP also hosted a range of community events during the Commonwealth Games that were unique to the region including sand sculpting, beach markets and—all centred around a big screen “LiveSite”.

The CGG is located on Port Phillip Bay approximately 70kms west of Melbourne’s CBD, covering an area of 1250 square kilometres. The majority (76%) of the residents live in separate houses (as opposed to units or apartments). Nearly half of the residents are couples with children (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002). The CGG, a provincial destination, is developing its events profile as it is securing number international events to expand its event portfolio. During the Games, the CGG hosted the basketball heats. The CGG also hosted a LiveSite and associated event and festival activities during the Games including theatre performances, music and live acts.

The CGB is an inland regional city located approximately 150kms North West of Melbourne’s CBD covering almost 3000 square kilometres. The majority (87%) of the residents live in separate houses, and 45% of the residents are couples with children. Further, 91% of households in CGB have at least one car (id, 2007). The CGB hosts a variety of festivals and events throughout the calendar year. The CGB is hosts a number of events which are targeted to appeal regional constituents. During the 2006 Commonwealth Games, the CGB hosted shooting events, and some basketball heats. The CGB also hosted a LiveSite and associated unique festival activities including an art exhibition of local artists work.

**DATA COLLECTION METHODS**
Focus groups were conducted in each of the research sites during November 2006. The focus groups consisted of 8 or 10 participants. Event attendance was not a criterion for participation in the focus groups, but half of the participants in each focus group had attended specific Commonwealth Games related events in their community. The sampling frame was designed to ensure that the gender, age and socio-demographic profiles of the focus groups were similar to that of their respective municipalities.

A standardised interview protocol was used to ensure comparability between each of the focus groups. The focus groups were divided into two parts. In the first part, participants were shown a series of official marketing collateral about the community events that was distributed in their respective municipalities in the lead up to and during the Games. The marketing collateral, which included flyers, programs of events and activities, brochures, and letterbox drop postcards and collected by the researchers before and during the Games, were used to prompt participants given that the focus groups were undertaken six months out from the event. Participants were then asked to describe how they obtained information about community events associated with the Games when they were held in their local communities earlier in that year.

For the second part of the focus group, participants were asked to assume that they were part of the local council which was planning to stage community events and activities in their local region associated with a large-scale event that attracts international media attention. The marketing collateral for the forthcoming 2007 12th FINA World Championships was distributed to the focus group participants to prompt them to consider the material and devise a strategy for their preferred methods of the dissemination of information about the event in their region. It was suggested to participants that the 12th FINA World Championships would be a dispersed event, similar to the Games.

All focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Co-authors used NVivo software to organise the data into initial coding categories and codes were revised until saturation eventuated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss, 1987). Coding categories were verified using the check-coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994) between the researchers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The data highlighted the efficacy of the methods that were employed to disseminate information to local residents about the community events associated with the Games. It also shed light on the ways in which residents prefer to gain information about events that might be staged in their local communities.

The efficacy of traditional communication methods
It seems that a traditional portfolio of communication methods, which was used to disseminate information (e.g., flyers, programs of events and activities, local newspaper advertising, brochures, and letterbox drops, postcards) across the regions, was not very effective in reaching those residents that participated in the focus groups. The key reason for these methods not being successful was because the approach did not accommodate the differences in the regions with regard to their socio-demographic and lifestyle profiles.

For example in the CPP, where there is a large proportion of residents who live alone in apartments and semi-detached housing, the focus group discussion indicated the local newspaper was ineffective in reaching participants. For example, one participant noted that even if the local newspaper did include information about the Games, she would not have received it because of the type of dwelling in which she lives. She stated “...Normally I would never know [about community events] because we don’t get the local paper delivered to our apartment building”. The local newspaper is not delivered to individual units in large apartment blocks in
the CPP. In many instances the newspapers are not collected by residents, but left as litter in the mailbox areas.

In contrast, in both the CGB and the CGG, where the majority of residents live in detached houses, local newspapers were seen as an important source of information regarding events in the community. For example, one participant from CGB said "...I've seen in the paper loads of times [information about community events]... there is a lot of that". A participant from CGG had a similar perspective "...I just use the local paper and see what is on in there". Focus group participants from the CGG and the CGB indicated that the local newspaper was central to increasing their awareness of events to be held in their communities. In regional areas such as CGB and CGG, it is likely that there is a greater reliance on local newspapers, as there are fewer alternatives in which to disseminate information about the local community and local events.

Another traditional source of information that is often used by event organisers for dissemination of information is radio. Participants in CPP did not mention that they sourced information about the event via the radio. This is perhaps not surprising given that while there is community radio in Melbourne, it services the entire Melbourne community (nearing 4 million in population) and has a geographic reach of the entire metropolitan area. In contrast, focus group participants in the CGB and the CGG reported a reliance on local radio stations for information about events in their communities. For example, one participant from CGG stated "the [local radio station] is very good. If you listen to the radio for an hour, you hear something". The CGB and the CGG each have their own community radio stations which are dedicated to providing a comprehensive coverage of news and events that are tailored to their respective communities and the needs of their residents, unlike in the CPP.

It is perhaps more difficult to effectively tailor and deliver community information to residents in a metropolitan municipality (such as the CPP) in the context of a large city. However, in the context of the Games, the CPP delivered brochures via letter box drops to its residents. Participants of this study from the CPP indicated that the collateral that was generated by the local council was not congruent with their planning timeframes. Further, they felt that that the information in the collateral was ill-timed in relation to the staging of the Games. One CPP focus group participant explained: "I think the council actually sent out beforehand, a leaflet... all to do with road closures [around the event] and so on. It is too much information at that time...". Another participant described her experience of receiving CPP community event promotional material for the Games: "I remember getting information and going 'I can't even look at that'. Participants evidently experienced a feeling of being overloaded with information that arrived in their letter boxes, rather than (as the council had most likely intended) a feeling of being informed of community events.

Prior to and during the Games, each of the three municipalities provided information about the activities that they would be hosting during the Games. The CGB and the CGG participants did not mention that they accessed information about the Games-related events in their communities, or events in general. While the CPP Council provides a detailed calendar of events for the community on its website, participants in that focus group indicated that they did not think of it as an appropriate distribution channel for event-related information. One participant explained "...We all know that this website [council website] exists... I wouldn't look at the website unless I needed to find out a phone number". Other members of the focus group agreed with this comment. Hence, the CPP's web-based information seems to have had limited use for participants of this focus group.

Residents preferred methods of event communication
In the second part of the focus group discussions, participants were asked to indicate how they would prefer to gain information about events that might be hosted in their local communities.
The analysis of the focus group data indicated that participants in all three regions prefer to be passive (i.e. information-receiving) rather than active (i.e. information-seeking) in terms of how they gain information about events in their local communities. Noticeably, participants in each of the three focus groups agreed that they wanted to receive information about events during the course of their normal routines. Participants identified that marketers of events could better use the existing infrastructure in their municipalities than what is currently the case. Furthermore, participants did not want to be inundated with detailed information about events in advance. One participant noted “they [the council] don’t need to give you a big blurb--they could just say “between such and such, the following events are on...”.

Yet, the analysis of the data highlighted that there were differences between the regions as to how their access to event-related information might be operationalised. For example, in the CPP focus group participants indicated that they would prefer to access information about events while travelling on public transport (e.g. posters), that is, in their daily routines. One participant said “You know, the old trams used to have a notice board of some sort on them. Perhaps only the trams that run through the local area might have a notice board that could be utilised [to advertise local events]”. Another CPP participant suggested that she would prefer to receive information from her local council with her rates notices (which are distributed quarterly). She explained “when you receive your rates, you could receive a “what’s on” in the next three or four months. I mean they’ve got to organise it in advance...”. Another resident from CPP said that he would like to receive event-related information from the building management groups (such as body corporates, leasing and rental agencies) for the apartment building in which he lived. This was looked upon favourably by other participants of the focus groups: “...That [body corporate notice board] sounds like a great idea. We don’t have anything like that”. Given the high proportion of residents who are not rate payers, but tenants in the CPP, this strategy would seem to be an effective means of communicating with a large number of residents in the municipality.

Similarly, the CGB and CGG focus group participants also suggested that existing community infrastructure could be utilised that would enable them to receive event-related information, rather than have them seek information out. For example, one participant from the CGG explained how existing in-store radio could be used to reach residents: “What about in the supermarkets? You know how they have they radio going and they are always telling you about how red hot [the supermarket chain] is? Everyone goes to the supermarket at least once a week...it should be on their in-store radio”. One participant from the CGB mentioned that noticeboards at supermarkets could be utilised more effectively. Participants from both regions mentioned using school newsletters to inform families about upcoming events, and noticeboards at child care centres and sport clubs and venues where their children attended. It was thought that if information were made available at these venues, residents would ultimately have more knowledge about events in their communities.

The focus group data from the CGG and CGB highlighted the ways in which residents could effectively be reached during their routine activities—such as shopping and taking children to activities. Underpinning their desire to be alerted to information at these locations was also the recognition that they could be reached through the people within their local interest groups. Participants in both CGG and CGB noted that word-of-mouth could be more effectively used to inform them of upcoming events. For example, one participant from the CGG identified mothers as an important group within the community that assist to dissemination about events. For example she said “I think word-of-mouth [is important] because I hear about most of the things through other mums”. Another participant noted that she often finds out about events through her children. She explained “You hear about [events] at the kids’ schools”. Another participant noted that he finds out about activities through word-of-mouth at other events.
Focus group participants in the CGB perceived local swimming pools and swimming clubs to be a central focus if promotions were to be effective in reaching them (acknowledged this may be a function of the event which was used to probe participants). One participant explained “you could incorporate it [event information about a swimming championship such as FINA] with the swimming clubs in Bendigo”. Focus group participants in CGB were also mindful that different community groups might have different needs from an aquatic event. One participant explained “maybe we could look at, instead of trying to get everyone to one function [like one swimming event] we need to split it up into smaller groups...like elderly, 0-5 year olds, families with kids from 0 – 15 years old”. Discussion continued amongst the group to identify different swimming themed events that could be held in the community that could be promoted to the various target markets that the group had identified. Participants concluded this discussion by agreeing that to reach the various user-groups effectively a variety of existing community networks would need to be employed.

CONCLUSION

Research questions driving this study were: How can event managers and marketers communicate with residents of host destinations to promote participation in mega-events? Do residents need to be communicated with differently than what is currently the case to promote participation in mega-events? The overall objective of this study was to gain information as to how the social outcomes of mega-events can be leveraged for the residents of their host destinations through increased participation. This study focused on the methods employed for the dissemination of information related to a dispersed mega-event, as it was thought that this was a key factor in raising awareness of the event and thus community participation in the event. While analysis of a mega-event has inherent case study limitations and the focus group technique does not generate data that is generalisable, the information derived from this study is elucidatory and gives rise to the need for further research on the topic.

There are three major findings from this study. First, the dispersed mega-event provides a challenge for event organisers in terms of coordination and control, particularly in reference to branding and the communication of event-related information. Centralised budgets and marketing strategies often require that marketing collateral is generated via “official” mega-event staffed headquarters. While centralised marketing communication strategies might be useful in distributing their cost across a large region, their use is unable to adequately account for, and respond to, diversity – which event organisers needed to better acknowledge to enhance the effectiveness of event-related information and thus event participation. The study highlighted the need to accommodate the socio-demographic differences between the main and satellite host destinations, even when a central marketing communication strategy is adopted. A dispersed mega-event such, as the Games or potentially the 12th FINA World Championships, requires that event promotions and advertising material is standardised across regions, yet that it be customised for participating satellite regions. Importantly, if this study had of included more than three municipalities, even further diversity would have likely been identified, thus accentuating the importance of this conclusion.

Second, this study highlighted that residents within the host satellite destinations prefer to receive information about events passively. They indicated their preference to information-receiving rather than information-seeking behaviours are information. Participants in this study were critical of current methods of communication used by event organisers (including print and broadcast media and broadcast, and the Internet, which is generally viewed as a valuable source of information dissemination for event organisers in the past). They demonstrated a preference for being contacted in more efficient ways and more succinctly (to reduce “information overload” and clutter) than they currently perceive to be the case. In all three regions the research participants noted that they would be more conducive to event advertising and attendance if they are exposed to event information at a time, and in a place, that is congruent
with their lifestyles. The qualitative methods used in this study elucidate some important considerations that implicate the use of much more creative (and in some cases perhaps more cost efficient) methods of communication with local residents where they can passively access information.

Finally, participants of this study noted the under-utilisation of existing community infrastructure (e.g. sport clubs, schools, public transport, notice boards in their apartment buildings, notices received with council rates, and supermarkets) and social networks. From a practical perspective, this implicates the necessity for partnerships between event organisers, community groups, and community organisations—which is consistent with many of the recently developed social policy outcomes established by event organisers (Chalip, 2006; Kellett et al., 2006). The current study suggests that engaging residents is a task that requires local knowledge and understanding of target markets—so that communication regarding events in communities can reach target markets in the most efficient manner possible for both residents and event organisers.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The dispersed mega-event is one that appears to be gaining support from the public and private sectors. Yet, little is known about the management, marketing and outcomes of such an event, particularly with regard to the ways in which their benefits can be leveraged for the residents of their host destinations. It is timely that event research is re-launched in the new and more complex domain of the dispersed mega-event.

This study explored one aspect of such an event, the distribution of marketing information, to better understand how resident participation in a dispersed mega-event can be increased to enhance its social outcomes for residents. Importantly, the results of this study highlight the need for a balance between centralised marketing strategies for an entire mega-event destination and tailored marketing tactics for satellite host destinations. Further research is required to understand how this can be operationalised effectively. Thus, further analysis of the dispersed mega-event event—associated strategies, the tactics and the outcomes—is required to ensure that their benefits are enhanced for their residents, who are often disadvantaged because of the fact that they are residents of the host destination(s).

The study suggests that residents are passive (i.e. information-receiving) rather than active (i.e. information-seeking) when accessing information about events. Indeed, their approach to accessing information about events seems to reflect the fact that attendance at events for residents is a leisure experience. In this instance, gaining information about events should be part of leisurely experience. Do marketers design communication strategies that reflect the leisurely nature of event attendance? Are they making access to information onerous? It would be useful to undertake research that explores this notion. It is possible that instead of marketing the event as a product, further research is warranted to understand how events can be marketed to residents as leisure experiences, and as services marketing literature would suggest, to understand how residents can receive information about events at time and places that will match the event experiences they are seeking. More research needs to understand the passive and active nature of information-seeking behaviour regarding events so that we can further infiltrate consumer groups.

Finally, this paper has suggested that existing community infrastructure and social networks can leverage participation in mega-events. Although this is not new information, it does point to different ways in which researchers and event organisers must tap into existing information from market research agencies and local governments. Many of the challenges that this paper has presented for communicating with local residents can be overcome by taking advantage of data and information that is already available.
The current exploratory study has extended the event communication literature by providing an understanding of why residents of event host destinations use various sources of information, and how they use them. Further, it has provided useful information regarding resident preferences for obtaining and receiving information about an event in their communities. The opportunities for research on this topic are broad, particularly in light of the embryonic nature of the dispersed mega-event.

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