

Research Article

## Disruption as a Kairos Moment Rethinking the Role of Christian Education in Fostering a Biblically-Grounded yet Compassionate Sexual Ethic

A Dan Kia <sup>1\*</sup>, Gilbert Timothy Majesty <sup>2</sup>, Novalyn Olly Tuegeh<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Kristen Indonesia; Email: [dan.kia@uki.ac.id](mailto:dan.kia@uki.ac.id)\*

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Kristen Indonesia; Email: [gilbert.majesty@uki.ac.id](mailto:gilbert.majesty@uki.ac.id)

<sup>3</sup> Sekolah Tinggi Teologi IKSM Santosa Asih; Email: [novalynolly@gmail.com](mailto:novalynolly@gmail.com)

\*Correspondence: A Dan Kia

**Abstract:** The disruptive era, characterized by rapid technological advancement, shifting social paradigms, and the globalization of ideas, presents a profound challenge to Christian Education, particularly in the realm of sexual ethics. The pervasive visibility of the LGBT phenomenon often creates a reactive response within Christian communities, leading to a perceived dichotomy between upholding biblical authority and extending Christ-like compassion. This article argues that this disruption should not be viewed merely as a threat but recognized as a Kairos moment a critical and opportune time for theological and pedagogical renewal. Employing a methodology of theological reflection and conceptual analysis, this study explores how Christian educators can move beyond polarized debates to reconceive their role. It proposes a framework for fostering a sexual ethic that is simultaneously biblically grounded and pastorally compassionate. This involves a deliberate rethinking of pedagogical approaches that engage students in critical dialogue with both Scripture and contemporary culture. The article contends that an authentic biblical ethic is not merely about prohibition but about forming disciples who understand God's design for human flourishing, relationships, and sexuality. By seizing this Kairos moment, Christian Education can empower students to navigate a complex world with convictional clarity and empathetic grace, thereby transforming a challenge into a catalyst for a more holistic, effective, and faithful ministry.

**Keywords:** Christian Education; Disruptive Era; Kairos Moment; LGBT; Sexual Ethics

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### 1. Introduction

The opening decades of the 21st century have been defined by a pervasive and accelerating state of disruption. This era, propelled by the digital revolution, the democratization of information, and the rapid globalization of culture, has left no sphere of human existence untouched. (Kellner, 2021) Within this maelstrom of change, educational and religious institutions find themselves on unstable ground, grappling with paradigms that challenge centuries-old traditions and beliefs. Nowhere is this tension more acutely felt than in the realm of Christian Education, particularly when it confronts complex and deeply personal issues of human sexuality and identity. The increasing visibility and social acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals represent one of the most significant socio-cultural shifts of our time, creating a formidable challenge for Christian educators who seek to be both faithful to their theological convictions and compassionate in their pastoral practice. This article posits that the current disruptive moment should not be perceived merely as a crisis to be weathered, but rather as a Kairos moment a concept in Christian theology denoting a critical, appointed time of opportunity and divine purpose that

calls for a profound rethinking of the role of Christian Education in fostering a sexual ethic that is both biblically grounded and authentically compassionate.

The phenomenon is global in scale yet intensely local in its impact. In educational settings ranging from Sunday schools to Christian universities, educators and students alike are navigating a landscape where traditional biblical interpretations on sexuality and gender collide with contemporary understandings and lived experiences. Data from sociological studies, such as those conducted by the Pew Research Center, consistently show a growing generational divide within religious communities, with younger cohorts demonstrating significantly greater acceptance of LGBT rights compared to their elders. (Barringer & Savage, 2022) This generational schism is not merely a statistical trend; it manifests in the classroom as a palpable disconnect. Students are often embedded in a digital ecosystem where diverse identities are normalized, while the official stance of their religious institutions can feel anachronistic or even harmful. This dissonance can lead to pastoral crises, including internalized shame among LGBT students, alienation from faith communities, and a broader exodus of young people who perceive Christianity as fundamentally hostile to their understanding of love and justice. (McCue-Napoli, 2024) The disruptive force of this cultural shift is thus not an abstract theory but a daily reality, pressuring Christian Education to evolve or risk irrelevance.

Previous research has extensively documented various facets of this challenge. A significant body of literature, exemplified by the work of scholars like Mark Yarhouse, has focused on the psychological and pastoral dimensions, exploring models for navigating sexual identity within a conservative Christian framework. (Yarhouse et al., 2018) His concept of "identity congruence" provides a valuable therapeutic lens. Other studies have critically analyzed the theological debates surrounding specific biblical passages used in discussions about homosexuality, with scholars like James V. Brownson offering re-examinations of traditional interpretations. (Brownson, 2013) Furthermore, a growing corpus of research addresses the impact of digital media on religious formation, highlighting how online platforms can both undermine traditional religious authority and create alternative communities for spiritual and identity exploration.

However, a critical gap persists in the existing literature. While many studies excel in either theological deconstruction or pastoral application, and others address the technological aspects of disruption, there is a scarcity of work that integrates these strands into a cohesive educational framework. (Ugboh, 2023) Much of the research operates within a reactive paradigm, seeking to "solve" the problem of LGBT inclusion or resistance. There is a lack of conceptual models that fundamentally reframe the challenge itself that see this period of disruption not as a problem to be solved, but as a providential opportunity to rediscover the core mission of Christian Education. Previous research often remains siloed, with theologians, educators, and pastoral caregivers speaking in parallel conversations. What is missing is a strategic vision that leverages the conceptual tool of Kairos to synthesize theological integrity, pedagogical innovation, and pastoral compassion into a renewed mandate for Christian formation in a pluralistic world.

The theoretical underpinning of this article is drawn from a synthesis of two primary domains. First, we employ the theological concept of Kairos, as developed in biblical scholarship and prophetic theology. Unlike chronological time (chronos), Kairos refers to a decisive, opportune moment that demands a response and offers the potential for transformation. (G. C. B. Williams, 2024) This lens allows us to interpret the current disruptions not as chaos, but as a divinely permitted context for purification and renewal of educational praxis. Second, we engage with contemporary educational theory, particularly the work on transformative learning by Jack Mezirow. (Mezirow, 2015) Transformative learning theory, which emphasizes the process of critically reflecting on and revising one's assumptions and perspectives, provides a robust pedagogical framework for navigating value conflicts and shifting worldviews. (Chasokela, 2025) It moves education beyond rote knowledge transmission towards facilitating deep, personal paradigm shifts a capacity essential for addressing the complex issue of sexual ethics.

The novelty of this research, therefore, lies in its integrative and reframing approach. It does not seek to propose a new theological position on sexuality, but rather to propose a new educational posture towards the entire conversation. The novelty is threefold: (1) the application of the specific theological motif of Kairos to analyze the socio-technological disruption facing Christian Education; (2) the deliberate synthesis of this theological framework with the pedagogical principles of transformative learning; and (3) the subsequent development of a conceptual model for an ethical framework that holds biblical grounding

and radical compassion not as a paradox to be managed, but as two indispensable pillars of a holistic Christian formation. This approach moves beyond the well-trodden paths of debate and instead focuses on the how we teach, how we form community, and how we prepare faithful disciples for thoughtful engagement with the world.

The primary aim of this article is to articulate and defend a reconceived role for Christian Education in light of the Kairos moment presented by the disruptive era, with a specific focus on sexual ethics. This overarching aim can be broken down into several specific objectives: first, to delineate the ways in which technological and cultural disruption creates a unique challenge and opportunity for Christian formation; second, to critically synthesize relevant theological (Kairos) and educational (Transformative Learning) theories into a coherent analytical lens; third, to identify the limitations of reactive or dichotomous approaches currently prevalent in many Christian educational contexts; and finally, to propose a constructive framework for a biblically-grounded yet compassionate sexual ethic, outlining its core principles and potential pedagogical applications. By pursuing these objectives, this study aspires to contribute a timely and strategic resource for educators, theologians, and church leaders committed to guiding the next generation with both truth and grace.

## 2. Proposed Method

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing a literature analysis approach to construct its theoretical framework and argument. The primary methodology involves a systematic and critical engagement with a wide spectrum of scholarly sources to explore the central research problem. (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006) This entails a thorough review of key texts within three interconnected domains: Christian theology, specifically works focusing on the concept of Kairos and theological ethics; educational theory, with an emphasis on transformative learning models and pedagogical responses to cultural shifts; and contemporary sociological and theological literature addressing the intersection of Christianity, sexuality, and gender identity. The process is not merely descriptive but analytical and integrative. The researcher will critically synthesize these diverse bodies of literature, identifying convergent insights, points of tension, and theoretical gaps. (Suri & Clarke, 2009) This synthesis allows for the conceptual triangulation necessary to build a coherent and robust argument. The aim is to construct a novel theoretical proposition by weaving together these distinct threads, ultimately leading to the development of a conceptual framework for a reimagined Christian educational ethic. Therefore, this method of literature analysis serves as the foundational tool for both critical reflection and constructive theological-educational proposal, enabling a deep exploration of how Christian education can navigate the challenges of the disruptive era. (Yeung, 2025).

## 3. Results and Discussion

### Deconstructing the Dichotomy: Beyond a Binary of Condemnation versus Affirmation

The landscape of Christian Education, when confronted with the topic of LGBT identities, has long been dominated by a seemingly intractable binary. On one end of the spectrum lies the pole of condemnation, an approach that prioritizes the articulation of doctrinal boundaries regarding sexual conduct, often framed exclusively through the lens of sin and prohibition. On the opposite end rests the pole of affirmation, which, in its desire to be inclusive and compassionate, often sets aside or reinterprets traditional biblical teachings to fully validate LGBT identities and relationships. (Grenz, 1998) This forced choice between what is perceived as "truth" and "love" has created a paralyzing framework for educators and students alike, fostering environments of fear, alienation, or theological confusion. However, a critical examination reveals that this pervasive dichotomy is a false one, a simplistic construct that fails to capture the richness, complexity, and ultimately the gospel-centered nature of a truly Christian ethic. Deconstructing this binary is the essential first step toward fostering an educational approach that is both biblically faithful and pastorally compassionate.

The pole of condemnation, while often rooted in a sincere desire to uphold biblical authority, frequently devolves into a reductionist ethic. In this model, the entirety of the conversation about human sexuality is collapsed into a narrow set of "clobber passages" aimed primarily at denouncing specific acts. This approach suffers from several critical flaws. Pedagogically, it reduces Christian education to legalism, focusing on external compliance rather than the internal transformation of the heart that is central to the gospel. It often ignores the vast biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, which

provides a much broader context for understanding human identity and relationships. Furthermore, it routinely neglects the lived experiences of LGBT individuals, reducing them to their sexuality and overlooking their whole personhood as image-bearers of God.(Nolasco, 2019) The result is an educational environment where students learn to recite positions but are not equipped to engage with the underlying theological reasons or the human complexity involved, ultimately failing to form disciples who can think critically and love deeply.

Conversely, the pole of affirmation, driven by a laudable impulse to combat the real harms of exclusion and rejection, often adopts a hermeneutic of suspicion toward the biblical text. To achieve inclusivity, it may set aside the consistent witness of Scripture across both testaments regarding sexual morality, or it may reinterpret these passages in ways that can feel dismissive of their historical and traditional understanding.(Koltun-Fromm, 2010) While this approach successfully creates a more immediately welcoming space, it risks emptying Christian Education of its distinctive theological content. If the teachings of the Bible can be set aside when they conflict with contemporary cultural sensibilities, then the foundation of the educational project shifts from divine revelation to human experience as the ultimate authority.(Pollefeyt & Bieringer, 2005) This creates a different form of discipleship, one that may be compassionate but lacks the convicting and transformative power that comes from engaging with the full counsel of God, including its challenging parts.

The path forward, therefore, lies not in choosing a side within this false binary, but in deconstructing the binary itself. The gospel of Jesus Christ consistently shatters our human-made categories. In Jesus, we see the perfect embodiment of both unwavering truth and radical grace. He confronted sin with absolute clarity while simultaneously offering compassion and fellowship to those marginalized by the religious establishment of his day. He affirmed the dignity of the person without always affirming their actions. This is the model for Christian Education. It calls for an ethic that refuses to separate what God has joined together: truth and love. This means moving beyond a simple "condemnation vs. affirmation" framework to a more robust paradigm of "conviction and care." It requires creating educational spaces where the historic Christian sexual ethic can be taught with clarity and theological depth, while also cultivating a culture of grace, empathy, and pastoral support that walks alongside individuals in their complexities and struggles.(Pratt, 2024)

The dichotomy between condemnation and affirmation is a theological and pedagogical dead end. It misrepresents the gospel and fails to prepare students for thoughtful engagement in a complex world. By deconstructing this binary, Christian educators can embrace a more holistic vision. This vision calls for holding firm to biblical conviction while extending Christ-like compassion, understanding that true faithfulness involves doing both simultaneously. It is only by moving beyond this polarized thinking that Christian Education can hope to form disciples who are both courageously faithful to Scripture and irresistibly loving toward their neighbor, thus faithfully responding to the Kairos moment before us.

### **Kairos as a Theological Lens: Reframing Disruption as Divine Opportunity**

In the face of rapid societal transformation, particularly regarding sexuality and identity, Christian communities often experience disruption as a threat a force that erodes tradition and destabilizes long-held beliefs. This defensive posture, while understandable, reflects a limited chronological understanding of time, what the Greeks termed *chronos*.(Hartog, 2022) However, the Christian tradition offers a more profound framework for interpreting such pivotal moments: the concept of *Kairos*.(Boer, 2013) Far more than mere sequential time, *Kairos* signifies a critical juncture, a decisive moment of opportunity appointed by God for judgment and grace, for challenge and renewal. When viewed through this theological lens, the disruptive pressures of our era including the complex challenges posed by LGBT visibility are transfigured from a crisis to be managed into a divine summons for the purification and revitalization of Christian Education.

The biblical narrative is punctuated by such *Kairos* moments. The Exodus was not merely a historical event but a *Kairos* moment where God intervened to redefine the identity and destiny of His people.(Kass, 2021) The Babylonian exile, a period of profound national and theological disruption, forced Israel to reimagine its worship and identity apart from the temple, leading to a deepening of its scriptural tradition.(Chirayath, 2021) Most significantly, the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the ultimate *Kairos*, the "fullness of time" where God entered human history, shattering existing paradigms of power, purity, and redemption.(Rausch, 2012) In each instance, the comfortable status quo was shattered not as an end in itself, but as the necessary precondition for a more profound understanding of

God's will and a more faithful mode of existence. The disruption was not a sign of God's absence, but rather the context for His most powerful revelations and interventions.

Applying this lens to the current context of Christian Education reveals the poverty of a merely reactive stance. An approach that seeks only to "defend the truth" against cultural shifts operates in a *chronos* mentality, fighting a rearguard action against the relentless tide of time. In contrast, a *Kairos* perspective asks a different set of questions: What is God saying to the Church through this cultural moment? Where have we conflated cultural tradition with biblical truth? How is the Spirit calling us to a more authentic and compelling expression of discipleship? The pervasive visibility of LGBT individuals, for instance, presents a *Kairos* moment not primarily about sexuality, but about theology and pedagogy. (Albano, 2022) It forces a re-examination of how we read Scripture, how we form disciples in a post-Christian world, and whether our communities truly reflect the radical hospitality of Jesus without compromising the call to holiness.

This reframing is fundamentally missional. It understands that disruption creates an unprecedented opening for the gospel to speak with fresh relevance. When Christian Education embraces this *Kairos*, it moves from a fortress mentality to a prophetic and pastoral vocation. It becomes an opportunity to critique the individualism and fluid identities offered by the broader culture while simultaneously critiquing the self-righteousness and legalism that can infect the Church. It is a moment to recover a robust theology of personhood rooted in the *Imago Dei*, which grants inherent dignity to every individual, regardless of their beliefs or struggles. (Howard, 2013) This approach does not pre-determine the outcomes of ethical deliberations, but it ensures they are conducted in a spirit of expectant faith, trusting that the same God who spoke in past moments of crisis is speaking now.

Ultimately, to see disruption as *Kairos* is an act of hope. It confesses that God remains sovereign over history, even its most chaotic chapters. For Christian educators, this transforms anxiety into purpose. The challenge is no longer about survival, but about stewardship how to faithfully respond to this appointed time. It calls for a pedagogy that is both rooted and responsive, one that forms students not to fear the world, but to engage it with theological depth and compassionate courage, confident that even in the midst of upheaval, God is at work, offering not a problem to be solved, but a divine opportunity to be seized.

### **Principles for a Biblically-Grounded and Compassionate Sexual Ethic**

Navigating the complex terrain of human sexuality within Christian Education requires a robust framework that transcends simplistic rules and embraces both theological fidelity and deep compassion. Moving beyond the unhelpful dichotomy of condemnation versus affirmation necessitates the construction of a positive sexual ethic, one that is not merely defined by prohibition but is guided by a clear set of foundational principles. Such an ethic must be biblically grounded, drawing its authority and shape from the grand narrative of Scripture, while simultaneously being pastorally compassionate, reflecting the heart of Christ in its engagement with human complexity. (Hans, 2024) The development of this ethic rests upon several interdependent pillars that together form a cohesive vision for discipleship in this sensitive area of life.

The first and foremost principle is a commitment to a Christocentric hermeneutic. (Peppler, 2012) This means interpreting the Bible's specific passages on sexuality through the primary lens of Jesus' life, teachings, death, and resurrection. Rather than isolating "clobber passages," a Christocentric approach places them in conversation with Jesus' radical teachings on lust and adultery in the Sermon on the Mount, his gracious encounters with marginalized individuals, and his overarching commands to love God and neighbor. This principle prioritizes the trajectory of the gospel redemption, reconciliation, and restoration over a purely legalistic application of the law. It asks not only, "What is prohibited?" but more importantly, "What does the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaim and make possible for human flourishing in the context of our sexuality?" This ensures that our ethic is distinctly Christian, centered on the person and work of Christ, rather than a generic moralism.

Building upon this, a second principle involves recentering the focus from mere behavior modification to holistic discipleship and identity formation. A reductionist ethic focuses almost exclusively on sexual acts. (Carmody, 2003) A more robust biblical ethic understands sexuality as a powerful dimension of personhood that is integrated into the broader call to follow Jesus. The primary question for the disciple shifts from "What am I allowed to do?" to "Who am I becoming in Christ?" This framework anchors identity not in

sexual orientation or desire, but in the foundational realities of being a creature made in the Imago Dei, a sinner redeemed by grace, and a member of the body of Christ. This principle makes room for a pastoral approach that acknowledges the ongoing struggle and journey of every believer, fostering a community where all regardless of their particular struggles are called toward the same goal of Christlikeness.

Third, this ethic must actively distinguish between condemnation and conviction, and between affirmation and compassion. These are not semantic differences but crucial pastoral distinctions. Condemnation rejects the person; conviction, orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, lovingly highlights sin as a barrier to flourishing and relationship with God. Similarly, affirmation explicitly endorses a belief or behavior; compassion extends unconditional love, dignity, and fellowship to a person without necessarily endorsing all aspects of their beliefs or lifestyle. This principle allows a Christian community to uphold a traditional biblical sexual ethic while absolutely rejecting homophobia or transphobia. It creates space to extend genuine friendship, support, and pastoral care to LGBT individuals, walking with them in their journey without demanding that they "have it all figured out" before being welcomed into fellowship. (K. Williams, 2021)

A biblically-grounded and compassionate sexual ethic is inherently communal and eschatological. It recognizes that the journey of discipleship, including sexual discipleship, is not meant to be walked alone but within the supportive, challenging, and grace-filled context of the church community. Furthermore, it lives in the tension of the "already but not yet" of God's kingdom. It acknowledges the "already" of redemption and the power of the Spirit for holiness, while also extending grace for the "not yet" of ongoing sanctification and the lingering effects of a fallen world. This final principle infuses the entire endeavor with hope, patience, and humility, pointing toward the future restoration of all things, where our identities will be fully realized in the direct presence of Christ.

### **Pedagogical Implications: Transforming Christian Education Practice**

The theological reconception of disruption as a Kairos moment and the subsequent framework for a biblically-grounded, compassionate sexual ethic remain abstract ideals unless they are incarnated within the lived practice of Christian Education. (Kasper, 2011) This demands a deliberate and courageous pedagogical shift, moving from a paradigm of information transmission to one of transformative formation. The classroom must become a laboratory for faith, where students are not merely told what to believe but are equipped to navigate complexity with theological depth, intellectual virtue, and Christ-like compassion. This transformation hinges on reimagining the educator's role, the learning environment, and the very tools used for discipleship in a digital age.

Firstly, the educator's role must evolve from that of a doctrinal gatekeeper to a facilitator of theological dialogue. The traditional model, where the teacher deposits information into passive students, is ill-suited for engaging a generation steeped in a culture of questioning and diverse perspectives. Instead, pedagogies must foster critical engagement. This involves employing Socratic questioning, analyzing case studies, and facilitating structured discussions where students interact with Scripture, tradition, and contemporary voices. (Brooke, 2006) For instance, rather than simply presenting the church's position on homosexuality, an educator might guide students through a respectful analysis of different hermeneutical approaches to key biblical texts, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each. This process cultivates intellectual ownership of faith, empowering students to articulate and defend their convictions rather than merely parroting received answers. It honors the Kairos moment by treating the classroom as a space where the Holy Spirit can speak through the collective search for truth, preparing students for a lifetime of faithful engagement with a changing world.

Secondly, the creation of a psychologically and spiritually safe space is a non-negotiable precondition for this transformative work. Discussions on sexuality and identity are deeply personal and potentially triggering. (Evans, 2013) If students fear judgment, shaming, or having their doubts dismissed, genuine learning ceases. The educator must therefore intentionally cultivate an environment of grace, explicitly establishing ground rules for respectful dialogue and modeling humility and vulnerability. This means listening actively and empathetically before responding theologically. When a student shares a personal struggle or expresses a viewpoint at odds with church teaching, the initial response must be one of pastoral care that affirms their inherent dignity as an image-bearer of God. This safe space is not an abdication of truth but the essential relational context in which truth can be

received.(Anderson, 2021) It reflects the Kairos ethic of compassion, ensuring that the classroom functions as a community of fellow pilgrims, not a courtroom.

Finally, a transformed pedagogy must proactively integrate digital literacy and a positive vision for human flourishing. The disruptive era is defined by the digital ecosystem, where students encounter a constant stream of competing narratives about identity. Christian Education cannot afford to be silent or reactionary. It must equip students to be discerning digital citizens by teaching them to critically deconstruct media messages, identify underlying worldviews, and understand the power of digital algorithms. This is a proactive form of discipleship. Concurrently, the curriculum must compellingly present the Christian narrative of sexuality not as a list of prohibitions, but as a positive and beautiful vision for human relationships within God's design.(Balswick & Balswick, 2008) By inviting students into this grand story of creation, redemption, and purpose, educators can provide a more attractive and fulfilling alternative to the fragmented identities offered by the culture, seizing the Kairos moment to offer a hope that is both true and deeply humanizing.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study has argued that the contemporary disruptive era, particularly regarding shifting sexual ethics and the visibility of LGBT identities, should be interpreted not as a mere threat but as a catalytic Kairos moment for Christian Education. The analysis began by deconstructing the prevalent and unhelpful dichotomy that pits biblical fidelity against compassionate practice, demonstrating how this binary has often led to either rigid dogmatism or a loss of theological conviction. Through the application of a Kairos lens, the disruption was reframed as a divine summons for renewal, challenging educators to seize this opportunity for deep reflection and change. In response, the article proposed a constructive framework for a sexual ethic that is simultaneously biblically grounded and profoundly compassionate, built on principles such as Christocentric interpretation, a focus on discipleship, and radical grace. Finally, these theological and ethical foundations were translated into concrete pedagogical implications, advocating for transformative learning models, digital literacy, and the creation of safe spaces for authentic dialogue. Ultimately, the task before Christian Education is to navigate a path of faithful innovation. This requires moving beyond reactive postures and embracing a proactive, integrative approach that holds truth and love in dynamic tension. The proposed ethic is not a compromise but a call to a more holistic and robust faithfulness—one that takes both Scripture and the human experience with utmost seriousness. By embracing this Kairos moment, Christian educators can transform their practice to foster a generation of disciples who are not only convictional in their beliefs but also empathetic, wise, and graceful in their engagement with a complex world. This is the promise of a Christian Education that is truly resilient and redemptive, capable of speaking with both relevance and eternal significance into the hearts and minds of this generation.

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