

# Gen Z Influence Unleashed: The Dynamic Impact of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Behaviour in the Digital Era

Rizky Aditya Husandani<sup>1</sup>, Prahastiwi Utari<sup>2</sup>, Andre Noevi Rahmanto<sup>3</sup>

Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Politics Science,  
Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, INDONESIA<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

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*Keywords:*  
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The proliferation of this technological advancement has led to the development of a strategic marketing approach that is recently transitioning into the period of digitalization. Companies progressively employ digital marketing as a substitute for conventional marketing strategies to advertise their brands and extend their influence to a broader audience. Digital marketing encompasses a variety of channels, such as search engines, social media, display advertising, mobile marketing, and other digital platforms. The objective of this study is to examine the influence of social media influencers on consumer behavior, with a specific emphasis on their ability to shape consumer views and intentions to make purchases. A systematic review of relevant literature was conducted, focusing on studies published between 2020 and 2024. Search criteria included keywords such as "Digital Marketing", "Social Media", "Influencers", and "Generation Z." A total of 10 high-quality journals were selected for analysis based on the PRISMA Guidelines. The findings reveal that social media influencers play a significant role in influencing consumer behavior by leveraging their trustworthiness, credibility, and engagement with their followers. Influencer marketing has become a potent strategy for brands to establish connections with targeted audiences, enhance brand exposure, and stimulate interaction and conversions.

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## INTRODUCTION

The internet has created a significant impact on various elements of people's lives due to technological advancements. The growth of this technology flow has resulted in the rise of a marketing approach that recently transitioned into the age of digitalization. Companies are increasingly using digital marketing as a replacement for traditional marketing tactics to advertise their trademarks and expand their range to a larger viewer. Smartphone marketing, banner advertising, social media, search engines, as well as additional online platforms, are just a few of the channels that make up digital marketing. This form of marketing utilizes digital technologies to deliver tailored marketing messages and conduct promotional activities to drive customer acquisition and retention (Halvadia & Menon, 2021). Consumers are afforded the convenience of rapidly and effectively accessing news from wherever and at any moment through digital media. Digital marketing is the distribution of promotional activities for a brand via digital media. Companies strategically utilize digital marketing channels to enhance brand-consumer relationships by fostering meaningful interactions, building brand trust, and creating engaging experiences. Through these digital channels, companies can interact with customers in real time, enabling personalized communication and targeted marketing efforts to strengthen brand-consumer relationships (Karjaluo et al., 2015).

Social media refers to a group of internet-based applications that leverage the principles of Web 2.0 to facilitate the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Aichner et al., 2021). Social media platforms enable users to engage in real-time or asynchronous social interactions with broad and narrow audiences, fostering social connections and information dissemination (Valkenburg, 2022). The large amount of online social networking users can be attributed to the ease of internet accessibility. Ansari and Khan (2020) imply that social media has transformed human collaboration by enabling individuals to engage in collaborative activities seamlessly across distances, transcending time and place limitations. Through social media platforms, users can interact, share information, and collaborate in real-time, regardless of geographical boundaries. Social media enables customers to demonstrate their brand devotion and offer unofficial support through the creation and sharing of user-generated content (UGC).

Presently, social media influencers are employed as a digital marketing strategy on social media platforms. The utilization of social networking celebrities in marketing is increasingly widespread and considered crucial by business partners. Companies are forsaking conventional marketing methods, such as celebrity endorsements, and embracing a new trend of utilizing influencers. Online influencers have emerged as a popular method for brand or product owners to advertise their goods, products, or services by showcasing a positive image of the influencer concerning the associated entities or companies. Social media influencer marketing involves

product placements and endorsements by influencers, impacting consumers' purchase intentions and electronic word-of-mouth (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021). Social media influencers play a significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) due to their perceived trustworthiness and credibility (Weismueller et al., 2020). Consumers often view social media influencers as reliable sources of information and recommendations, leading to increased purchase intentions and positive e-WOM (Aggad & Ahmad, 2021). The credibility of influencers is a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns, as it impacts consumers' trust in the messages conveyed by influencers (Gamage & Ashill, 2022).

Social media influencers can leverage content from various social media platforms to strategically affect public perception of a product, hence increasing the market value of a brand. The use of Influencers in digital marketing originates from a culture of word of mouth that generates trustworthy endorsement from its audience. Currently, Influencer marketing leverages the power of social media influencers to connect with audiences, particularly the younger demographic, by utilizing their engaged follower base to endorse products. (Shepherd et al, 2023). In modern times, nearly all individuals are connected to social media platforms, particularly the generation known as Z. Generation Z (Gen Z), born between 1995 and 2012, is characterized by unique features that define them as the first global generation. They are born into a digital world, integrating technology into their lives from the start (Patricio, 2016). McKee-Ryan (2021) states that Gen Z values social connections but also desires in-persons interactions, showcasing a blend of technology reliance and a need for personal connection. Gen Z indeed dominates social media usage, showing a significant influence on their lifestyle (Mude & Undale, 2023). Putri et al. (2023) implies that Generation Z uses social media more frequently than Generation Y for a range of activities such as education, entertainment, shopping, and socializing. The population of Gen Z in Indonesia accounts for 27.94% and consists of around 75.49 million individuals (Sari et al., 2023). According to Nisa et al. (2020), approximately 80.7% of individuals belonging to Generation Z depend on product evaluations on e-commerce platforms as their main source of information when seeking new products online. To effectively capture the attention of Generation Z, it is vital to comprehend their usage of social media for product discovery.

Utilizing Social Media Influencers for marketing purposes has emerged as a popular approach in the era of digital technology. Gen Z, the most recent and greatest demographic of consumers, spanning from 2017 to 2030 (Priporas et al., 2020). Utilizing social media celebrities as a form of digital advertising among Generation Z customers can be highly advantageous, especially on platforms with a significant viral reach. Generation Z, as digital natives, have a natural inclination towards using social media, making it an appropriate marketing platform for this group (Nugroho et al., 2022). Generation Z considers social media influencers as more trustworthy and reliable than celebrities. Research conducted by Schouten et al. (2019) has shown

that participants identify more with influencers than celebrities, feel more similar to influencers, and trust influencers more than celebrities. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Nugroho et al. (2022), it was discovered that 44% of individuals from Generation Z rely on recommendations from trusted influencers when making purchasing decisions. Enterprises are increasingly recognizing the substantial influence that these influencers exert on the buying patterns of Generation Z. As a result, they are actively pursuing the use of influencer recommendations as a component of their digital marketing plan to advertise their brands, products, or services. A thorough examination of the function of social network influencers as a form of digital advertising for Generation Z is sought to be offered by this article.

Despite the massive amount of research available on the topic of influencer marketing, there remains a significant gap in understanding how precisely social media influencers impact Generation Z's buying behavior. While many studies have examined how consumers tend to behave in the presence of influencers, not much research has been done to consider the various features that stick more to Generation Z such as, in what ways the influence persuader's trust, competence, and warmth resonate with that age group. Also, most of the previous studies are based on the quantitative measures of the effectiveness of the influencer like engagement rates or sales figures, but they often miss qualitative aspects of the relationship between influencers and their consumers. In this respect, the objective of this paper is to address this issue through a systematic literature review which does not only present the previously done works of research but rather emphasizes the role of transparency and emotional attachment in researched markets targeted at Generation Z. Moreover, the novelty of this research lies in a detailed assessment of the potential impacts of influencer marketing campaigns within the framework of features and preferences of Generation Z. Thus, a growing body of literature presents this research showing how brands can make use of the media personalities to promote and increase brand loyalty and purchase intentions of the consumers within this market.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Marketing communications include the diverse methods employed by companies to directly or indirectly inform and remind consumers about the products and brands they provide. Marketing communications serve as how brand or product owners communicate with consumers, fostering dialogue and cultivating connections (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the other words, marketing communications serve as the means by which brand or product owners communicate with consumers, fostering dialogue and building interactions. The fundamental constituents of marketing communications encompass advertising, promotion of sales, public relations, and individual selling (Todorova & Zhelyazkov, 2021). The utilization of digital technologies to

facilitate these marketing communication activities, is called Digital Marketing (Sihotang et al., 2023). This form of marketing involves creating, communicating, and delivering value to consumers and other stakeholders through digital channels (Mahmud et al., 2022). Digital marketing encompasses a broad spectrum of activities, including online marketing communications, search engine marketing, social media marketing, and campaign-based e-marketing communications (Pramuki & Kusumawati, 2021). It aims to acquire consumers, build preferences, promote brands, nurture relationships, and increase sales through digital platforms (Foroudi et al., 2017). Digital marketing tools are regarded as the most effective means of engaging with clients and ensuring organizational dependability due to their capacity to keep up with the ever-changing demands of customers (Wymbbs, 2011). Digital marketing utilizes a range of promotional actions that are conveyed through digital media (Sundaram et al., 2020). Recently, social media has greatly revolutionized digital media by facilitating a wider distribution of information through the amalgamation of innovation and creativity, particularly in enhancing sharing via social networks. The emergence of social media platforms has revolutionized the way individuals interact and engage with content, allowing for more dynamic and interactive communication channels (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Social media facilitates free interaction among users, providing marketers with diverse avenues to connect with and engage their target audience (Appel et al., 2019). Nowadays, social media has become increasingly popular, massive use of social media is caused by more than 100 million active users using gadgets or smartphones to open apps such as social media (Santoso et al., 2021). According to Sundaram et al. (2020), about 50% of internet users regularly use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and engage with these platforms daily. With the continuous development of social media advertising, there are emerging opportunities that need to be appropriately utilized. Scott Cook, the co-founder of Intuit, states that the success of brands is not determined by the messages companies send to their customers, but rather by the conversations that consumers have with each other. The firm possesses an exclusive authority, which is control over information (Lipsman et al., 2012).

The prevailing digital marketing channel is the influencer marketing technique. Influencers are those who can influence the purchasing decisions and behaviors of others by their power, knowledge, position, or relationship with their audience. (Vrontis et al., 2021). These influencers utilize their trustworthiness, genuineness, and active interaction with their followers to endorse products, services, or concepts in a convincing and relatable way, ultimately impacting customer opinions and behaviors within their specific field or industry. Social media influencers provide brands access to specific audiences, boost brand visibility, and generate engagement and conversions through genuine and tailored content. Nugroho et al., (2022) imply that social media influencers are autonomous experts in the field of social media who have established their brand by demonstrating their trustworthiness and expertise in making and delivering genuine messages

to individuals who follow them. They typically refrain from openly creating advertisements and instead initiate interactions or dialogues within their community. According to Martínez-López et al., (2020), influencers, regarded as micro-celebrities, often engage in paid sponsorships by collaborating with brands and endorsing items and services while sharing their opinions. Social media influencers, or Key Opinion Leaders (KOL), is supposed to disseminate exclusive content to convey it distinctively to their current and potential followers, as suggested by Casaló et al. (2020). Hence, the narrative approach employed by social media influencers facilitates electronic word-of-mouth (e- WOM) on digital platforms, allowing customers to engage in interactive discussions and exchange their thoughts and viewpoints (Zhou et al., 2021).

Consumers make purchasing decisions based on the quality, image, and price of a brand or product (Suhaily & Darmoyo, 2017). It is crucial to consider the brand or item owner's strategy for enticing consumers. According to Leparoux et al. (2019), marketing tactics including influencers have a significant positive relationship with purchase purposes, as they increase the popularity and desirability of a product, shaping consumer behavior and creating lasting impressions. The public's exposure to influencer evaluations fosters curiosity and a strong inclination to acquire the product or brand. A positive purchasing experience has the potential to foster client loyalty. Having a compelling experience enhances consumer trust in the product, leading to repeat purchases and a willingness to share positive feedback with others (Pinto & Paramita, 2021).

## **METHOD**

The chosen research methodology is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is a methodology for building an empirical artifact that transparently codifies and categorizes data on a topic. It can be used for statistical analysis, comparing perspectival differences, synthesizing general themes, and identifying knowledge gaps on a topic. SLR aims to remove subject bias and politics from literature reviews, providing a scientific method for conducting them. It synthesizes published works to establish the present state of knowledge about a topic, informing future efforts in the field (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2023). The literature papers that have been chosen consist of research papers and academic publications. This study approach is used to gather papers that examine the use of influencers as a form of digital advertising using social media channels among Gen Z. This study will also adhere to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) criteria. There are four main stages to the guideline: identification, screening, eligibility for coverage, and inclusion criteria for reports that are pertinent to the problem (Page et al., 2021).

Different approaches were employed to derive the findings of the content analysis in this article. The next step is to ascertain a subject or issue that serves as the origin of keyword searches

for retrieving data from web platforms. The found data sources are then filtered according to standards like publication period, field, and feasibility assessment of study quality. The next stage is collecting data according to predefined standards and then extracting it to examine the applicability of the idea and provide further details on the study results. The English-language journals found follow international academic journal standards. Using keywords like "Digital Marketing" and "Influencer," one searches search engines. The sources that meet the needs of this study are then selected from the search results. Keywords that are used are Generation Z, Social Media, Influencers, and Digital Marketing. Data collecting procedures included carefully choosing academic publications from a wide range of Google Scholars sources after a comprehensive search. The dates for scholarly journal searches are 2020–2024. By doing a search for journals that meet the standards of worldwide quality academic journals and utilizing specific keywords, a total of 17,300 journals were identified. A limitation step was conducted, imposing time limit boundaries, resulting in the identification of 347 journals. Moreover, the selection procedure is conducted based on the scientific field and an evaluation of the research quality in up to 28 journals. Subsequently, 10 journals were chosen based on the research topic and subjected to analysis using the PRISMA Guidelines.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Utilizing Social Media Celebrities as a Method of Online Advertising**

Companies have extensively adopted digital marketing instead of traditional marketing methods to promote their brands and expand their target audience (Dwiandini, 2024). Social media influencer marketing represents the most recent development in digital marketing. Social Media Influencers are individuals who can sway consumer perceptions of companies or products through pictures, videos, and other social media posts (Pawar, 2022). Additionally, Pawar (2022) asserts that the audience reach of influencer marketing surpasses that of traditional marketing methods. Presently, brand proprietors employ social media influencers extensively to promote their products to increase public purchasing interest and sales. Social media has emerged as the preeminent tool for exerting influence over business marketing strategies in the current digital age. As a consequence of trends in word-of-mouth marketing, product marketing utilizing influencers is growing in popularity, according to research conducted by Pawar (2022). Directly, influencers on social media's legitimacy is substantially impacted by factors such as dependability, information quality, and entertainment value; indirectly, it is substantially impacted by the aforementioned variables and consumer purchase intentions. Additionally, the credibility and trustworthiness of an influencer have a direct impact on consumers' inclination to engage in purchases (Pawar, 2022). Social media is utilized by the majority of Gen Z consumers, who also

subscribe to a multitude of social media influencers. According to Ghaly (2023), social media influencers can impact the buying behaviors of their audience through the distribution of sponsored content on social media platforms. An endorsement from influencers fosters a positive perception of the brand, which in turn impacts consumers' inclination to engage in a transaction. In the determination of an influencer's impact, knowledge, fame, and fan base are some of the determinants. Pawar 2022 demonstrates that influencers can be utilized efficaciously to reach Generation Z.

Social media influencers can increase Generation Z's interest in a product by highlighting the advantages and appeal of the product to their interests and way of life. According to a study conducted by Hazari and Sethna (2023), the purchasing behavior of Generation Z is substantially influenced by their attention and attitude. Thus, the utilization of social media influencers whose aesthetic preferences and areas of interest align with those of Generation Z can impact their purchasing behavior. By cultivating a positive consumer attitude, specifically among Generation Z, towards advertising via social media influencers, the brand proprietor can enhance consumers' engagement and focus on the advertisement. Consequently, this will improve the effectiveness of the message being communicated (Hazari & Sethna, 2023). Customers in Generation Z view social media influencers as more relevant. Additionally, using social media influencers in digital marketing is thought to be more authentic from a marketing and advertising perspective than digital marketing communications and advertising that do not make use of social media influencers (Munsch, 2021). Munsch (2021) found that social media influencers can improve Generation Z consumers' attention spans when it comes to digital advertising stimuli. Social media influencers can also help members of Generation Z understand new information in advertisements, which will improve their sense of relevance and authenticity.

### **The Impact of Social Media Influencers on the Purchasing Behavior of Generation Z**

The study conducted by Chiu and Ho (2023) highlights seven managerial effects that business owners should take into account to maximize the utilization of Social Media Influencers and effectively interact with the Gen Z consumer. The first consequences suggest that trademark holders need to comprehend how Social Media Influencers establish a strong emotional connection with Generation Z, as this is crucial for devising successful advertising on social media platforms plan. An additional implication is that brand owners should employ neighborhood influencers or ethnic/cultural institutions that are in line with the target customers of Generation Z to efficiently convey their objectives.

The third inference is that brand proprietors must possess the capability to modify the substance provided by Social Media Influencers to Generation Z consumers by utilizing superior

content creation to enhance buying decisions. Fourth, company owners need to select social media influencers that are incredibly attractive physically. Ghaly (2023) has posited that influencers with a considerable amount of attractiveness are more inclined to influence their followers' desire to make a purchase. Ghaly (2023) further demonstrates that influencers possessing appealing attributes can positively impact the purchasing intentions of their clients. Owners of brands should meticulously choose suitable Social Media influencers to promote their goods, as the celebrity's reputation can have a substantial effect on the brand's image (Dwiandini, 2024).

The brand owner must prioritize the selection of reliable and knowledgeable influencers who can effectively communicate product-related information is the fifth important implication. Building trust in the expertise of influencers is essential for the efficacy of marketing campaigns aimed at Generation Z. The key components of the perceived credibility of influencers on social media encompass trustworthiness, competence, beauty, and resemblance. The trustworthiness of social media influencers is significantly influenced by these variables (Balaban & Maria, 2019). However, credibility assessments on social media often display bias, and the presence of fake feedback is a result of deliberate manipulation of online reviews. Review manipulation involves a deliberate and controlled injection of false information targeting several people at the same time, with the intent to deceive or mislead individuals (Sumeet & Ansari, 2021). To efficiently exert influence over Gen Z followers, influencers must be seen as trusted voices of authority on specific topics, providing valuable information to their followers (Rust et al., 2022). The credibility of an influencer significantly impacts the way consumers perceive their honesty, sincerity, and truthfulness, which are crucial factors in influencing their desire to make a purchase (Alyahya, 2021).

To increase the likelihood of consumers purchasing their products, brand owners should choose influencers that have a profound emotional bond with Generation Z. This can include well-known public personalities or celebrities who enjoy widespread support from this particular group. Moreover, brand owners can give priority to particular marketing operations following their support goals, which allows them to acquire a more thorough comprehension of Gen Z's viewpoints regarding the items they endorse. According to a study conducted by Zatwarnicka-Madura et al. (2022), Social Media Influencers have a substantial impact on the behavior and purchase intention of Generation Z customers. Purchase intention is a metric that gauges the inclination of consumers to purchase a particular product or service. Social media influencers exert a substantial impact on the purchasing intentions of Generation Z. The utilization of Social Media Influencers can be regarded as a viable tactic to captivate the attention of Generation Z, provided that the selected influencer possesses not only an appealing physical appearance but also a substantial level of credibility. In their study, Nugroho et al. (2022) found that competence has a strong and beneficial impact on the purchasing interest of Generation Z. Additionally, they

concluded that credibility plays the most influential role in shaping the buying interest of Generation Z. The trustworthiness of an influencer directly and significantly impacts the purchasing intentions of Generation Z. According to Nugroho et al. (2022), attractiveness is a key factor in determining the credibility of an influencer, and it has a strong impact on the brand image of the endorsed product. The study conducted by Pinto and Paramita (2021) found that social media influencers have a substantial impact on the loyalty of Generation Z towards a business. Generation Z is characterized by a propensity for rapid boredom. However, when presented with something more distinctive, they have the potential to become devoted patrons. The study conducted by Pham et al. (2021) shows that influencer characteristics, such as credibility, knowledge, and elegance, significantly impact the information they convey, including the level of arguments, accessibility, and impact. Furthermore, these characteristics exert a beneficial influence on the mindsets and behaviors of Generation Z about product acquisition.

### **The Paradox of Employing Social Media Influencers in Generation Z**

On the other hand, there are varying viewpoints within Generation Z on the use of Social Media by Influential individuals, which primarily depend on brand management. The study conducted by Pradhan et al. (2023) explores the factors contributing to Generation Z's hesitancy in trusting Social Media Influencers as a dependable source when making decisions about products. They consider influencers who upload content on behalf of a brand as deceptive since it may be seen as leveraging economic opportunities in a deceitful and unethical way. Moreover, this goes against the anticipated beliefs of Generation Z regarding influencers, who are seen as genuine creators of material that are not dependent on marketing instructions.

To avoid Gen Z's rejection of a product based on influencer uploads, it is recommended that brand owners avoid exercising considerable authority over celebrity posts while addressing Gen Z. Using social media allows for the establishment of a link between an influencer and customers. Therefore, companies must give priority to creating networks that revolve around creative and imaginative informal connections (Pradhan et al., 2023). Companies should adapt their social media influencer marketing strategy to target Generation Z, as this demographic is known for being more skeptical of covert advertising and more aware of a brand's impact on influencers and product-related content. Hence, companies must recognize that their credibility and the credibility of the influencers they collaborate with are more important than any commercial objectives (Pradhan et al., 2023).

### **CONCLUSION**

The study conducted a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to gather many journal papers on the utilization of Social Media Influencers and their implementation in digital marketing

strategies for Generation Z. This study examines prior research and concludes that in the current digital age, the utilization of Social Media Influencers has a substantial influence on the outcomes of brand marketing. In the current age of technology, social media platforms are fiercely competing to gain users' attention.

Additionally, Generation Z users have a limited attention span and desire to engage with a large amount of content. As a result, brand owners must acknowledge the potential benefits of marketing promotions and advertisements in the media, which can ultimately enhance their return on investment. Social media influencers have the ability to shape the opinions of Generation Z, a demographic that is highly connected to social media platforms. Utilizing Social Media Influencers as a method of digital advertising offers numerous benefits for brand owners in terms of enhancing brand recognition and generating purchasing enthusiasm among Generation Z consumers. This can foster brand loyalty among Generation Z, due to the fact that repeat buying of the same brand can lead to brand commitment, which contributes significantly to brand loyalty according to research findings (Rizwan et al., 2014). It is common for members of Generation Z to purchase things after reading evaluations written by influencers, particularly those influencers that they already trust and who have a high level of reputation for a particular product.

Generation Z will demonstrate their allegiance and will not even hesitate to recommend and discuss the information with those who are closest to them if the information that is provided by the influencer is up to the standards that they have always expected. On the other hand, when it comes to the utilization of social media influencers, it is anticipated that brand owners will pay attention to and appreciate the influencer's honesty and innovation in the products that are going to be manufactured and sold. Influencers who are overly dependent on a company and who exclusively rely on orders and control from that brand are a sign of dishonesty and insincerity, according to Generation Z, which is a generation that is well-versed in social media. This leads to the notion that the Social Media Influencer is solely interested in gaining financial advantages, resulting in a lack of trust and negative opinions among consumers. Further study could be undertaken to explore the utilization of Social Media Influencers in enhancing brand reputation through the implementation of a digital marketing strategy targeting Generation Z.

In the future, the application of the Digital Marketing concept will not solely prioritize boosting sales, awareness, and purchase intentions among brand owners' target audience, specifically generation

Z. It can also be utilized to enhance the reputation of a brand that previously suffered from a negative image and lack of public trust. Future study is anticipated to deliver rigorous studies utilizing quantitative methodologies that are grounded in industrial data and may be subjected to thorough validity testing. Further research is needed to determine the efficacy of utilizing Social Media Influencers as a digital marketing approach for Generation Z in the digital age.

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