



CULTURE & TRENDS REPORT

THE NEXT GENERATION OF CREATIVITY

A Maximalist Moment Reshaping Culture



NEW GENERATION, NEW CREATIVE LANGUAGE

While the tastes of young people have always impacted pop culture, today's teens are more likely to consider themselves creators, and they possess an unprecedented influence over what we watch and share online. Their digital literacy makes them not just informed consumers, but also adept creators and curators of content reflecting their interests and worldview. This heightened literacy has given them a profound level of influence, leading to the emergence of an often dismissed maximalist aesthetic.

This Creative Maximalism represents a new language of the next generation of creativity.

To learn more about this next generation of creativity, the YouTube Culture & Trends team researched hundreds of the past year's trends from the world's top markets and ran surveys with SmithGeiger, asking thousands of people about their interests and attitudes towards the internet. Respondents were people who are active online, age 14-49.

In the USA, 66% of 14- to 24-year-olds agree that people their age have a big impact on what people talk about online vs. less than half of adults (online 25- to 49-year-olds) surveyed.

Belief in Online Impact

Gen Z
(14-24 yrs)

66%

Adults
(25-49 yrs)

49%

Source: Google/SmithGeiger, YouTube Trends Survey, US April 2025, N = 500 online Gen Z age 14-24; N = 500 online people age 25-49.

NEW GENERATION, NEW FRAMES OF REFERENCE

As YouTube turns 20 this year, a generation of teens has arrived who are the first to grow up in today's borderless, fully customizable, and participatory media environment. This environment can best be understood through a framework of the phenomena they were born after: post-"Gangnam Style," post-Minecraft, post-YouTube.

57%

14- to 24-year-olds agree that they have been more excited to see new content from creators than new TV shows or movies.

Source: Google/SmithGeiger, YouTube Trends Survey, US April 2025, N=500 online Gen Z age 14-24.

THE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT TODAY'S TEENS OCCUPY

YouTube and today's teens developed in parallel. Their cultural literacy is built on YouTube's ecosystem of creator-driven trends, iterative content cycles, and direct audience relationships. Its formats are as native to them as TV and film genres were to prior generations. Video is where teens turn first to find content that reflects their taste and experiences.



As **Minecraft** and **Roblox** became the world's most popular games, today's teens slipped free of traditional narrative constraints. These open-world environments fostered social connection and creativity by letting players experiment without set objectives. Ultimately, this generation developed an expectation of participation and agency within their entertainment, blurring the line between consumer and creator.



@minecraft

17.1M Subscribers



@officialpsy

20M Subscribers

The youngest teen was born the same year that "**Gangnam Style**" became a one-of-a-kind global smash. The global obsession that it sparked heralded a coming generational shift where foreign language and culture would become selling points rather than barriers for cultural phenomena. With easy access to the world's entertainment, an appetite for non-local content is now the norm.



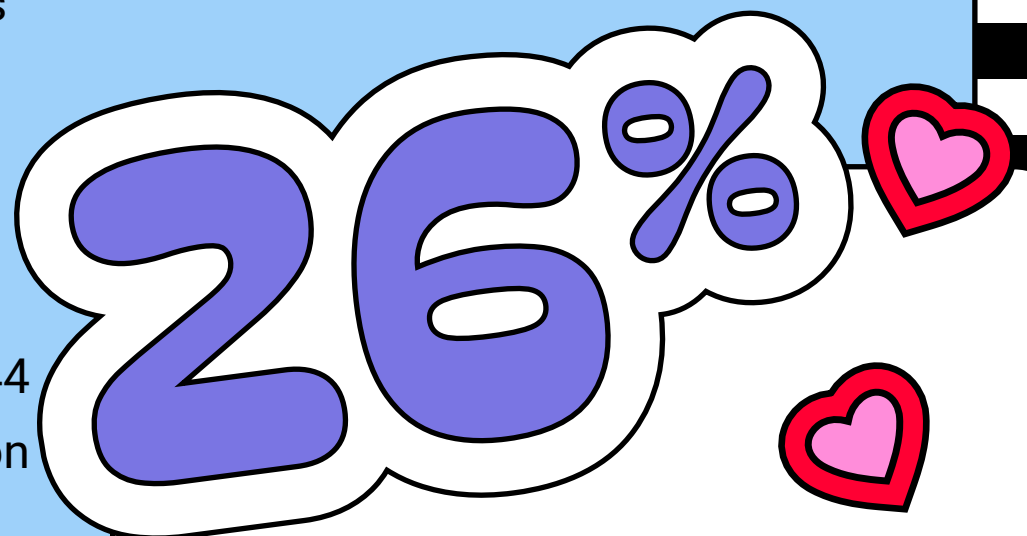
OLD FRAMES OF REFERENCE RECEDE

For a generation that largely considers itself video creators¹ and who seek to be engaged fans, traditional media is decreasingly relevant to their daily lives.

Evidence of this decline is found in Deloitte's 2025 Digital Media Trends study, where Gen Z was found to "spend 54% more time-or about 50 minutes more-than the average consumer per day on social platforms and watching UGC; and 26% less time-or about 44 minutes less per day-than the average person watching TV and movies." In fact, video games, social media, and video platforms dominated the time they spent with media².

NRG's "Growing Pains" study offers a potential why for this behavioral shift. In their research, they found that less than one-third of young people felt that traditional media did a good job of depicting social media, video games, school, and family – essentially their entire world³.

With traditional media failing to adequately reflect the world and interests of teens, today's teens are filling that void, the first to grow up primarily watching content created and curated by other young people.



26%

Gen Z spend 26% less time watching TV and movies compared to the average person.

Source: Deloitte, 2025 Digital Media Trends: 19th Edition (March 2025), 2025, <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/digital-media-trends-consumption-habits-survey/2025.html>.

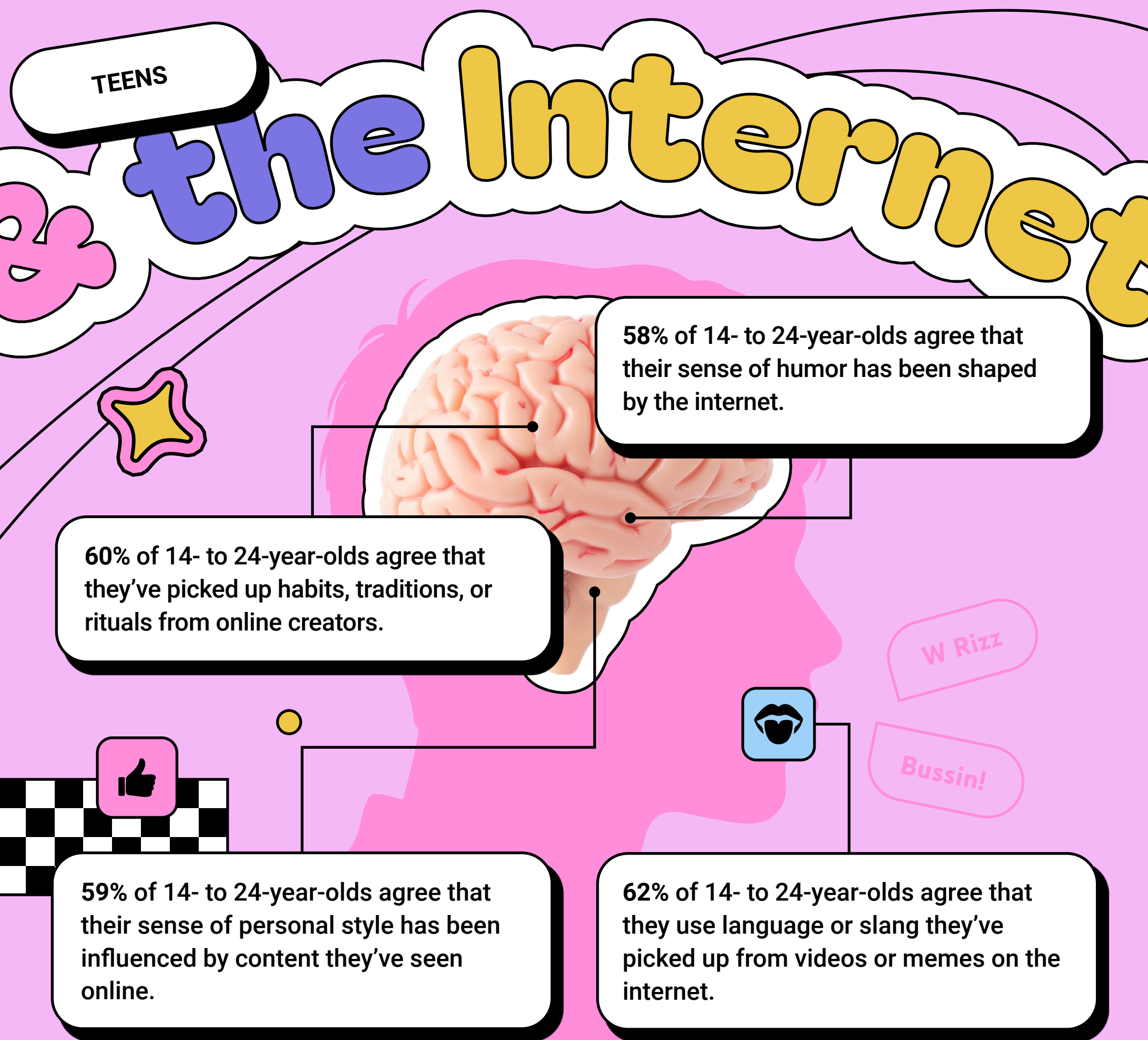
¹ Source: YouTube Culture and Trends, Culture and Trends Report: Fandom, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/trends/report/fandom-2024/>

² Source: Deloitte, 2025 Digital Media Trends: 19th Edition (March 2025), 2025, <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/digital-media-trends-consumption-habits-survey/2025.html>

³ Source: National Research Group, Growing Pains: How today's young people are rewriting the narrative of childhood, 2025, <https://www.nrgmr.com/our-thinking/entertainment/growing-pains-the-scrolls-and-tolls-of-modern-childhood/>

FOR TEENS, BY TEENS

For teens, participating in the discourse of their peers and communities means creating and engaging with video. Today's teens have the desire, tools, and distribution to make the content they want to see, inspired by the video formats they grew up on. YouTube has shaped their culture and proven to them their power to influence online discourse.



THE ELEMENTS OF CREATIVE MAXIMALISM

Having grown up in a post-“Gangnam Style,” sandbox game, and YouTube world, young people are displaying an affinity for creating and watching entertainment exhibiting the qualities of a new language of creativity, Creative Maximalism. This aesthetic includes four distinct qualities.

AUDIO/VISUAL COMPLEXITY

1

Videos feature intra-frame context rich in information, iconography, and visual cues, often paired with hyper-paced editing or massive scale.

NARRATIVE CO-CREATION

2

Public-generated, massive, decentralized entertainment properties replete with immense casts of characters and voluminous storylines.

INTERNET-REFERENTIAL

3

Videos are layered with inside jokes, references, and memes originating in niche subcommunities online.

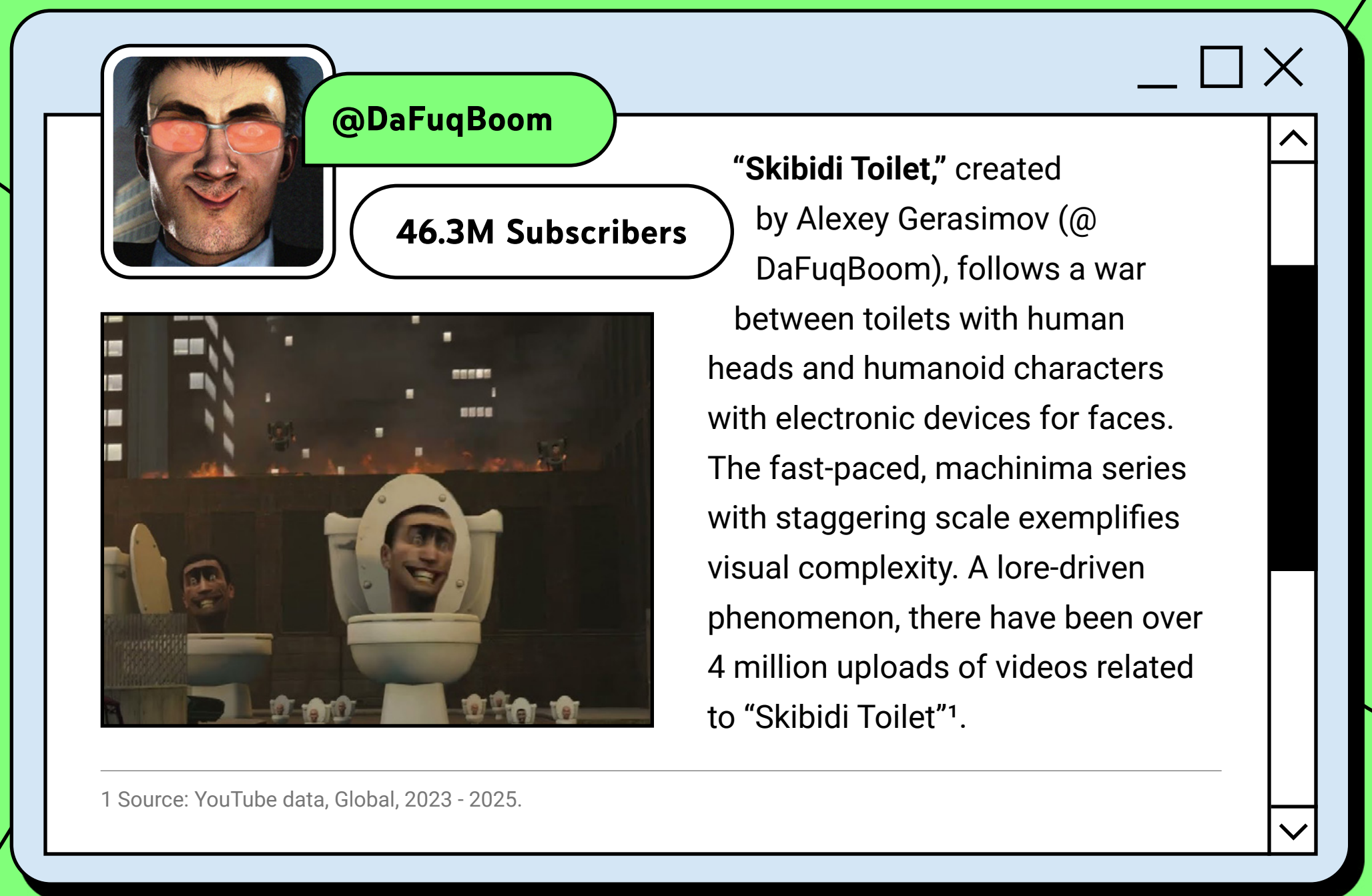
GLOBAL INFLUENCE

4

This content is often aesthetically or thematically influenced by non-local content.

AUDIO/VISUAL COMPLEXITY

Contrasting prior generations' staid TV and film mise-en-scène, this aesthetic is an adaptation to the digital worlds in which teens live. Raised on complex visuals from video game HUDs and anime, they are primed to process and produce this style. This shift is accelerated by the democratization of editing tools, placing the means of complex production into everyone's hands.



A screenshot of a YouTube channel page for @DaFuqBoom. The channel name is in a green bubble, and the subscriber count is 46.3M. A video thumbnail shows a character with a human head on a toilet. The video description text is on the right, and a source note is at the bottom left.

@DaFuqBoom

46.3M Subscribers

"Skibidi Toilet," created by Alexey Gerasimov (@DaFuqBoom), follows a war between toilets with human heads and humanoid characters with electronic devices for faces. The fast-paced, machinima series with staggering scale exemplifies visual complexity. A lore-driven phenomenon, there have been over 4 million uploads of videos related to "Skibidi Toilet"¹.

1 Source: YouTube data, Global, 2023 - 2025.

Packing more information and action into a single screen – by layering information over video, using self-aware editing, or showing multiple frames at once – creates complexity seen everywhere from Shorts with emoji dance instructions layered over the choreography to the hyper-paced edits of fancams. It exemplifies this new creative language, a clear evolution from past aesthetics.

NARRATIVE CO-CREATION

Raised on participatory “remix” culture, younger viewers gravitate to media that encourages their input through co-creation, fan art, and fan-lore. These intricate narratives demand viewer investment, resulting in sprawling entertainment worlds with vast storylines collaboratively expanded by the fans themselves.

34%

of 14- to 24-year-olds contributed to the creation of an online content series or other creator project in the past 12 months.

Source: Google/SmithGeiger, YouTube Trends Survey, US April 2025, N=500 online Gen Z age 14-24.

Over the past several years, the public has collectively created massively popular properties, including the **SCP Foundation**, **Backrooms**, and in 2025, **Italian brain rot**. The products of this distributed creativity are a rich collection of characters and stories that have been adapted to video and have become part of teens’ popular culture.

Composer Jorge Rivera-Herrans’ “**EPIC: The Musical**,” a musical adaptation of “The Odyssey,” evolved from a college thesis into a viral project with *over 115 million views across 30 released songs*¹. Rivera-Herrans gave the community agency by casting and commissioning animated music videos from the community, with many others creating animated music videos as fan art.

A central graphic featuring a collage of social media profiles and video thumbnails. At the top is a blue heart icon. Below it are four profile callouts: @that.drawer.mircsy (62.9K Subscribers), @gigi2820 (562K Subscribers), @ns2dstudios (69.4K Subscribers), and @omiomi_koki (16.3K Subscribers). The background includes a purple creature, a woman in a blue dress, and a character with wings. Text overlays include 'EPIC THE TROY SAGA' and 'The CHALLENGE'.

There have been over 50,000 uploads of videos related to “EPIC: The Musical” since the creator began working on it in 2021.

Source: YouTube data, Global, 2021 - 2025.

Young audiences expect to be active partners in shaping the stories they love. The result is a new world of decentralized entertainment properties. While they may require research to keep track of, that investment is a feature that forges a profoundly deeper connection and sense of ownership for the audience.

¹ Source: YouTube data, Global, 2021 - 2025.



INTERNET REFERENTIAL

Today's video phenomena are increasingly layered with inside jokes and references drawn from the digital worlds from which they emerge. This insularity is amplified by large online subcommunities, creating a maximalist style of creativity that resonates powerfully with insiders, but can feel inaccessible to wider audiences.

Consider the universe of cat memes, which have spawned **Cat Meme videos**, where narrative content relies on viewer familiarity with an extensive cast of older meme characters used to convey specific emotions. Recently, "**Spinning Cat**" emerged from that panoply to become the subject of a hit song, reaching #11 on YouTube's global music charts.

Referentiality can be seen in this year's **summer emote** trend. "Emotes" are in-game gestures and dances popularized by games like Fortnite, whose emotes were often pulled from viral dance trends. With summer emotes, creators were recreating recently-viral dances ("emotes") to express anticipation for the coming season.

Ultimately, fluency in referential culture is a way to demonstrate belonging: the more you know, the more you belong.



GLOBAL INFLUENCE

Finally, the new maximalist creativity can be identified by its global cultural influences. Today's generation was raised with the entire world's entertainment at its fingertips, equipped with the comfort of researching non-native cultural references as well as the tools, like auto-translated captions, required to consume content in other languages. For young people, this has cultivated a deep appreciation of content outside their native culture, directly shaping what they watch and, in turn, create.

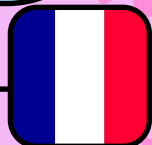
TRENDS TRANSCENDING BORDERS

Le poisson Steve from France, a lo-fi hand-animation of a dancing fish with a catchy French tune, accumulated over 90 million views across LFMV and Shorts for videos with "le poisson steve" in the title in 2025.

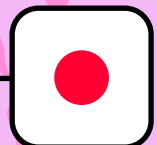
Source: YouTube data, Global, 1 Jan - 15 Aug 2025.



@vigzvigz
36.3K Subscribers



@lovelive_series
810K Subscribers



@VIVINOS
2.46M Subscribers



"Alien Stage" is a South Korean animated series about a deadly singing competition on an alien planet. Its dark themes, unique music, and extensive fan theories captivated a worldwide fan base, with the United States contributing the greatest portion of views to videos with "Alien Stage" or "Alienst" in the title in 2025.

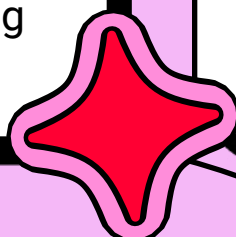
Source: YouTube data, Global, 1 Jan - 15 Aug 2025.



@phonk
802K Subscribers



A genre like **Brazilian phonk** can trace its roots from Southern US hip-hop to Eastern European dance music before being remixed in Brazil – showing how trends not only cross cultures, but borrow and evolve along the way.

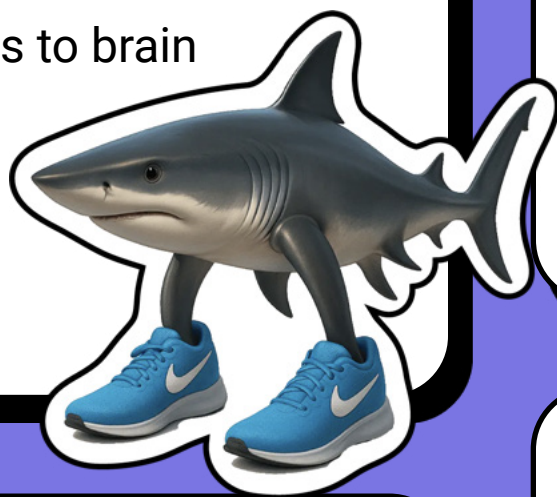


DECODING “ITALIAN BRAIN ROT”

All of the attributes of Creative Maximalism can be found in one of 2025's biggest cultural phenomena: Italian brain rot videos, an absurdist universe of surreal internet memes that **boasts more than 450,000 uploads in 2025**.

1 Audio Visual Complexity

Although these AI-generated mash-up characters may be considered inherently visually complex, it is the content created about them, from tier lists to power rankings to brain rot video game clips, that provides audio-visual complexity.



2 Narrative Co-Creation

Tons of characters. Though it is hard to say for certain how many characters exist, the Italian brain rot wiki currently lists hundreds, all created by the public.



3 Internet Referential

The name “Italian brain rot” itself is an internet reference, referring to 2024’s Oxford word of the year, “brain rot.”

These internet memes are now characters in user-generated video games like Roblox’s Steal a Brain rot.



4 Global Influence

Italian brain rot with the character Tralalero Tralala, named after a nonsense utterance in an Italian audio clip. As more characters were added, they received rhyme, pseudo-Italian names, often paired with AI-generated Italian audio.



THE FUTURE OF CREATIVE MAXIMALISM

As today's young people continue to flex their creative and curatorial muscles, Creative Maximalism will become entrenched in pop culture. This transition is already underway with mainstream entities adopting and normalizing this new creative language. Brands like **Nutter Butter** are adopting the style for social media, and major players like the **NFL** are adapting it through schedule release videos. Even Hollywood is actively scouting YouTube franchises like "Skibidi Toilet."

@Chargers

416K Subscribers



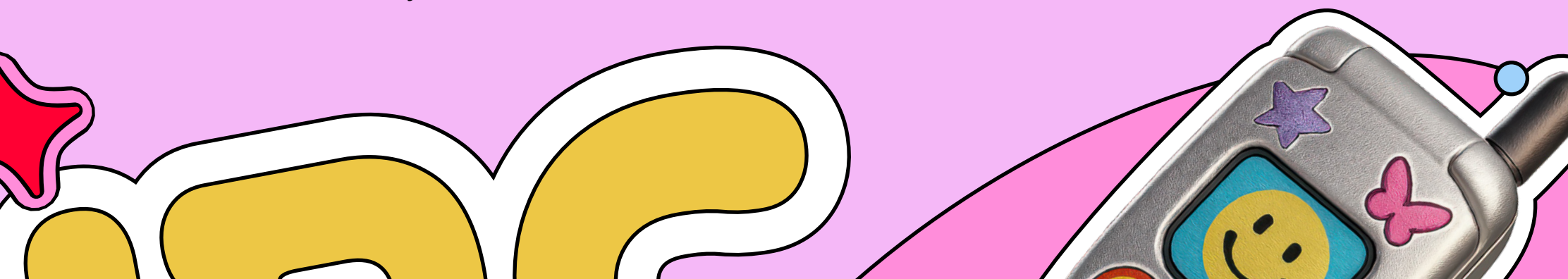
@WandWmusic

2.25M Subscribers




More importantly, Creative Maximalism may be the force that compels the adoption of generative AI for video. This aesthetic is inherently complex, and for a young generation that prioritizes participation in culture, generative AI should be the tool that eases creation of visually complex, iterative, and referential content like "Italian brain rot." It is perhaps not a coincidence that one of the biggest phenomena of the year exists because of generative AI.

The combination of mainstream adaptation of this aesthetic and the adoption of powerful new tools that enable it ensures that the maximalist creativity of today's youth may not be a fleeting moment. Rather, it may become a foundational element in the future of culture.




WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU




Embrace the digital-first world - Young people's worlds are digital – their entertainment, their expression, and their relationships are mediated through devices and networks. Reaching them now requires approaches rooted in digital spaces and cultures.

The new universal language - Young people are fluent in a wide array of cultural languages, references, and digital tools from a lifetime of creation, connection, and building shared identity online. This has created a shared language of the internet. Adopting this language requires more than mimicry; it demands genuine fluency in the culture that gives the language its meaning.



Maximalism is the creative mode of now - Young people have grown up with the ability to receive and process a lot of information and stimuli. This creates an opportunity to consider new ways to use the frame to convey your message to young people.

Co-creation is key - Young people desire and expect to be contributors to the things they consume. They expand the relevance of properties through their co-creation by “modding” it with the things that are interesting to them and the people in their communities.



Some things never change - For as different as all of this may seem, young people are motivated by the same things they always have been – forming their own identities, building their own communities, and seeing the world they experience reflected in the things they consume.