

Exposure to Korean Pop Culture (K-Pop) And Tiktok Usage on The Shift in Cultural Preferences (Drama and Music) Among Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

The development of social media has accelerated the spread of global culture, including Korean pop culture (K-Pop), among Generation Z. However, research on exposure to K-Pop culture and the use of TikTok on changes in Generation Z's cultural preferences in Medan City is still limited. This study aims to analyze the use of TikTok and exposure to K-Pop culture on changes in Generation Z's cultural preferences in Medan City. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach with a sample of 10 Generation Z informants aged 17–25 years selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation using interview guidelines, observation sheets, and research documentation. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, narrative presentation, and conclusions. The results show that TikTok, through its For You Page (FYP) feature, increases exposure to K-Pop, thereby influencing Generation Z's preferences for Korean dramas, music, and culture. The implications of this study demonstrate the importance of utilizing digital media in introducing local culture to maintain Generation Z's interest.

Keywords: TikTok, K-Pop, Generation Z, Culture, social media

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan media sosial telah mempercepat penyebaran budaya global, termasuk budaya pop Korea (K-Pop) di kalangan Generasi Z. Namun, penelitian mengenai paparan budaya K-Pop dan penggunaan TikTok terhadap pergeseran preferensi budaya Generasi Z di Kota Medan masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis penggunaan TikTok dan paparan budaya K-Pop terhadap pergeseran preferensi budaya Generasi Z di Kota Medan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan sampel 10 informan Generasi Z usia 17–25 tahun yang dipilih menggunakan purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi dengan instrumen pedoman wawancara, lembar observasi, dan dokumentasi penelitian. Analisis data dilakukan melalui reduksi data, penyajian narasi, dan penarikan Kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa TikTok melalui fitur For You Page (FYP) meningkatkan paparan K-Pop sehingga memengaruhi preferensi Generasi Z terhadap drama, musik, dan budaya Korea. Implikasi penelitian menunjukkan pentingnya pemanfaatan media digital dalam memperkenalkan budaya lokal agar tetap diminati Generasi Z.

Kata kunci: TikTok, K-Pop, Generasi Z, Budaya, Media Sosial

A. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology and globalization has brought significant changes to people's lives, especially for Generation Z, who grew up in the era of the internet and social media. Generation Z is a group with a high level of digital media usage, making them more likely to accept various information and global cultures that develop through the internet (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). One prominent phenomenon is the increasing popularity of Korean pop culture (K-Pop), both through music and dramas. The spread of this culture has become faster through social media, particularly TikTok, which can reach users widely and instantly (Sirait, 2025). TikTok has an algorithm system centered on the *For You Page* (FYP) feature, allowing users to receive content tailored to their interests and activities (Tumangger & Munthe, 2025).

The impact of technological and social media development can be seen in the increasing use of TikTok among Generation Z (Firamadhina & Krisnani, 2020). In Medan City, Generation Z uses TikTok as their primary source of daily entertainment. Various contents such as dance challenges, Korean drama clips, and K-Pop music frequently appear on the main page (*For You Page/FYP*), making users increasingly familiar with Korean culture. This continuous exposure has made K-Pop not only a form of entertainment but also a part of their lifestyle (Rusdi & Alwi, 2025).

This phenomenon indicates a shift in cultural consumption patterns. Generation Z no longer only enjoys local culture but has also started shifting toward global cultures such as K-Pop. This shift is influenced by several factors, including social media, peer environments, visual attractiveness, and content quality (Inovasi & Ips, 2025). TikTok's algorithm system, which displays content according to users' preferences, also enables repeated exposure to certain cultures (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022).

Previous studies support this phenomenon. (Elma & Pane, 2025) stated that K-Pop has rapidly developed through digital media. (Kristina et al., 2024) explained that TikTok's algorithm plays a major role in shaping user preferences. (Hariri et al., 2021) argued that digital culture can shape the social identity of young people, sementara (Astuti et al., 2025) emphasized that globalization allows foreign cultures to influence local cultures. Other studies also show that social media recommendation systems can increase users' exposure intensity to specific content, thereby influencing user behavior and preferences (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). Previous studies, however, have focused more on TikTok usage or the development of K-Pop separately, making studies on the influence of TikTok usage and K-Pop exposure on the shift in cultural preferences among Generation Z still limited.

Based on these considerations, there is still a research gap regarding the influence of Korean pop culture (K-Pop) exposure and TikTok usage on the shift in cultural preferences among Generation Z. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in combining two aspects, namely TikTok usage and K-Pop cultural exposure, in examining the shift in cultural preferences of Generation Z in terms of dramas and music, particularly in Medan City, where studies are still limited and require further investigation.

Based on these considerations, this study formulates three main focuses: the driving factors of TikTok usage, the development of K-Pop popularity, and the shift in

Generation Z cultural preferences toward K-Pop (dramas and music). The findings show that TikTok is used intensively (1–4 hours per day) due to entertainment purposes, algorithms, and social influences. K-Pop has become increasingly popular because it frequently appears on TikTok, and a shift in cultural preferences from local culture to Korean culture has occurred, influenced by media exposure, visual attractiveness, content quality, storylines, and peer environments.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to understand the phenomenon of K-Pop cultural exposure and TikTok usage on the shift in cultural preferences among Generation Z in Medan City without using statistical analysis. According to (Sugiyono, 2023), (Sarmini, 2023) dan (Lexi J. Moleong, 2024), qualitative research aims to understand the meanings, behaviors, and experiences of individuals through interview data and direct interactions.

The population in this study consisted of Generation Z in Medan City aged between 17–25 years. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting informants based on specific criteria, such as actively using TikTok and having been exposed to K-Pop content (Prameswari, 2024). The number of informants in this study was 10 Generation Z participants who met the research criteria.

Data collection techniques were carried out through semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in-depth to obtain information related to TikTok usage and the cultural preferences of the informants. Observations focused on TikTok usage activities, particularly on the *For You Page* (FYP), while documentation was conducted through field notes and screenshots of relevant content (Asgar et al., 2025).

The research instruments used included interview guidelines, observation sheets, recording devices, and research documentation. The research data consisted of primary data obtained directly from informants and secondary data obtained from books, journals, and scientific articles as supporting research theories.

Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, narrative presentation, and drawing conclusions by identifying patterns and relating them to previous theories. Data validity was maintained through source and technique triangulation. This approach was supported by (Norma et al., 2025) who stated that descriptive research aims to describe social realities and identify patterns in the lives of young generations

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on the results of the study conducted on 10 Generation Z informants in Medan City, it was found that TikTok has become the most dominant social media platform used in daily life. Almost all informants accessed TikTok every day, with usage durations ranging from one to four hours. The activities carried out were not limited to watching

content but also included interactions through features such as likes, comments, and content sharing. This indicates that TikTok functions not only as a medium of entertainment but also as an active digital interaction space.

Driving Factors of TikTok Usage Growth Among Generation Z in Medan City

Based on the results of interviews and direct observations, it was found that TikTok has become the most dominant social media platform used by Generation Z in Medan City. Informants actively used TikTok in their daily lives, with usage durations ranging from one to four hours per day. The usage activities were predominantly characterized by repeated scrolling on the For You Page (FYP).

The interview results showed that TikTok usage occurred in various situations, such as during leisure time, breaks, and before going to sleep. This indicates that TikTok has become a part of the daily habits of Generation Z.



Source: Researcher Documentation, 2026

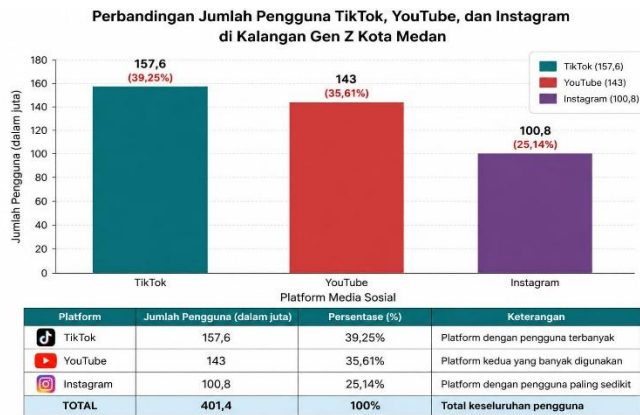
Figure 1. TikTok Users in Daily Life

Based on the interview results, the main factor driving TikTok usage is the attractive and diverse content available on the platform. Informants stated that TikTok has become the main source of entertainment that is easily accessible. One informant mentioned that *“I use TikTok almost every day because it has become my main entertainment whenever I feel bored.”*

TikTok’s algorithm system also became an important factor influencing users’ interest. Informants felt that the content appearing on their feeds matched their interests, which encouraged them to continue using the application. On TikTok, the more users watch certain content and frequently like or share it, the more similar content will continuously appear on their *For You Page* (FYP). This can be seen from an informant’s statement that *“the videos are short and immediately show content that matches what we like.”* Another factor influencing TikTok usage is the social environment. Informants tended to use TikTok because their peers were also actively using the application. This indicates that TikTok usage is influenced not only by technological factors but also by social interactions within the surrounding environment. TikTok’s recommendation algorithm is designed to adapt to user preferences in order to enhance user experience on digital platforms (Zhang & Liu, 2021).

Based on the research data, TikTok became the most widely used platform with a percentage of 39.25% (157.6 million users). This figure is higher than YouTube at 35.61%

and Instagram at 25.14%. This means that out of all social media users in the data, nearly 4 out of 10 people preferred TikTok. This indicates that TikTok is indeed the most popular platform among Generation Z. The following observation results show the number of TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram users:



Source: Researcher Documentation, 2026

Figure 2. Number of Tiktok, Youtube, and Instagram Users

Based on the results of interviews and observations, the high level of TikTok usage is influenced by several factors. TikTok is considered more attractive because it provides short, easily accessible content that appears directly according to users' interests through the **For You Page** (FYP) feature. This makes users feel comfortable and continue using the application. Compared to YouTube, which generally has longer content duration, and Instagram, which focuses more on photos and social interactions, TikTok is considered more practical and easier to use. In addition, the social environment also serves as a supporting factor, as the large number of peers using TikTok encourages Generation Z to use the platform in order to keep up with trends. Therefore, the high level of TikTok usage is influenced by content attractiveness, algorithm systems, ease of use, and social environment factors.

The Development of K-Pop Culture Popularity (Drama and Music) among Generation Z in Medan City

Based on the research findings, it was found that the popularity of K-Pop among Generation Z in Medan City has increased significantly, particularly through TikTok. Exposure to K-Pop content occurs repeatedly through the *For You Page* (FYP), which displays various types of content such as dance challenges, viral music, and Korean drama clips.

The interview results showed that most informants were first introduced to K-Pop through TikTok. One informant stated that *“I first got to know K-Pop from TikTok because it often appeared on my FYP, and over time I started to like it.”* This indicates that TikTok plays a major role as the primary medium in introducing K-Pop culture to Generation Z.

These findings are also supported by the research documentation presented in Figures 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4, which display K-Pop content in the form of K-Pop idol music videos, Korean drama recommendation videos, and K-Pop community accounts in Medan. The

documentation shows that K-Pop content dominates the informants' *For You Page* (FYP) displays.

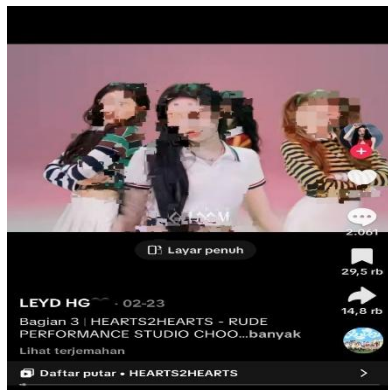


Figure 3. K-Pop Idol Music Content Frequently Appearing on TikTok FYP



Figure 4. Korean Drama Recommendation Content Frequently Appearing on TikTok FYP



Figure 5. K-Pop TikTok Account in Medan City

Source: Researcher Documentation, 2026

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the increasing popularity of K-Pop culture among Generation Z in Medan City is influenced by the intensity of content exposure through TikTok, which makes the culture more widely recognized and increasingly favored.

Factors Influencing the Development of Generation Z Preferences Toward K-Pop (Drama and Music)

The research findings indicate that Generation Z's preferences toward K-Pop are formed through various interconnected factors, including media exposure, content characteristics, and the social environment.

Based on the interview results, visual appeal became one of the main attractions. Informants stated that the attractive appearances of Korean idols and actors made them more interested in following K-Pop. One informant revealed that *"I like it because the idols are handsome and beautiful, and the dramas are also interesting."* In addition, the quality of the storylines in Korean dramas also became an important factor in shaping preferences. Informants considered that the storylines presented were more interesting and varied compared to local programs.

Repeated exposure through TikTok also strengthened these preferences. Informants who were initially not interested gradually became interested in K-Pop after frequently seeing related content on their *For You Page* (FYP). This can be seen from an informant's statement: *"At first, I was not very interested, but because it often appeared on TikTok, I eventually started to like it."*

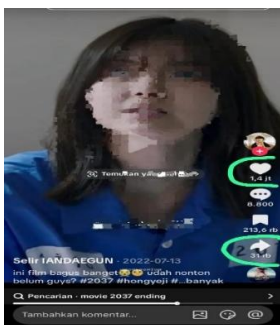


Figure 6. Korean Drama Content

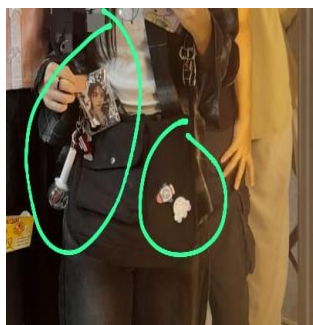


Figure 7. K-Pop Attributes Owned by Informants



Figure 8. K-Pop Photocards or Attributes and K-Pop Fans in the Campus Environment

Source: Researcher Documentation, 2026

These findings are supported by the research documentation presented in Figures 1.5 to 1.6, which show Korean drama content on TikTok as well as K-Pop attributes such as photocards and merchandise owned by the informants. The documentation indicates that preferences toward K-Pop not only occur in digital spaces but have also developed into a part of lifestyle.

Based on the observation results, the social environment also strengthened these preferences. Informants frequently shared content, discussed, and recommended music or dramas to their peers. One informant stated that *“many of my friends like K-Pop, so we often recommend songs and dramas to each other.”* Thus, Generation Z’s preferences toward K-Pop are shaped through a combination of digital media exposure, content attractiveness, and the continuous influence of the social environment.

DISCUSSION

Driving Factors of TikTok Usage Among Generation Z in Medan City

TikTok usage among Generation Z in Medan City is not merely a trend but has become part of their daily lives. Based on observations on TikTok, the *For You Page* (FYP) is filled with content tailored to users’ interests, ranging from entertainment and music to popular culture such as K-Pop and Korean dramas. The content that appears also tends to be repetitive, which continuously attracts users to keep watching.

This finding is in line with (Kristina et al., 2024) who stated that TikTok has an algorithm system capable of personalizing content, thereby increasing user engagement. The more frequently users watch certain types of content, the more similar content appears. This is what makes TikTok feel more “connected” to its users (Kode et al., 2024). These findings are also supported by research explaining that TikTok’s algorithm works through a content personalization system based on user activities, such as watch duration, *likes*, and *shares*, thereby increasing user engagement with specific content (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). According to (Dekker et al., 2025) algorithm personalization influences user engagement because the displayed content is adjusted to users’ interests. This recommendation system allows users to continuously receive exposure to similar content and encourages them to spend more time using the application.

According to (Hariri et al., 2021) social media in digital culture serves not only as a source of entertainment but also as a space for shaping the identity and lifestyle of young generations. TikTok has become a platform where Generation Z can express themselves, follow trends, and even build self-image in the digital world (Putri et al., 2025). (Silvia Tabah Hati, Ilmu et al., 2024) stated that culture and traditions should be preserved so that future generations can appreciate cultural diversity. Social media not only influences technology usage behavior but also affects the formation of social identity and interaction patterns in digital environments (Vombatkere et al., 2024).

Based on direct observations in campus environments and social gathering places, TikTok usage is often carried out collectively, such as showing videos to each other, following trends, or creating content together. Interview findings also revealed that many users considered TikTok more attractive because its content is fast, engaging, and constantly updated. According to (Maharani & Aguss, 2025) TikTok usage is influenced by users' interest in visual and easily understandable content, which increases engagement on social media platforms.

Compared to other applications such as Instagram and YouTube, TikTok is considered more practical by users. This is because TikTok provides short-duration videos that do not require much time to watch, content appears directly without requiring users to search for it, the algorithm quickly adapts to user interests, and it offers more trends that can be followed immediately. In line with this,

(Maharani & Aguss, 2025) bahwa TikTok berkembang menjadi media digital yang banyak digunakan karena kemudahan akses, penyajian konten yang singkat, serta kemampuan platform dalam menyesuaikan kebutuhan pengguna.

Development of K-Pop Popularity (Drama and Music) Among Generation Z in Medan City

The popularity of K-Pop among Generation Z in Medan City has increased rapidly, especially since the emergence of TikTok. Based on observations on TikTok, K-Pop content such as dance challenges, song clips, and Korean drama scenes frequently appears on the *For You Page* (FYP) and has become a widely followed trend.

This phenomenon can be explained through the theory of cultural globalization. According to (Astuti et al., 2025), globalization enables cultures from other countries, such as South Korea, to enter and be easily accepted through digital media. (Rida et al., 2023) stated that K-Pop has become one example of global culture that has successfully attracted the attention of younger generations in various countries, including Indonesia. The spread of popular culture through digital media demonstrates that technological advancements facilitate the process of cross-cultural exchange between countries and accelerate the dissemination of global culture among younger generations (Purnomo & Syuryansyah, 2025).

According to (Elma & Pane, 2025) the success of K-Pop cannot be separated from strong digital strategies, particularly through social media. (Hariono, 2025) stated that TikTok has become a highly effective promotional tool because it can make songs or drama clips go viral within a short period of time. Social media can increase the popularity of popular culture through rapid,

interactive, and repetitive patterns of content dissemination, enabling it to attract users' attention on a wider scale (Gustam, 2015). Social media also plays a role in shaping digital trends through content distribution (Kushardiyanti et al., 2021) Upon closer examination, K-Pop and K-Dramas possess several distinctive characteristics that make them more appealing. The characteristics of K-Pop music include catchy and memorable songs, a combination of various genres such as *pop*, *hip-hop*, and *EDM*, attractive and easy-to-follow choreography, and appealing idol visuals. Meanwhile, Korean dramas are characterized by concise storylines, high production quality, strong and emotional characters, and diverse genres such as romance, thriller, and fantasy.

According to (Kristina et al., 2024), content with strong visual and emotional elements is more likely to become viral and be favored by social media users. Visual elements in digital media influence the increase in user attention because users tend to be more attracted to content that contains strong and emotional visual elements (Putri & Prakoso, 2025). In addition, the Korean language itself has become an attraction because of its unique and interesting pronunciation, its frequent appearance in songs and dramas, and its ease of recall due to repeated exposure on TikTok. This phenomenon indicates that language is no longer a barrier but has instead become a cultural attraction. This is in line with the concept of cultural globalization, which enables cultural exchange across countries (Azzahra et al., 2025).

Direct observations of K-Pop activities within the campus environment also showed that many Generation Z individuals actively participate in communities and use K-Pop-related attributes. The research documentation provided visual evidence such as photocards, albums, and merchandise, demonstrating that K-Pop has become a part of their lifestyle.

The Shift in Generation Z's Cultural Preferences toward K-Pop (Drama and Music)

The shift in Generation Z's cultural preferences toward K-Pop occurs due to a combination of various factors, including media influence, individual factors, and the social environment. Based on observations on TikTok, K-Pop content that frequently appears makes users become familiar with and eventually develop an interest in the culture. Intensive use of social media can influence the way individuals receive information and shape users' behavioral tendencies in their daily lives (Ratnasetya & Kurniawati, 2024).

According to (Global, 2025), iKTok plays a major role in shaping preferences because users are continuously exposed to the same content repeatedly. This phenomenon is known as the *exposure effect*, meaning that the more frequently individuals see something, the more likely they are to develop a preference for it. In addition, explained that viral content has a strong influence in shaping cultural tastes, particularly among younger generations who are active on social media. Repeated exposure to an object can increase an individual's level of preference toward that object. The more frequently a person is exposed to a particular culture through digital media, the greater the possibility that the culture will be accepted and liked (Zajonc, 1968). In addition, (Fitria & Hanathasia, 2022)

also explained that viral content has a strong influence in shaping cultural preferences, especially among younger generations who are active on social media.

According to (Toni Nasution, 2023) each member of society possesses different knowledge regarding culture because individuals have different experiences influenced by their respective environments.

Based on direct observations, it was found that the influence of K-Pop is not limited to viewing habits but also extends to lifestyle aspects, such as clothing styles inspired by idols, the use of Korean terms in conversations, and a broader interest in Korean culture in general.

The research documentation displaying attributes such as photocards, albums, and accessories serves as concrete evidence that these preferences have become integrated into everyday life. In line with (Anjani & Hariyanto, 2022), interest in a particular culture is not only reflected through media consumption but can also develop into an identity and lifestyle, as shown through the use of certain attributes. Social media also enables the formation of new interactions and habits among users, which can influence communication patterns and lifestyles within the digital social environment (Cahyono, 2016).

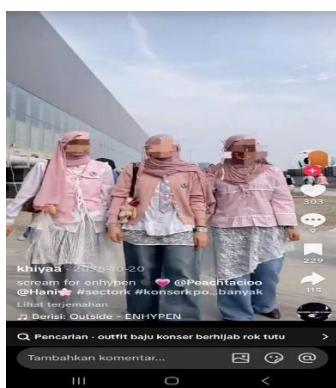


Figure 9. One Example of Clothing Style Inspired by K-Pop Idols



Source: Researcher Documentation, 2026

Figure 10. K-Pop Attributes, Photocards, and Accessories

The interview results also showed that many Generation Z individuals considered K-Pop more appealing because it is most modern and trendy, has more attractive visuals, and presents storylines that are more relatable to the lives of young people.

From the perspective of social change, (Silvia Tabah Hati, n.d.) explained that cultural change is a natural process that occurs due to interactions between cultures. The shift from local culture to global culture does not necessarily mean that local culture disappears, but rather reflects a process of cultural adaptation. Thus, the main factors influencing Generation Z preferences are repeated exposure through TikTok, the visual appeal and quality of content, the influence of the social environment, and the need to follow trends and establish self-existence.

The relationship among the observation findings, interview results, and research documentation indicates that the shift in cultural preferences occurs not only on social

media but also in real life. TikTok has become the main bridge connecting Generation Z with K-Pop culture, thereby shaping new patterns of cultural consumption in the digital era.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that TikTok usage and exposure to Korean pop culture (K-Pop) have an influence on the shift in cultural preferences among Generation Z in Medan City, particularly in relation to dramas and music. The high intensity of TikTok usage causes K-Pop content to frequently appear on the For You Page (FYP), thereby increasing Generation Z's exposure to and interest in Korean culture. The findings indicate that TikTok usage is influenced by attractive content, algorithm systems that match users' interests, ease of use, and social environmental influences. In addition, the popularity of K-Pop among Generation Z continues to increase due to repeated exposure to content through TikTok, such as music, dance challenges, and Korean dramas. This condition has resulted in a shift in cultural preferences, which can be observed through increasing interest in Korean dramas, music, lifestyles, and cultural trends in everyday life. The findings of this study indicate that social media, particularly TikTok, functions not only as a means of entertainment but also plays a role in shaping the cultural preferences of Generation Z. Theoretically, these findings support the concept of cultural globalization and the role of digital media in the lives of young generations. Practically, this study is expected to provide insights into efforts to preserve local culture and utilize digital media as a tool to introduce Indonesian culture so that it remains attractive to Generation Z.

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