The Influence of Tiktok (TT) Advertisement Messages on Health and Beauty Products towards Immoral Behaviour of Gen-Z

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ABSTRACT

TikTok advertisements are highly effective at boosting the promotion of health and beauty products but also carry negative repercussions, influencing immoral behaviour among Gen-Z. While researchers and society are increasingly concerned with moral decline, the specific connection between TikTok advertisements and unethical behaviour remains unclear. Thus, this present study examines the impact of TikTok advertisements on health and beauty products, examining how their portrayal of beauty standards and lifestyles may promote immoral behaviours among Gen-Z while raising awareness of the associated risks and ethical implications for parents, educators, marketers, and policymakers. Using the convenience sampling method, questionnaires were collected from targeted respondents as part of the study's quantitative research approach. The data were analysed using SmartPLS version 3.0 in Structural Equation Modelling to investigate the antecedents of TikTok advertisements towards immoral behaviour on Gen-Z, concerning health and beauty products in Malaysia. The findings demonstrated a significant impact of specific elements of TikTok advertisements, particularly images and subject matter, on the moral decadence of Gen-Z, while other elements, like captions and language, did not show a statistically significant effect. The study also confirmed a strong link between social contagion theory and the effect of TikTok advertisements on Gen-Z. The importance of this research will raise Malaysian awareness to be responsible in ensuring their TikTok advertising or content adheres to ethical standards when promoting their health and beauty products.

Keywords: Commercial products, Gen-Z, Influence, Immoral behaviour, TikTok advertisement

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rise of TikTok as a dominant force in the realm of social media has been remarkable. Formerly known as Musical.ly, TikTok has become the most popular social media site, capturing millions of users from all over the world, especially those from Generation Z (Gen-Z) [1]. TikTok's captivating short videos have made it not just a popular platform for entertainment but also an effective marketing tool for companies, particularly those in the health and beauty sector. According to [2], the platform's algorithm-driven content distribution strategy guarantees that advertising messages are seen by a large number of people, hence affecting customer behaviour and forming impressions, especially among susceptible young people. TikTok is a platform targeting Generation Z consumers and has developed into a hub for entertainment, advertising, and artistic expression.

Most existing research focuses on psychological outcomes or consumer behaviour especially in promoting health and beauty products [3], with limited attention to moral development and ethical issues. There is also a research gap in understanding the specific impact on Malaysian Gen-Z, given their unique socio-cultural context. Additionally, the antecedents of immoral behaviour influenced by advertising and platform algorithms

remain underexplored. Thus, this study aims to examine the impact of TikTok advertisements on health and beauty products, focusing on how their portrayal of beauty standards and lifestyle choices may promote immoral or socially unacceptable behaviours among Gen-Z. It also seeks to raise awareness of the potential risks and ethical implications of such advertising among parents, educators, marketers, and policymakers.

The Impact of TikTok Advertisements

The impact of TikTok advertisements, especially those that promote health and beauty items, on the moral behaviour of its younger audience is becoming increasingly concerning in the current digital world [3]. Advertising messages are smoothly incorporated into consumers' content feeds due to TikTok's algorithm-driven platform, which maximises exposure and engagement. The constant availability of commercials, which frequently feature idealised pictures of lifestyle and beauty, has the power to profoundly influence the attitudes and actions of its mostly youthful user base [4].

Implication for Body Image and Beauty Standards

TikTok ads frequently reinforce unattainable beauty standards by advertising goods and ways of living that might not be suitable or healthful for all people. Regularly being exposed to these idealised depictions can intensify negative body image issues and feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with one's appearance. In serious circumstances, it can even play a role in the development of eating disorders or other mental health illnesses [5].

Current Materialism and Consumer Culture

TikTok's advertising of beauty and health items adds to the consumerist culture that is becoming increasingly prevalent among Gen-Z users. A mindset that associates material goods with happiness and contentment is fostered by a constant stream of commercials glamorising particular products and lifestyles. This emphasis on materialism can result in several negative behaviours, including excessive spending, placing more value on appearance than on substance, and a lack of consideration for the ethical and environmental ramifications of purchasing decisions [6].

Ethical Considerations

Beyond simple purchasing habits, TikTok commercial messages have a significant impact on Gen-Z's moral behaviour. These ads may unintentionally contribute to the normalisation of immoral acts like deceit, manipulation, and objectification by upholding restrictive standards of attractiveness and promoting materialistic ideals. Furthermore, attempts to promote empathy and understanding in society can be undermined by the monetization of health and beauty, which can trivialise important issues like mental health struggles and physical dysmorphia [7].

As Gen-Z individuals navigate their formative years in an increasingly digital world, the role of social media in shaping their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours cannot be overstated. Understanding the implications of TikTok advertising on health and beauty products is crucial, as it sheds light on the complex interplay between media consumption, consumer culture, and moral development.

In conclusion, the impact of TikTok commercial messaging on Generation Z users' moral behaviour—especially concerning health and beauty products—is a complex problem with wide-ranging effects. It is crucial to critically assess the ethical aspects of advertising practices and take into account ways to promote a more responsible and socially conscious message as TikTok continues to transform the digital landscape and exert its effect on young minds. The researcher may endeavour to create a digital environment that empowers and uplifts its users instead of promoting negative stereotypes and behaviours by bringing these concerns to light and encouraging discussion.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the antecedents of TikTok advertisements of health and beauty products, towards immoral

behaviours among Gen-Z users in Malaysia.

2. To investigate the impact of TikTok advertisements of health and beauty products, towards immoral behaviours among Gen-Z users in Malaysia.

Research Questions

1. What are the antecedents of TikTok advertisements of health and beauty products, towards immoral behaviours among Gen-Z users in Malaysia.

2. What is the impact of TikTok advertisements of health and beauty products, towards immoral behaviours among Gen-Z users in Malaysia.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it examines the influence of algorithm-driven advertisements on TikTok in shaping the attitudes, behaviours, and moral development of young users in Malaysia. An analysis of the psychological effects of idealised beauty standards and consumerist messages reveals potential adverse consequences, including body image concerns, mental health difficulties, and the prevalence of materialistic values within Gen-Z [3]. This study offers valuable recommendations for marketers to adopt more ethical advertising practices and encourages educators to promote media literacy among youth [6]. Furthermore, it highlights the cultural relevance of social media's influence on Malaysian youth, contributing to local and global discussions on digital behaviour and moral development. The findings also hold practical implications for policymakers in regulating social media advertising to safeguard young consumers, ensuring a healthier digital environment that promotes positive social values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

TikTok is a popular social media platform that has become a global cultural phenomenon among Generation Z consumers worldwide. Its short-form video format and widespread reach have made it a hub for amusement and advertising health and beauty products. The relationship between TikTok's influence and its promotion raises concerns about its impact on consumer behaviour, particularly among the impressionable Gen-Z demographic. As TikTok continues to dominate the social media scene, it is essential to investigate the influence of its commercial messaging effects on the moral behaviour of Generation Z users.

The purpose of this review of the literature is to examine the corpus of research on the impact of TikTok promotional messages on health and beauty products and how they may affect Gen-Z users' moral behaviour. This review seeks to improve understanding of the complex interaction between social media advertising, consumer attitudes, and ethical issues in the context of health and beauty promotion by merging insights from academic publications and theoretical frameworks.

With over a billion active users, TikTok, a social media platform has become a major player in the realm of social influence, particularly among younger generations [8]. TikTok's interactive content facilitates peer-to-peer influence, which shapes users' perceptions and behaviours. Advertising messages disseminated through TikTok may exert a considerable influence on Gen-Z users' attitudes and behaviours. TikTok's appeal is its emphasis on user-generated content and interaction which foster a sense of community and belonging among its varied user base [9].

TikTok is a potent platform that allows marketers to interact with consumers, leveraging influencers, sponsored content, and targeted ads to reach their intended audience [10]. The seamless integration of adverts into users' feeds blurs the distinction between organic and sponsored content, potentially amplifying the persuasive power of marketing messaging. Research suggests that TikTok's interactive nature and emphasis on authenticity contribute to its effectiveness as an advertising medium, particularly among younger demographics [10]. Advertisers may improve their relevance resonance with TikTok users and impact their attitudes and behaviours by matching their content with user-generated material and cultural trends [11]. On the other hand,

concerns have been raised regarding the moral implications of TikTok advertising, particularly with relation issues such as transparency, disclosure, and influencer responsibility [12]. As TikTok evolves and expands its advertising capabilities, it is crucial to critically examine its impact on consumer behaviour and cultural values, particularly among impressionable Gen-Z users.

A previous study has investigated the impact of social media advertising on consumer behaviour. In recent years, social media platforms have become a vital part of consumers' lives, offering not just opportunities for connection and entertainment but also substantial sources of information and influence. TikTok has surged in popularity, particularly among younger demographics, and has emerged as a powerful tool for advertisers seeking to communicate with consumers in new ways. [13] stated that social media platforms such as TikTok have a major significant impact on customers' purchasing decisions and attitudes towards promoted items. Furthermore, these platforms provide a fertile ground for the dissemination of persuasive messages that may influence people's moral concerns as evidenced by bibliographical references.

One important factor contributing to the efficacy of social media advertising is its capacity to use the principles of social proof and peer influence. Platforms like TikTok are dependent on user-generated content, allowing consumers to share their experiences with products and brands with their social networks. This user-generated material acts as a form of social proof, authenticating the desirability and legitimacy of advertised products. Furthermore, social media networks offer unparalleled targeting capabilities, enabling advertisers to personalise their messages to specific demographics, interests, and behaviours. This tailored strategy enhances the relevance and resonance of advertising content, enhancing consumer engagement and conversion.

However, it is critical to acknowledge the possible risks of social media advertising, particularly in terms of transparency, authenticity, and consumer privacy. As social media platforms blur the distinction between organic and sponsored content, consumers may become suspicious of promotional messaging and resistance to advertising efforts [12]. In addition, social media advertising, particularly on platforms such as TikTok, has a tremendous impact on consumer behaviour by shaping perceptions, attitudes, and purchase decisions. Research has shown that exposure to idealised representations of beauty and lifestyle norms on social media can lead to feelings of inadequacy and poor self-esteem among users, particularly vulnerable impressionable youth [14]. Marketers must manage the ethical and psychological consequences of social media advertising responsibly, ensuring advertising methods line with consumer interests and expectations.

With celebrities playing a significant role in promoting products and altering consumer opinion social media platforms have become crucial for health and beauty promotion. Research by [15] underscores the impact of celebrity endorsements on Twitter, which significantly impacts customers' perceptions of source legitimacy, purchasing intentions, and social affiliation with celebrities, all of which ultimately influence their desire to purchase advertised products.

The health and beauty industries have used social media platforms for advertising, taking advantage of their visual and interactive features to influence consumer perceptions and behaviours. [15] discovered that celebrity endorsements on Twitter strongly affected consumers' perceptions of brand trustworthiness, purchasing intentions, and social identification with celebrities. In the context of health and beauty advertising, the visual character of content on platforms like TikTok is particularly significant. TikTok's short-form videos and visual storytelling, provide advertisers with a dynamic platform to demonstrate health and beauty products in action, potentially impacting consumers' perceptions of beauty standards and purchasing decisions. However, ethical issues must be carefully negotiated to ensure that advertising techniques support consumer well-being and promote positive body image.

METHODOLOGY

Sample Selection and Data Collection

The sample for the study was taken randomly from the Malaysian population, specifically targeted at Gen-Z users of health and beauty products. The respondents were selected using the convenience sampling technique, which is a procedure of selecting participants from the target population based on ease of access. This

sampling technique yields several inherent benefits, including being cost-effective, less time-consuming and simple to operate. The inclusion criteria for target respondents include; 18 years and above, users of health and beauty products, and Malaysians. A total of 147 respondents fulfilled the stated criteria and were accepted for further data analysis.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire assessing participants' engagement with TikTok advertisements, the frequency of exposure to various advertisement types, and attitudes towards the behaviours promoted in these advertisements. The questionnaire was adapted to capture variables aligned with the study's objectives, measuring both observable engagement patterns and perceptions regarding the advertisements' ethical implications.

Utilisation of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling

The discussion of rationales for using PLS-SEM in quantitative analysis in research articles and methodological literatures were extensive. Even the most studied field also requires one. Every justification needs to be detailed and explained properly [16], including why it is preferred over other methods [17]. In this research, PLS_SEM was chosen due to the main research goal of this study which is predicting the key target construct in the model [18]. Other justifications are due to the small sample size (n=147), a non-normal distribution of data and the investigation will examine the model for unobserved heterogeneity [19]. In addition, PLS-SEM is also able to analyse the simultaneous estimation of multiple and interrelated dependent relationships between variables and the use of latent construct measurement.

Statistical Analysis

The collected data have been coded into SPSS 20 for statistical analyses and correlations prior to the PLS-SEM analysis. Further analyses were conducted using SMARTPLS 3.0 to check on the composite reliability, average variance extracted, and hypothesis testing of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 Demographic Information (n = 147)

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	42	27.2
Female	107	72.8
Age		
18 - 21 years old	107	72.8
22 - 24 years old	29	19.7
26 – 28 years old	11	7.5
Race		
Malay	140	95.2
Chinese	5	3.4
Indian	0	0
Others	2	1.4

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Marital Status		
Single	142	96.6
Married	4	2.7
Divorced/Widowed	1	0.7
Education Level		
SPM	6	4.1
Diploma	101	68.7
Bachelor's Degree	35	23.8
Others	5	3.4
Total	**147**	**100**

Table 1 shows the demographic details of the 147 participants in the study. The majority of the participants are female (72.8%), with the highest representation in the 18-21 age group (72.8%). The participants are mostly Malay (95.2%), with minimal representation from other ethnic groups. Notably, almost all participants are single (96.6%), with a small number being married (2.7%) or divorced/widowed (0.7%).

In terms of educational background, the majority of participants have attained a diploma (68.7%), while a smaller group have completed a bachelor's degree (23.8%). Additionally, some individuals have completed SPM (4.1%) or have pursued other forms of education (3.4%), indicating that this demographic was well-educated and within an age range highly susceptible to social influence.

Table 2 TikTok Engagement among Respondents (n = 147)

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Frequency of using TikTok		
Daily	137	93.2
Weekly	6	4.1
Monthly	2	1.4
Yearly	2	1.4
Total time spent on TikTok per day (hours)		
Less than 1 hour	17	11.6
1 – 3 hours	56	38.1
4 – 5 hours	49	33.3
6 – 10 hours	16	10.9
More than 10 hours	9	6.1
Main reason for using TikTok		

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Purchase	64	43.5
Entertainment	143	97.3
Correspondent	8	5.4
Socialising	48	32.7
Frequent of using TikTok to search for product advertisements		
Daily	61	43
Weekly	43	30.3
Monthly	27	19
Yearly	11	7.7
Types of product advertisements seen		
Cosmetic	110	77.5
Healthcare product	52	36.6
Entertainment	122	85.9
Foods	59	41.5
Books and Accessories	1	0.7
Sport	1	0.7
Types of product advertisements seen are inappropriate and may lead to immoral behaviour.		
Cosmetic	23	16.8
Healthcare product	47	34.3
Apparel	33	24.1
Entertainment	84	61.3
Gambling	3	0.2
Online game	1	0.1
Product advertisements that had been advertised by the seller are considered not appropriate		
Yes	36	25.4
No	106	74.6

Table 2 outlines the TikTok engagement among the participants. The majority of users engage with TikTok daily (93.2%), while only a small percentage use it weekly (4.1%), monthly (1.4%), or yearly (1.4%). When it

comes to the amount of time spent on TikTok each day, most participants spend between 1 and 3 hours (38.1%) or 4 to 5 hours (33.3%). A smaller number of users spend less than 1 hour (11.6%), 6 to 10 hours (10.9%), or more than 10 hours (6.1%) on the platform each day.

In terms of the main reasons for using TikTok, the vast majority use it for entertainment (97.3%). Other reasons include making purchases (43.5%), socializing (32.7%), and correspondence (5.4%). This indicates that while entertainment is the primary motivator for using TikTok, a significant portion of users also engage with the app for shopping and social interactions.

Furthermore, the data shows that a significant portion of users frequently use TikTok to search for product advertisements, with 43% doing so daily and 30.3% every week. A smaller percentage searches for ads monthly (19%) or yearly (7.7%). This suggests that TikTok is a popular platform for discovering products among the participants.

When it comes to the types of product advertisements seen, entertainment-related ads are the most common (85.9%), followed by cosmetics (77.5%) and healthcare products (36.6%). Interestingly, a notable percentage of participants (61.3%) believe that entertainment ads, and to a lesser extent, ads for cosmetics (16.8%) and healthcare products (34.3%), may lead to immoral behaviour. Despite this, the majority of participants (74.6%) do not find the product advertisements they encounter on TikTok to be inappropriate, although 25.4% do. This indicates a general acceptance of product advertisements on TikTok, even though some concerns about the content's appropriateness remain.

Reliability and Validity Test

Reliability analysis is conducted for the scales using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficient of Cronbach's alpha ranges is measured between 0 and 1. According to [16], Cronbach's alpha value that is greater or equal to 0.80 is a good scale, 0.70 for an acceptable scale and 0.60 for a scale for exploratory purposes. Results of Cronbach's alpha indicate that Caption (0.816), Image (0.735), Language (0.843) and Subject (0.766). Thus, these indicators are considered satisfied.

Composite Reliability

Composite reliability (CR), also known as omega reliability, is a preferred alternative to Cronbach's alpha as a test of internal consistency reliability. In particular, Cronbach's alpha typically underestimates the true reliability and should therefore be regarded as a lower boundary to the reliability [20]. The value of CR should be more than 0.6 for exploratory research, within 0.7 to 0.9 is satisfactory, while more than 0.90 is not desirable because it indicates that all the indicators are measuring the same phenomenon and unlikely to constitute a valid reliability assessment of a construct [18]. The result shows the CR value of Caption (0.894), Image (0.835), Language (0.894) and Subject (0.850).

Average Variance Extracted

Average variance extracted (AVE) is an index to measure convergent validity in PLS-SEM. Generally, it is a degree to which a latent construct explains the variance of its indicator [19]. In an adequate model, AVE should be greater than 0.5 [19, 21, 22]. The AVE values of this study were all satisfactory with all latent constructs above 0.5.

Discriminant Validity

[23] suggested that to establish discriminant validity, the square root of AVE must be higher than the correlations of the constructs with all other constructs in the structural model. The inter-construct correlations show that each construct shares larger variance values with its own measures than with other measures. In sum, the measurement model ensured that the discriminant validity is well established in this study as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3 Discriminant Validity

	CAPTION	IMAGE	LANGUAGE	SUBJECT
CAPTION	0.805			
IMAGE	0.388	0.748		
LANGUAGE	0.489	0.371	0.824	
SUBJECT	0.519	0.534	0.385	0.765

Research Hypothesis Testing

The bootstrapping technique has been used to determine the statistical significance of the path coefficient and to calculate the t-values in this study. All calculated values which include sample mean, standard deviation, t-statistics and p-values are shown in Table 4, while Figure 1 illustrates the SEM-PLS Algorithm result of this research. The t-value of the hypothesised path of Caption and Immoral Behaviour is 1.741, with a p-value is 0.082. Thus, the hypothesis model is not statistically significant.

In addition, the t-value of the hypothesised path of Image and Immoral Behaviour is 0.213, with a p-value of 0.028. Therefore, the hypothesised path of the inner model is statistically significant. Suggesting that visual representations in advertisements may influence Gen-Z's perceptions of acceptable behaviour, aligning with the Social Contagion Theory.

The hypothesised path of Language and Immoral Behaviour revealed non-statistically significant results with a t-value of 1.859, a p-value is 0.064. Captions and language did not show statistically significant impacts on behaviour ($p > 0.05$). This could indicate that Gen-Z viewers are more influenced by visual elements than textual components, emphasizing the importance of visual ethics in social media marketing.

Lastly, the t-values of the hypothesised path of Subject and Immoral Behaviour are 0.015, with a p-value is 0.003. Hence, the hypothesised path is statistically significant in this study. Similarly, the subject matter in ads was significantly related to immoral behaviour ($p < 0.01$), supporting the idea that exposure to specific themes in health and beauty advertisements can normalize behaviours that may not align with societal values.

Table 4 Hypothesis Testing

	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P Values	Supported (Yes/No)
CAPTION -> IMMORAL BEHAVIOUR	0.161	0.092	1.741	0.082	No
IMAGE -> IMMORAL BEHAVIOUR	0.213	0.095	2.204	0.028	Yes
LANGUAGE -> IMMORAL BEHAVIOUR	0.132	0.074	1.859	0.064	No
SUBJECT -> IMMORAL BEHAVIOUR	0.333	0.105	3.036	0.003	Yes

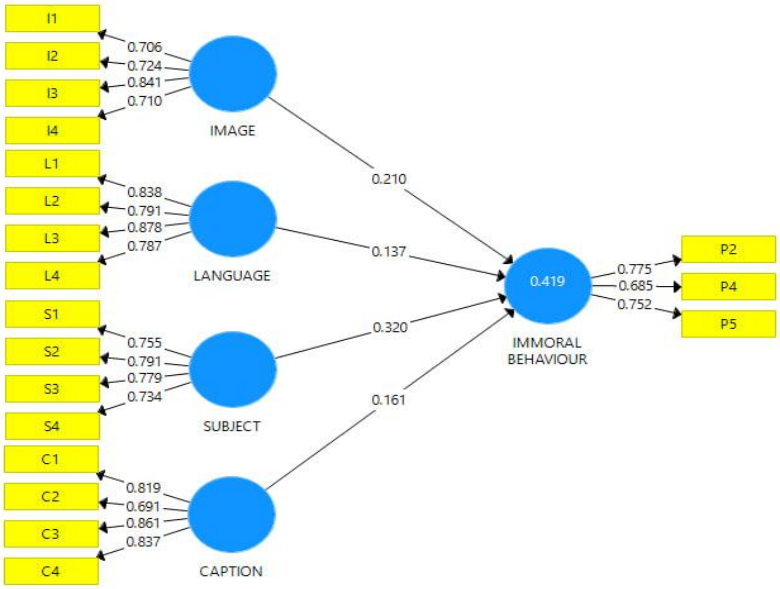

Fig. 1 Structural Equation Modelling (PLS Algorithm)

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify the antecedents of TikTok advertisements for health and beauty products and examine their impact on immoral behaviours among Gen-Z users in Malaysia. The findings indicate that TikTok advertisements, particularly through images and subject matter, significantly influence immoral behaviours among young users, while captions and language do not have a significant effect. These results suggest that certain elements of TikTok advertisements could encourage socially unacceptable behaviours, underscoring the need for ethical guidelines and greater awareness among parents, educators, marketers, and policymakers to mitigate potential negative impacts on the younger generation.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on this study, various recommendations can be proposed to foster knowledge and increase awareness and responsibility in TikTok advertisements, particularly regarding health and beauty products.

First, this study recommends increased ethical responsibility from marketers and content creators and urges parents and educators to emphasise media literacy to mitigate potential negative impacts.

Second, it is recommended that further research be conducted in the longitudinal form to assess the long-term impact of TikTok ads on Gen-Z's behaviour and attitudes towards beauty standards and moral values. Furthermore, expanding the demographics of the study to include various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds would give a more comprehensive perspective. Incorporating qualitative methodologies such as interviews and focus groups, can help understand the nuances of how Gen-Z interprets TikTok ads and their personal experiences. Further, a comparative study with other social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat could yield valuable information into the differing influences on the morality of Gen-Z. Emphasis should also be given to the role of content creators and their influence in shaping the perception of beauty and morality. In addition, collaborating with parents and educators to promote media literacy education programs will help the next generation in developing critical analysis skills for advertisements. In order to ensure responsible advertising, it is crucial to encourage marketers to establish ethical advertising standards and monitoring programs. By taking these steps, it is intended to raise awareness and responsibility in TikTok advertising which will reduce the risk of moral decadence among Gen-Z.

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