Talking About Brainrot: Youth Engagement with AI-Generated Content and the Dynamics of Intergenerational Communication

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Abstract

Generative AI is increasingly shaping social media dynamics and the production of viral content, particularly among younger audiences. One recent example is Italian Brainrot, a meme phenomenon characterized by AI-generated, surreal visuals and absurd narratives, which has rapidly gained popularity among adolescents. Despite its widespread presence online, little is known about how such AI-generated content is perceived by young users and communicated across generational lines. This study investigates the attitudes and perceptions of 89 adolescents aged 12 – 14 regarding Italian Brainrot and related content. Specifically, it addresses two research questions: (1) How do young adolescents perceive and engage with the Italian Brainrot phenomenon? and (2) How do they communicate about this content with peers and adults? Our findings contribute to broader discussions on generative AI, internet language, and intergenerational communication. In particular, we highlight both the barriers and opportunities for fostering critical awareness and responsible engagement with AI-driven media among youth.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing → Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**.

Keywords

Generative AI, Italian Brainrot, Teenagers, Intergenerational Communication

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Content Warning

This paper addresses AI-generated social media content that may be perceived as disturbing or offensive. While no explicit material is directly reproduced in the text, readers are advised to proceed with caution.

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1 Introduction

Recent digital culture among younger generations has been significantly shaped by the popular concept of *Brainrot* – a colloquial term used to describe the supposed deterioration of a person's mental or intellectual state resulting from the constant, often compulsive, consumption of online content [24, 74]. In 2024, Brainrot was selected as Oxford's Word of the Year [24], formally recognizing its cultural prominence. The term refers both to the perceived cognitive deterioration caused by overconsumption of "trivial or unchallenging content" online, and to the content itself. Platforms such as *TikTok*, *YouTube Shorts*, and *Discord* have been especially influential in shaping this media environment by promoting ultra-short-form, fast-paced, and highly entertaining content formats that encourage rapid shifts in attention and viral content [55]. This phenomenon has been linked to shortened attention spans [36] and distinctive forms of communication [28], often characterized by a surreal or absurd sense of humor [65, 66]. An example is 'Brainrot language', a linguistic trend characterized by expressive nonsense, phonetic spellings, and viral memetic phrases such as *Skibidi*, *Sigma*, and *Rizz* [2]. Within this broader phenomenon, a distinctive subgenre known as *Italian Brainrot* emerged as a meme trend in early 2025 [21, 51]. Characterized by surreal, AI-generated images of fantastical creatures paired with pseudo-Italian names and synthesized voiceovers (see Figure 1), Italian Brainrot quickly became viral across platforms such as *YouTube*, *TikTok*, and *Instagram*. The memes rely heavily on grotesque visuals, absurdist humor, and nonsensical storytelling, reflecting a growing meta-awareness among users about the saturation of AI-generated "slop" content online [59]. Despite (or because of) their absurdity, these characters have been incorporated into user-generated narratives, contributing to the development of a participatory form of digital folklore, particularly among younger audiences. To date, the terms Brainrot and Italian Brainrot remain largely unexplored in academic literature, despite their relevance to studies of digital youth culture [2], media virality [74], and AI-generated content [33]. Unlike previous viral phenomena driven by user creativity or meme logic alone, Italian Brainrot specifically reflects the convergence of generative AI tools and meme-based cultural production. As such, it provides a strong example of how AI-generated content is not just watched or shared, but becomes part of how people, including young people, communicate and create content online.

In this study, we examine how young people perceive the phenomenon, including their awareness and interpretations of Italian Brainrot memes (**RQ1**). We also explore intergenerational dynamics by investigating how these references are (or not) communicated to older generations, such as parents and teachers (**RQ2**). By doing

so, we aim to show how new forms of AI-mediated content are embedded in broader cultural and communicative practices, offering a lens to understand younger users' engagement with digital media while highlighting opportunities to bridge cross-generational gaps.

2 Related Work

This section is structured around three key areas relevant to our investigation. First, we review existing literature on generative AI and its role in shaping contemporary internet culture, particularly in the creation and spread of viral content (subsection 2.1). Second, we examine research on youth engagement with digital media, memes, and emerging forms of online language, with a focus on how adolescents navigate humor, identity, and meaning-making in internet-native formats (subsection 2.2). Third, we explore studies on intergenerational communication in digital contexts, addressing how young people share and explain internet phenomena – such as AI-generated content– to adults, and the social and cognitive factors that mediate these exchanges (subsection 2.3).

2.1 Generative AI and the Production of Viral Content

The rapid development of generative AI technologies – such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Midjourney – has significantly reshaped how content is created and distributed across digital platforms [25, 60, 71]. These tools generate or enhance text, images, audio, and video, potentially supporting diverse expressive aims and transforming user content generation [25]. This shift aligns with the concept of Artificial Intelligence-Mediated Communication [22], which refers to interpersonal communication in which an intelligent agent modifies, augments, or generates messages on behalf of a communicator to accomplish specific communication goals.

Generative AI plays a central role in shaping contemporary online media. Examples include crafting engaging narratives using Large Language Models [4], producing photorealistic images [52], and generating short videos based on minimal user input [3]. These technologies accelerate content production and enable formats optimized for virality – particularly on platforms like *TikTok*, *YouTube*, and *Instagram* [50, 59, 60]. With more recent advancements, AI technologies are now used to craft engaging social media posts, apply creative visual effects on platforms like *Instagram*, and even produce fully AI-generated virtual influencers and YouTubers [31]. These developments highlight the growing presence of generative AI in daily digital communication practices [60].

However, the proliferation of AI-generated content raises serious concerns [33, 76]. The spread of deepfakes and synthetic media-hyper-realistic outputs produced by AI has intensified anxieties about misinformation and the erosion of trust in online content [33, 73], while also contributing to increased polarization and the circulation of aggressive content [76]. These developments challenge traditional notions of authenticity and authorship, underscoring the need for critical reflection on the role of AI in shaping contemporary information ecosystems and digital culture [60, 73].

Moreover, most AI-generated content appears tailored toward younger audiences [39, 57]. This trend not only raises questions about youth media literacy but also underscores the cultural centrality of adolescents in shaping and circulating AI-enhanced content across platforms. In particular, youth are often at the forefront of engaging with, remixing, and interpreting AI-generated media in ways that reflect their own values, humor, and social practices [39].

2.2 Youth Engagement with Memes and Italian Brainrot

Youth engagement with AI-generated media is deeply intertwined with broader internet-native cultural forms, particularly memes. Memes have become prominent and recognizable artifacts of contemporary digital culture, often functioning as forms of visual argumentation or social commentary [6, 64]. Humor and irony are frequently employed as rhetorical strategies within memes to address events, ideas, or social phenomena [66].

A framework for understanding this engagement is *Incongruity Theory*, which proposes that humor arises when there is a subversion of expectations, when something appears illogical, exaggerated, out of context, or inconsistent with our mental schemas [40, 65]. This theory further suggests that the capacity to appreciate such incongruities develops alongside cognitive maturation. As children transition into adolescence, they become increasingly adept at comprehending more complex and abstract forms of humor, including wordplay, multiple meanings, and violations of logical norms [40, 70]. This theoretical lens can be applied to phenomena such as non-sense memes, such as the Italian Brainrot trend, which features AI-generated images depicting surreal hybrids of animals, everyday objects, food, and weapons. Regarding the origins of Italian Brainrot, the character *Tralalero Tralala* is widely considered a foundational example [1, 77]. The creation of this character is frequently attributed to the *TikTok* user @eZburger401, who posted a video featuring *Tralalero Tralala* in January 2025. Shortly after, @eZburger401 was banned, likely due to the audio accompanying the video, which contained profanity and blasphemous language in Italian targeting religious figures. Other reports suggest that the audio was originally created by *TikTok* user @burgermerda in September 2024, with @eZburger401 acting as a re-uploader [77].

From early 2025 onward, the spread of both existing and newly created Italian Brainrot characters went viral, leading to the establishment of an online encyclopedia dedicated to documenting the various characters and their interrelations [1]. Despite the name, much of Italian Brainrot content is neither produced by Italian users nor characterized by Italian language or Italian-inspired elements. For example, one of the most popular characters (*Tung Tung Tung Sahur*) originated from an Indonesian creator, the *TikTok* user @noxaasht, and employs the Indonesian language. Moreover, new character creation trends are increasingly tied to specific geographic locations, including Croatia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Spain.

The popularity of this content is evident across multiple platforms, including *YouTube*, *TikTok*, and *Instagram*. Concurrently, commercial efforts have arisen to capitalize on the viral momentum. Numerous companies have incorporated Italian Brainrot imagery into their marketing strategies [29], and merchandising products branded with Brainrot identities have become increasingly prevalent. This commercialization highlights the evolving intersection between participatory digital culture and market-driven practices.

[1] Italian Brainrot Wiki: https://italianbrainrot.miraheze.org/wiki/Main_Page

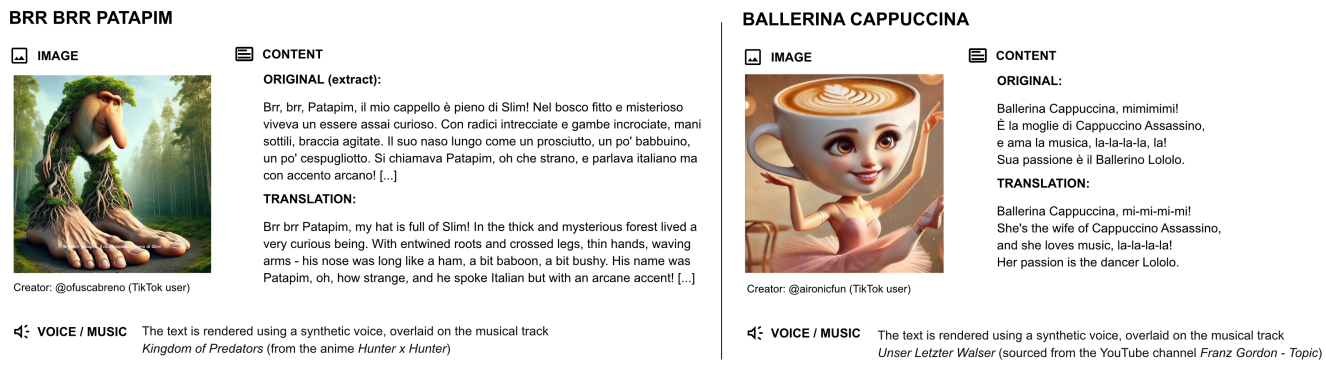

Figure 1: Examples of two popular Italian Brainrot memes.

While Italian Brainrot has attracted notable attention in popular culture and media, academic research remains sparse. Our study aims to fill this gap by exploring how young adolescents perceive and engage with the Italian Brainrot phenomenon (**RQ1**), examining its cultural significance, social meanings, and implications for youth digital literacy.

2.3 Intergenerational Communication and Digital Content

Intergenerational communication around digital content – particularly between parents and children – plays a critical role in shaping technology use, risk perception, and trust [20, 62]. Prior research has explored how parents mediate children's engagement with a variety of digital technologies and platforms, including Internet [20], Virtual Reality [18], Internet of Things (IoT) devices [17], social media platforms [12, 15, 23, 61], and mobile apps [68, 78]. Across these studies, trust consistently emerges as a central factor in parent–child mediation [20, 72]. Transparent and communicative technical interventions are shown to foster this trust, enabling more collaborative and informed discussions about digital content and technology use [23]. This literature highlights the importance of designing digital systems that not only support safety and control, but also actively facilitate intergenerational dialogue and mutual understanding.

However, building this kind of trust requires not only open communication but also a shared understanding of the technologies involved, along with a common vocabulary for discussing risks, content, and experiences. This becomes especially challenging in today's digital landscape, where youth engage with a continuous, high-volume stream of content that parents often struggle to track, interpret, or contextualize [26]. A major barrier to mutual understanding lies in the rapidly evolving language, slang, and cultural references that emerge on social media platforms [41] – many of which are unfamiliar to parents and difficult to translate across generational lines. The emergence of generative AI further complicates this dynamic by introducing systems that are autonomous, opaque, and capable of producing highly personalized, context-specific, and potentially persuasive content [75]. As a result, adults may find it even more difficult to engage in meaningful dialogue with young people about what they are encountering online, thereby increasing the risk of misunderstanding, mistrust, or disengagement.

In this respect, young people are introduced to generative AI from a variety of sources beyond their parents [42]. These include influencers' videos, targeted advertisements on social media, recommendations from peers, and viral content such as memes and internet trends as Italian Brainrot [75]. Both parents and children exhibit notable misconceptions about AI in general [43], as well as about the ways in which generative AI collects, shares, and processes data [75]. For example, Mertala and Fagerlund [43] found that 5th- and 6th-grade students often anthropomorphize AI, attributing human-like qualities such as independent thought or intentionality, while others view AI as a pre-installed or static intelligence rather than a system that learns from data. As reported by Yu et al. [75], teenagers often conceptualize generative AI as functioning similarly to a search engine or a large static database, believing that it retrieves answers directly from the Internet or a fixed repository of stored responses. Likewise, many parents share this search engine metaphor, with some additionally assuming – incorrectly – that generative AI platforms perform fact-checking or verify information before generating responses [75]. Furthermore, there appears to be a substantial gap in parental awareness regarding the diverse ways in which young people engage with generative AI, including interactions with character-based chatbots for emotional support and participation in virtual relationships [75]. These intergenerational gaps in understanding mirror broader generational differences in social media use and digital content creation [35, 44].

To address these dynamics, this study includes a research question (**RQ2**) focused on how young people communicate about Italian Brainrot content with peers and adults, including parents, teachers, and others. We aim to investigate the motivations underlying these interactions and collect real-world experiences of intergenerational dialogue surrounding AI-generated and digital content.

3 Methods

A survey-based study was designed to address the following research questions:

- **RQ1**. How do students aged 12-14 perceive and engage with the Italian Brainrot phenomenon?

- **RQ2**. How do young people communicate about Italian Brainrot content with peers and adults?

The study was conducted within a curricular activity aimed at fostering digital competencies, in collaboration with school principals and the referring teachers of the participating institutions. To ensure anonymity, no class identifiers, student names, or other personally identifiable information was collected. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and students could choose to complete it in full, in part, or to decline participation without any consequence. The research followed the research institutional Policy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights. To elaborate on the results for **RQ2**, we involved an additional sample of teachers from different schools in the region to further explore the dynamics of intergenerational communication.

3.1 Participants

A total of 89 young adolescents (49 females, 40 males), aged between 12 and 14 years old, participated in the survey conducted in May 2025. They were enrolled in five middle school classes – three 1st and two 2nd years – in the province of Trento in Italy. The participants were all students from self-selected classes in schools that had voluntarily enrolled in the curricular activity described above. To complement these data, 87 educators (69 females, 18 males) from the same province were recruited in September 2025. Teachers were voluntary participants in a separate training program on AI and ethics. None of the participating teachers had attended or had been involved in the student training program. Table 1 summarizes participants' demographics.

3.2 Materials

Table 2 summarizes the structure of the survey used with students, while the full material, translated into English, is provided as supplementary material. The survey was designed in an exploratory manner, guided by themes emerging from work on youth engagement with digital cultural formats [6, 15, 21, 22, 25, 59, 62, 71]. Questions Q1–Q7 focus on students' familiarity with Brainrot content, their exposure contexts, and sharing behaviors, reflecting methodological approaches used in studies on youth-driven online practices [6, 21]. Questions Q8–Q11 examine intergenerational communication by exploring how students describe adults' reactions and the challenges of explaining Brainrot across age groups. These items align with prior work on generational differences in media interpretation and parent–child communication around digital culture (e.g., [15, 62]). Questions Q12–Q15 address students' perceptions of AI involvement in Brainrot creation. Their formulation draws on recent research on AI-mediated creativity and youth understanding of generative systems (e.g., [22, 25, 59, 71]).

Teachers were asked three questions, selected and adapted from the students' survey: 1. "*Have you ever heard of Brainrots?*" (4-point Likert; same as Q1 for young adolescents); 2. "*What do you think about Brainrots?*" (5-option Multiple Choice; complementary to Q9 for young adolescents); 3. "*Have you ever discussed this phenomenon with a student? How did it go?*" (Open-ended; complementary to Q11 for students).

3.3 Task and Procedure

On the day of the activity, the researchers met with students class by class in their respective school classrooms, with a class teacher always present. As part of the activity, students first completed the pen-and-paper survey individually, which took approximately 20 minutes. This was followed by a lecture on AI education. The findings presented in this study are based exclusively on the results of the first survey.

In a separate session, teachers – who had not participated in the student data collection – attended a lecture on AI where they answered the three questions using *Wooclap*[2]. At the start of the lecture, we gathered background information on educators' teaching experience, including subject areas and years of teaching. The lecture then introduced core AI concepts, providing definitions and relevant historical context. As part of the overview of recent developments in generative AI, participants answered the first question, assessing familiarity with Brainrots to establish a common knowledge base. Next, they viewed the Italian Brainrot *Prr Prr Patapim*, chosen for its nonviolent content, absence of explicit language, and its popularity among students. Their responses formed the basis for discussion and a deeper explanation of the phenomenon during the lecture.

3.4 Data Analysis

The anonymous responses were manually transcribed and coded into a dataset. For the multiple-choice questions, frequencies were computed for each option. For Q4, Q9, and Q14, which included an "Other (specify)" option, responses were analyzed by two researchers and, when possible, aggregated with the predefined multiple-choice options. When aggregation was not possible, the responses were analyzed qualitatively and described in the text. In addition to descriptive statistics, non-parametric tests and correlation analyses were performed to identify significant relationships between variables. The open-ended responses were analyzed using inductive thematic content analysis [7, 10]. Qualitative analyses were performed independently by two researchers: after initial coding, the themes were iteratively refined through discussions, and disagreements were addressed with further dialogue between the two researchers until consensus was reached [8, 9]. Participants who did not respond or who provided answers such as "*I don't know*" were excluded from the analysis.

For each Italian Brainrot reported by participants, a researcher searched for the referenced content using *YouTube*, *Instagram*, and *TikTok*. For each video, the original source was identified, as some Italian Brainrots feature complex and intertwined narrative structures[3]. A researcher viewed them and transcribed their audio, since the material available on the platforms was sometimes incomplete. The content was evaluated either in its original language – when matching the researchers' native language – or using the English translation disseminated online (e.g., from Wiki Italian Brainrot). Two researchers then independently assessed the content of the Italian Brainrots reported by participants (deductive approach; [8]):

- *Content type* – Each video was classified according to its publication year and its description on social media or the

[2]https://www.wooclap.com/
[3]https://italianbrainrot.miraheze.org/wiki/Main_Page

Table 1: Demographic details of young adolescents and educators participating in the study. STEM = Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, HASS = Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, SEN = Special Educational Needs.

Group	*N*	*F* /*M*	Age / Exp. (years)	Grade/ Subject
Adolescents	89	49 / 40	12–14	54 1st-year, 35 2nd-year
Educators	87	69 / 18	16 [1–10], 28 [11–20], 21 [21–30], 22 [>30]	38 STEM, 22 HASS, 27 SEN

Table 2: Survey items, corresponding questions, response types, and their relation to the research questions

pr	id	Question	Category	RQ
1	Q1	*Have you ever heard of Italian Brainrot?*	Likert (1-4)	RQ1
2	Q2	*If yes, who did you talk to about it?*	Multiple Choice (6)	RQ2
3	Q3	*Where have you seen content related to Brainrots?*	Multiple Choice (4)	RQ1
4	Q4	*How do you usually feel when you watch Brainrots?*	Multiple Choice (7)	RQ1
5	Q5	*Have you ever shared any Brainrot-related content?*	Likert (1-6)	RQ1
6	Q6	*If you remember any, can you please write down the names of any Brainrot that comes to your mind?*	List	RQ1
7	Q7	*Why do you think Brainrots have become so popular?*	Open-ended	RQ1
8	Q8	*Have you ever talked to an adult about Brainrots?*	Multiple Choice (4)	RQ2
9	Q9	*How do adults usually react when you talk about Brainrots?*	Multiple Choice (5)	RQ2
10	Q10	*Why do you think Brainrots are more popular among young people than adults?*	Open-ended	RQ2
11	Q11	*Have you ever tried to explain Brainrots to an adult? If yes, how did it go?*	Open-ended	RQ2
12	Q12	*When you watch a Brainrot, do you ever wonder how it was created?*	Likert (1-4)	RQ1
13	Q13	*Do you think artificial intelligence was used to create Brainrots?*	Closed-ended (Yes/No/Don't know)	RQ1
14	Q14	*If yes, how do you think it was used?*	Multiple Choice (5)	RQ1
15	Q15	*Have you ever tried to create your own Brainrot?*	Likert (1-4)	RQ1

Italian Brainrot Wiki as follows: (a) Italian Brainrot: published after 2025 and described as such, or listed in the Wiki; (b) Old Brainrot: published before 2025, similar in content, and present in the Wiki; (c) Meme: unrelated content not referenced in the Wiki, regardless of publication year.

- *Language used* – The language spoken in the video (e.g., Italian, Indonesian); when more than one language was present, it was coded as "Mix" (e.g., Mix Italian/English).
- *Use of explicit language* – Coded as "yes" if at least one swear word, insult, or blasphemous expression was present; otherwise coded as "no".
- *Presence of violent themes* – Coded as "yes" if the video contained violent or sensitive topics (e.g., war, sexual content, disabilities); otherwise coded as"no".

4 Results

4.1 Knowledge and Engagement with Italian Brainrots

The majority of the participating young adolescents (n = 87; 97.75%) reported being familiar with Italian Brainrot content (Q1; see Table 3): 8.99% had "*only heard of them*" (n = 8), 28.09% indicated knowing them "*a little*" (n = 25), and 60.67% reported knowing them "*well*" (n = 54). Only two participants stated that they were unfamiliar with Brainrots and, therefore, were excluded from the following analyses. Participants primarily reported viewing such content (Q3) in applications as *YouTube* (n = 60; 68.97%), *TikTok* (n = 33; 37.93%), *WhatsApp* (n = 19; 21.84%), *Instagram* (n = 10; 11.49%). Participants listed between zero and 27 Brainrot names (Q6), with an average of 7.8 names (SD = 5.01); three participants did not provide any name. In total, 679 names were collected, referring to 50 distinct Brainrots, which were subsequently classified and analyzed (see subsection 4.2).

Participants reported a range of emotions (Q4) associated with watching Brainrots. Most of them reported feeling "*amused*" (n = 63; 72.41%), while fewer individuals indicated feeling "*interested*" (n = 10; 11.49%), "*curious*" (n = 11; 12.64%), "*bored*" (n = 14, 16.09%), "*confused*" (n = 13; 14.94%), or "*scared*" (n = 4; 4.60%). Six participants wrote "*other emotions*", which were independently coded by two researchers: two were classified as "positive" (e.g., "*excited*") and four as "negative" (e.g., "*tired*"). The majority of participants selected only positive emotions (n = 57; 65.52%), while 11 (12.64%) reported a mix of positive and negative emotions, and 18 (20.69%) expressed only negative emotions. One participant did not indicate any emotion.

Analyzing the responses (n = 84; three participants did not respond) regarding the sharing of Brainrot videos (Q5), most participants (n = 50) stated that they had never shared such content (n = 40; 47.62%) or had never shared it but had "*thought about it*" (n = 10; 11.9%). In contrast, 34 participants reported sharing content "*few times*" (n = 16; 19.05%), "*sometimes*" (n = 12; 14.29%), "*often*" (n = 2; 2.38%), or "*a lot*" (n = 4; 4.67%).

Of the 86 respondents to Q12, 40 reported they had "*never*" (n = 25; 29.07%) or only "*rarely*" (n = 15; 17.44%) wondered how they were created, while 46 indicated they had "*sometimes*" (n = 31; 36.05%) or "*often*" (n = 15; 17.44%). However, 80 participants (91.95%) reported (Q13) being aware that the content had been generated with AI to some extent. Only one participant stated

Table 3: Summary of students' responses related to RQ1. For each Qn, the number of respondents used to compute percentages is indicated. For specific items, cumulative-frequency subgroups are highlighted in gray (e.g., "*Familiar*" in Q1).

Survey Item / Response	n	%	cumulative	(%)
Q1. Familiarity ($N = 89$)				
Familiar (total)			**87**	**(97.75)**
Know them well	54	60.67		
Know them a little	25	28.09		
Only heard of them	8	8.99		
Unfamiliar (hereafter excluded)			**2**	**(2.25)**
No	**2**	**2.25**		
Q3. Platform ($N = 87$)*				
YouTube	60	68.97		
TikTok	33	37.93		
WhatsApp	19	21.84		
Instagram	10	11.49		
Q4. Emotions ($N = 86$)*				
Amused	63	72.41		
Curious	11	12.64		
Interested	10	11.49		
Bored	14	16.09		
Confused	13	14.94		
Scared	4	4.60		
Only positive			**57**	**(65.52)**
Only negative			**18**	**(20.69)**
Mixed			**11**	**(12.64)**
Q5. Sharing Brainrots ($N = 84$)				
No			**50**	**(59.52)**
Never	40	47.62		
Never but considered	10	11.90		
Yes			**34**	**(40.48)**
Few times	16	19.05		
Sometimes	12	14.29		
Often	2	2.38		
A lot	4	4.67		
Q12. Curiosity for Creation ($N = 86$)				
Not really			**40**	**(46.51)**
Never	25	29.07		
Rarely	15	17.44		
Yes			**46**	**(53.49)**
Sometimes	31	36.05		
Often	15	17.44		
Q13. AI use ($N = 86$)				
Yes	80	91.95		
No	1	1.16		
Do not know	5	5.81		
Q14. AI-generated elements ($N = 86$)*				
Images	64	73.56		
Voices	39	44.83		
Videos	37	42.90		
Text narration	6	6.90		
Q15. Create Brainrots ($N = 87$)				
Never			**68**	**(78.16)**
No intention	44	50.57		
Not attempted	24	27.59		
Attempted			**19**	**(21.84)**
Unsuccessful	11	12.64		
Successful	8	9.20		

*Multiple choice question.

that the content was not AI-generated, and five indicated that they "*didn't know*". Specifically, 64 (73.56%) indicated images were AI-generated, 39 (44.83%) voices were AI-generated, and 37 (42.90%) videos were AI-generated (Q14). Only six (6.90%) identified the content – the text narrated by the voice – as being AI-generated. Some participants also explained AI use in "Other (specify)", such as for "*creating the Brainrots' names*" (P17), "*generating a viral trend*" (P19, P48, P64), or "*making the content funnier*" (P05, P44).

The majority of participants ($n = 68$; 78.16%) indicated that they had never created their own Italian Brainrot content. Of these, 44 (50.57%) had not considered doing it, whereas 24 (27.59%) had considered it but had not engaged in Brainrot creation. Nineteen (19) participants reported attempts to create a Brainrot, with 11 (12.64%) indicating unsuccessful attempts and 8 (9.20%) reporting successful creation.

4.1.1 Thematic Analysis: Explaining the Popularity of Brainrot. Inductive content analysis [7, 10] of open-ended responses ($n = 67$) to Q7 revealed five main themes regarding perceived reasons for the popularity of Italian Brainrots. Participants who did not respond ($n = 10$) or who provided answers such as "*I don't know*" ($n = 10$) were excluded from the analysis.

- "***The content is interesting***" ($n = 48$). Participants described Brainrots as "funny", "strange", and/or "catchy", with 11 of them emphasizing that videos' short and dynamic format captures attention and fuels enthusiasm. Some of these participants ($n = 5$) emphasized that the appeal of Brainrots lies in their nonsensical nature. Others ($n = 6$) attributed their popularity to the images, described as "unusual", "strange" or even "mystic" (P56). Still others ($n = 4$) suggested that textual elements are particularly attractive, especially when they contain rhyme (P46) or absurd/nonsensical sentences (P34). Participant P78 explained that the AI-generated voice may also contribute to their appeal. While generally (45 times) associated with positive comments (e.g., P39:"*Because they are funny and interesting!*"), some responses suggested ambivalence or criticism ($n = 3$), with comments such as "*It may be fun for someone*" (P11) or "*They could be described as 'funny'*" (P34).
- "***Language used***" ($n = 5$). Participants expressed that Brainrot's popularity derives from its – often vulgar – language, as mentioned by P19: "*Because they use profanity and bad language – and that is what makes it enjoyable*". Differently, P21 explained that the use of Italian contributes to its international appeal, as the unfamiliarity of the language abroad made the content distinctive.
- "***They fuel group dynamics***" ($n = 9$). Brainrots were described as social facilitators, fostering sharing and playing among peers (e.g., P2 and P3 mentioned that they play memory games on Brainrots' contents). Participants highlighted the diffusion of their content through social media, particularly when described by influencers or celebrities (P69), and noted its growing adoption among younger children (P15).
- "***They eat your brain***" ($n = 13$). These 13 comments expressed a critical view of Brainrots, describing them as "stupid" and suggesting that they "*eat your brain*", as stated by P55 and P73. Participants reported that young people enjoy them because the content is "silly" and "*make your brain turn stupid*" (P55), and because "*our generations love silly things that don't last long, which are strange and AI-generated*" (P38).
- "***Novelty and technological mediation***" ($n = 15$). Another relevant theme concerned the role of novelty and AI-generated content. Some participants ($n = 9$) attributed Brainrots' appeal to the AI-related novelty effect and highlighted AI as a factor that increases both the volume and visibility of such content. Other participants ($n = 6$) explained that increased smartphone use among younger audiences and the large amount of this content increases the likelihood of exposure and, thus, their popularity.

4.2 Italian Brainrots' Content Analysis

The 679 names collected corresponded to 50 specific videos, which were analyzed for their content. Three of these were meme videos from 2016–2018, such as *Oh No, Our Table, It's Broken*, and three were precursors of Brainrots – older and less popular among younger audiences, including *Skibidi Toilet* (2023) and *John Pork* (2010). Each of these non-Brainrot videos was mentioned only once and were not included in the content analysis.

For the remaining 44 videos, we analyzed the language used and classified the content according to the use of explicit language and the presence of violent themes. We found 28 content in Italian (e.g., *Trulimero Trulicina*); six in Indonesian (e.g., *Tung Tung Tung Sahur*); one in Croatian (*Špijuniro Golubiro*); one in Spanish (*Los Tralaleritos Dicen Tralala*); and eight mixing Italian with other languages, such as *Chimpanzini Bananini*, which combines Italian and English. In total, 33 Italian Brainrots contained neither explicit language nor violent themes. These included 19 in Italian (e.g., *Frigo Camelo*), 5 in Indonesian (e.g., *Boneca Ambalabu*), 8 in mixed languages, and 1 in Spanish. Eleven videos (9 of which were in Italian) were identified as containing explicit language or addressing violent themes. Of these, 6 were noted by at least 10 survey participants. Five Brainrots presented both explicit language and addressed violent themes, and all of them were in Italian (e.g., *Bombardiro Crocodilo*, which refers to war and includes offensive words). Specifically, two of these were mentioned by more than 50 participants (*Tralalero Tralala*, $n = 59$; *Bombardilo Crocodilo*, $n = 51$). Two videos used explicit language but did not address violent themes (e.g., the Croatian *Špijuniro Golubiro*, $n = 10$, and the Italian *Matteo*, $n = 15$). Four videos addressed violent themes without using explicit language (e.g., *Bombombini Gusini*, which refers to war, $n = 29$; and the Indonesian *Ta Ta Ta Ta Ta Ta Ta Sahur*, referring to religious elements, $n = 10$). See Appendix A for the complete list of analyzed Brainrots and Figure 2 for a graph of those mentioned by at least 10 participants.

4.3 Cross-generation Content Communication

Among participants, 77 (88.51%) reported (in Q2; see Table 4) that they had discussed Italian Brainrot exclusively with peers, while only 8 (9.20%) indicated that they had also talked about it with adults; two participants did not select any option. All respondents who mentioned adults specified their parents, with three additionally indicating other adults in general, and only one reporting teachers. We explored the relationship between variables to determine whether there was a trend among participants who tended to talk about Brainrots more frequently and, particularly, with adults. Specifically, we examined the correlation between the number of individuals with whom the topic was discussed (adults and peers; Q2, ratio $0-1$) and the reported level of familiarity with Brainrots (Q1). A Spearman rank-order correlation test indicated a weak positive association between the two variables ($\rho = 0.23$, $p = 0.04$), indicating indeed that greater familiarity with Brainrots was associated with discussing the topic with a larger number of people. We further examined the responses of the eight participants who reported discussing the topic with at least one category of adults. Giving the small sample size, no statistical analyses were conducted. Of these participants, one reported "*a little*" familiarity with Brainrot videos (Q1), while the remaining seven indicated high familiarity. Regarding the distribution of emotional responses (Q4), six participants reported exclusively positive emotions and two reported mixed positive and negative emotions; none reported exclusively negative emotions.

Table 4: Summary of students' responses related to RQ2 (all questions were multiple choice). For each Qn, the number of respondents used to compute percentages is indicated.

Survey Item / Response	n	%	cumulative	(%)
Q2. Communication target ($N = 89$)				
Same age	73	83.91		
Younger	21	24.14		
Older	10	11.49		
Parents	8	9.20		
Teachers	1	1.15		
Other adults	3	3.45		
No response			**2**	**(2.30)**
Peers only			**77**	**(88.51)**
Adults also			**8**	**(9.20)**
Q8. Mentioned to adults ($N = 87$)				
Yes			**48**	**(55.17)**
Family	29	60.42		
School	21	43.75		
Others	11	22.91		
Never			**39**	**(44.83)**
Q9. Perceived adults reactions ($N = 87$)				
Do not understand	51	58.62		
Waste of time	35	40.23		
Funny	11	12.64		
Curious	6	6.89		

When asked whether they had ever mentioned Brainrots to adults (Q8), 39 respondents (44.83%) reported that they had never done so. Among those who had ($n = 48$, 55.17%), 29 (60.42%) said they talked about it within their family, 21 (43.75%) at school, and 11 (22.91%) in different contexts.

When asked how adults usually react to discussions about Brainrots (Q9), the majority indicated that adults did not understand them ($n = 51$; 58.62%) or considered Brainrots a waste of time ($n = 35$; 40.23%). Only 11 (12.64%) reported that adults also found them funny, and 6 (6.89%) said adults were curious and wanted to know more. In addition, 11 participants provided additional comments: 4 remarked that they never talked about Brainrots with adults, 2 explained that adults disliked them or did not understand them because of the use of explicit language, 3 wrote that adults considered Brainrots "stupid" or nonsensical, 1 indicated that adults perceived them as "something wrong", and 1 that the adult was simply not interested.

4.3.1 Thematic Analysis: Explaining Brainrot to Adults. From analyses of Q11's responses, we discovered that only 30 (34.48%) attempted to explain an Italian Brainrot to an adult. Their responses revealed an imbalance in the ***"Adult-target"*** of the explanation: eight participants mentioned members of their family, while only three mentioned teachers and school contexts. From their answers, two main directions emerged:

- ***"Positive experience"*** ($n = 8$): four cases involved adults who expressed genuine appreciation for the content (P24, P25, P51, P58), while the other four described adults who were amused but also reported confusion (P02, P03, P79, P84).

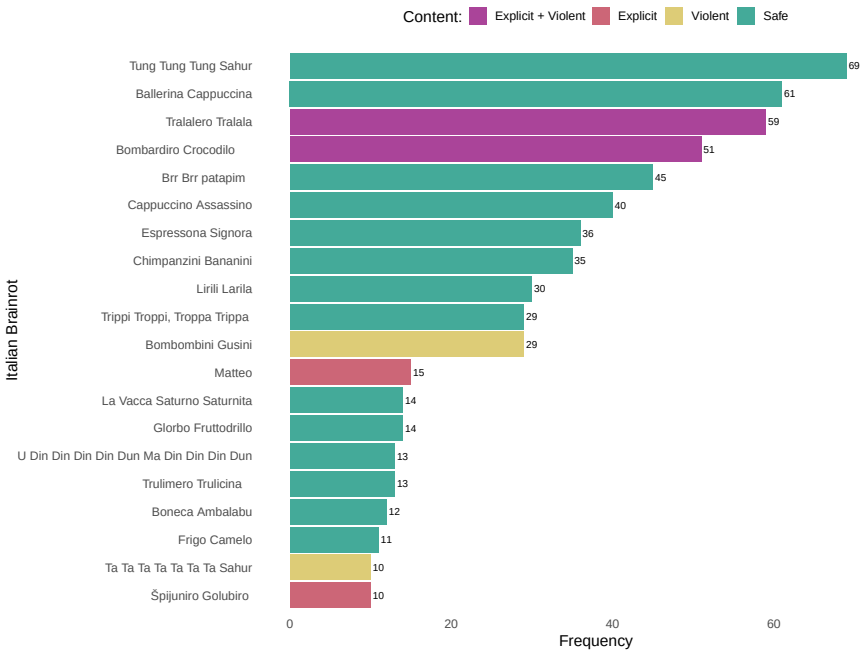

Figure 2: Frequency of the reported "Italian Brainrot" characters by content category.

- ***"Negative experience"*** (n = 22): participants described adults dismissing Brainrots as a waste of time (P40) or as stupid (P25, P80, P87, P89), failing to understand them (n= 14), or reacting with shock (P73), or puzzlement (P03 and P86). Some adults considered Italian Brainrots "useless" (P72), noting that "*there is better content online*" (P38) and criticizing the use of vulgar language (P21). One participant reported that their parents were concerned that children are exposed to this content (P72).

4.3.2 Thematic Analysis: Explaining Differences with Adults. Four main themes emerged from the analysis of participants' responses (n = 71) regarding why they thought young people and adults perceive this content differently (Q10).

- ***"Content is for young(er)"*** (n = 25): participants noted that Brainrots primarily appeal to younger audiences because they are perceived as "funny", "nonsensical" (n = 8), and often involve "*wordplay combined with humorous imagery*" (P57). Additional features such as their "short duration" (P17) and the use of "vulgar or explicit language" (P83, P40) were also mentioned as contributing factors. A subset of participants (n = 5) further emphasized that the content is "childish" making it particularly appealing to younger children.
- ***"Eat your brain and time"*** (n = 11): participants commented that Brainrots are not popular across adults precisely because they are "stupid" and/or "a waste of time".
- ***"Social Media and content exposure"***(n = 43): many participants emphasized the role of *social media*. They reported that young people are more interested in digital content (n = 9) and that platforms actively promote this type of material in their feeds (n = 20). Some noted that it has become a trend among young adolescents (P13, P14), while a few (P28, P35, P45) suggested that younger people are "smarter" than adults and therefore better able to understand digital content. As a reason for these differences, respondents also highlighted adults' lower engagement with social media (n = 22), describing them as "*boomers*" (P55), "*wiser*" (P09, P41, P73), or simply too busy to engage with this type of content (P12).
- **"Different groups dynamics"** (n = 9): participants suggested that adults are generally not interested in this type of content (n = 5), instead preferring more serious material (P56). Others emphasized that adults are less dependent on social media for group dynamics (P05), are less influenced by peers (P87), and experience reduced exposure to and sharing of such content (P61).

4.4 Educators' Awareness of Italian Brainrot

Of the 87 teachers, only 11 (12.64%) reported familiarity with Italian Brainrot: 2 reported knowing them "*well*", 3 "*a little*", while 6 indicated having heard the term without understanding its meaning. The 2 teachers who reported strong familiarity explained that the topic emerged from their students, who were enthusiastic about it. The other teachers stated that they first encountered the term through their own children rather than their students. One of these children, younger than 10 years old, was unable or unwilling to provide a clear explanation when prompted, leading the parent to abandon the conversation. A Kendall's τ_b[4] correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between years of teaching experience and familiarity with Brainrots. The analysis indicated a slight

[4]Kendall's τ_b is a non-parametric correlation coefficient suitable for assessing the relationship between ordinal variables [14, 30], as teaching experience and familiarity in this study.

negative association between the two ordinal variables ($\tau_b = -0.24$, $p = .01$), suggesting that greater teaching experience tended to correspond to lower familiarity. After watching the Brainrot video, 25 teachers (28.74%) described the phenomenon as a "*waste of time*", 45 (51.72%) expressed "*interest in learning more*", 23 (26.45%) reported "*not understanding it*". Only four (4) participants considered it funny (4.60%). Chi-square tests were performed to compare the distribution of perceived reactions reported by students Q9 with teachers' answers (Figure 3). For "*waste of time*" and "*funny*", the distribution of responses did not differ significantly between students and teachers [respectively, $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 2.54$, $p = .11$; $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 3.58$, $p = .06$]. Differently, significant group differences emerged for "*do not understand*" and "*curious*". Teachers selected "*do not understand*" substantially less often than students indicated [$\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 18.43$, $p < .001$], while "*curious*" was selected more often by teachers [$\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 42.19$, $p < .001$].

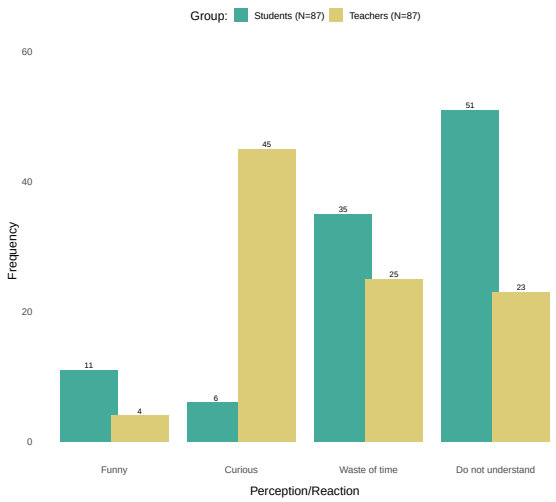

Figure 3: Frequencies of students' perceptions of adults' reactions to Italian Brainrots (Q9) and of teachers' reactions to them.

5 Discussions

Through our investigation of **RQ1**, we confirmed that Italian Brainrot content represents a highly pervasive component of adolescents' digital environments, shaping both their emotional responses and patterns of social interaction. Further, our analysis of **RQ2** revealed a marked generational divide in the understanding and discussion of Brainrots, with adolescents actively engaging with this AI-mediated phenomenon while adults remain largely unaware of it.

Engagement and Emotional Responses to Brainrots (RQ1). Our findings reveal that almost all participating students (97.75%) are familiar with Italian Brainrot content and actively engage with it, primarily through social media platforms such as *YouTube*, *TikTok*, and *WhatsApp* – that generally young adolescents are not legally allowed to use due to age restriction [56]. Amusement was the dominant emotional response (72.41%), with humor, absurdity, and at times offensive or violent elements serving as central sources of appeal, as emerged from the thematic analysis, as well as in line with previous research [6, 64, 65]. Only a minority of young adolescents (20.69%) expressed negative emotions toward Brainrots, some of them explicitly describing them as "*eating your brain*". In contrast, others noted that their explicit language is a defining feature of Brainrots that contributes to their popularity and entertainment value. Consistent with psychological perspectives on adolescence and social media use [19], Brainrots appear to "*fuel group dynamics*" and function as a shared symbolic repertoire that supports group cohesion, peer bonding, and playful interaction. The analysis of the most frequently mentioned Brainrot characters further indicates that not all popular examples rely on offensive language or violent content (e.g., *Tung Tung Tung Sahur* or *Ballerina Cappuccina*). However, some of the most widely circulated ones do include problematic themes, which in some cases are precisely what drives their popularity (e.g., *Tralalero Tralala*). At the same time, a large majority of participants recognized the AI-generated nature of this content (91.95%), which sometimes sparked curiosity about the tools and technologies behind it (53.49%). This growing awareness of technological mediation suggests adolescents' ability to recognize the artificial nature of the content they consume. However, the ability to identify the use of AI systems represents only one dimension of AI literacy [38]; developing fuller AI literacy also requires understanding how such systems work, their limitations and biases, and their broader social and ethical implications. In this sense, Brainrots may serve as an entry point for capturing young people's attention and engaging them in critical reflection about AI-generated media. Our findings also raise questions about whether the appeal of Brainrots represents a new, AI-driven cultural phenomenon or whether it reflects long-standing patterns in how young generations adopt and redefine emerging technologies. Historical parallels — such as the moral panics around violent video games in the 1990s [16, 32] and the diffusion of social media in the 2000s [46, 54] — show that each technological wave has generated recurring cycles of youth enthusiasm, adult anxiety, and intergenerational misunderstanding about risks, values, and appropriate use. From this perspective and in light of our findings, Brainrots can be understood as a continuation of these common intergenerational dynamics, now amplified by AI's capacity for rapid content generation and large-scale virality.

Generational Gaps and Bridge to Cross-Generational Dialogue (RQ2). Regarding **RQ2**, despite its widespread popularity, Italian Brainrots are discussed almost exclusively among peers (88.51%), with adults and educators demonstrating very limited awareness and understanding of the phenomenon. While students primarily emphasized the entertainment value of Brainrots, their accounts suggest that they perceive adults as dismissive or critical of the trend ("*waste of time*" – 40.23%; "*not understanding*" – 57.47%) – likely a reason why many do not engage in open conversations with adults about it. Although nearly half of the respondents (55.17%) reported attempting to discuss Brainrots with adults, these exchanges rarely led to meaningful or critical engagement with either the phenomenon itself or the themes it portrays. Young adolescents often attributed this gap to adults' different patterns of social media use and to the centrality of viral content in youth digital culture. The near-complete lack of awareness among educators further underscores the need to acknowledge and address students' actual media

Table 5: Implications of the Italian Brainrot phenomenon for AI literacy and design, linked to relevant frameworks [49, 63] and design guidelines [38], with illustrative examples from the literature.

Implication for AI Education	Implication for Design
Engagement with AI-generated content	
Our results show that 97.75% of adolescents were familiar with Brainrots, and 91.95% knew they were AI-generated. Brainrots can serve as engaging case studies to promote media literacy, encouraging critical reflection on AI-generated content and human roles in its creation, in line with AI literacy frameworks emphasizing human agency. *UNESCO AI framework*: AI Techniques and Applications *AILit framework*: K3.1 and K3.2 (AI Reshapes Work and Human Roles)	Design interfaces that scaffold guided, reflective co-creation with AI, helping young users recognize how their prompts, choices, and edits shape generated outputs. Designing playful, low-barrier activities – e.g., remixing hybrid Brainrot-inspired characters or crafting AI-assisted rhymes – can foster agency, creative decision-making, and awareness of the human influence embedded in AI-generated media. *Competencies and Design Implications*: Competency 10 (Human Role in AI) and Design Consideration 12 (Leverage Learners' Interests) *Relevant examples:* [11, 47]
Understanding virality and digital circulation	
The viral spread of Brainrots and their reshaping by online communities can be used to illustrate how AI content can potentially circulate globally, highlighting the social and cultural embedding of AI content. Our results further show that young people predominantly share this viral content within their peer groups or younger individuals (88.51%), but only rarely with adults (9.20%). *UNESCO AI framework*: AI Techniques and Applications *AILit framework*: K3.2 and K3.3 (AI Reshapes Work and Human Roles)	Develop visualizations that reveal how AI-generated content spreads, mutates, and branches across networks and social media. Tools such as "meme family trees" or circulation maps can help learners understand the dynamics underlying viral trends and the role of communities in shaping and reframing AI-generated media. *Competencies and Design Implications*: Competency 10 (Human Role in AI) and Design Consideration 11 (Social Interaction) *Relevant examples:* [45, 67, 69]
Ethics and manipulative content	
Brainrots raise issues related to offensive or manipulative content, providing a basis to discuss ethical implications of AI-generated media and encouraging critical thinking about ethical AI use and content creation. The analysis of 50 popular Brainrots shows that 9 of them include language that can be considered violent or offensive. *UNESCO AI framework*: Ethics of AI *AILit framework*: K4.3 (AI's Capabilities and Limitations)	Design tools that help youth identify, interpret, and manage potentially offensive, manipulative, or ambiguous AI-generated content. Interfaces may include contextual explanations or alternative views that present different interpretations of the same AI output to encourage ethical reasoning and critical reflection. *Competencies and Design Implications*: Competency 16 (Ethics) *Relevant examples:* [13, 34, 58]
Copyright, authorship, and ownership	
Circulation of Brainrots in marketing and advertising highlights questions of intellectual property, authorship, and ownership of digital content, encouraging discussion on responsibility and legal/ethical considerations in AI content generation. Indeed, 21.84% of our participants attempted to create their own personalized Brainrot, and many (53.49%) expressed curiosity about how such content can be generated. *UNESCO AI framework*: Human-centred Mindset *AILit framework*: K5.3 and K5.4 (AI's Role in Society)	Create interface cues and metadata systems that surface the provenance of AI-generated artifacts, making visible the prompts, models, edits, and human contributions involved in their creation. Structured transparency tools - such as model or content "cards", or remix histories - can help learners understand responsibility, authorship, and the socio-legal dimensions of AI creativity. *Competencies and Design Implications*: Competency 16 (Ethics) and Design Consideration 8 (Critical Thinking) *Relevant examples:* [5, 37]
Intergenerational inclusion in AI learning	
Italian Brainrot phenomenon demonstrates the need for digital literacy programs aimed at students, educators, and parents, helping adults contextualize youth-driven phenomena without dismissing them and fostering intergenerational communication. Our findings highlight a clear generational gap: educators were largely unaware of the trend, with only 12.64% reporting any familiarity. At the same time, 51.74% of teachers expressed curiosity and an interest in learning more, pointing to opportunities for engaging adults. *UNESCO AI framework*: Human-centred Mindset *AILit framework*: K5.1 (AI's Role in Society)	Design participatory workshops and experiences that enable intergenerational exploration of AI concepts and youth-driven cultural phenomena like Italian Brainrots. Such environments should support shared creative tasks, scaffold adults' understanding of children's digital practices, and promote dialogue across age groups for strengthening informed decision-making processes and increasing mutual understanding. *Competencies and Design Implications*: Design Consideration 10 (Support for Parents) *Relevant examples:* [27, 72]

ecologies. While the majority of teachers reported no familiarity with Brainrots (87.36%), nearly half (51.72%) expressed curiosity to learn more. Expanding opportunities for professional development and structured dialogue could help educators better understand emerging digital trends and support students in developing critical and reflective approaches to their online experiences [38, 49, 53, 63]. Such initiatives may also promote digital well-being, as our findings indicate that students who reported exclusively negative emotions toward Brainrots (20.69%) tended not to discuss them with adults. This pattern reduces young people's chances to critically process discomfort or seek support through dialogue and limits adults' opportunities to understand how adolescents navigate digital culture [23, 26]. The findings highlight that Italian Brainrot currently does not function as a site of cross-generational communication. At the same time, however, it may offer an avenue for intervention: integrating Brainrots into AI literacy initiatives could serve as an entry point for fostering engagement and facilitating dialogue across generations. In the following section, we elaborate on the implications of leveraging Brainrot-related discussions within AI education pathways to support such forms of dialogue and interventions.

5.1 Implication for AI Literacy and Design Considerations

To support critical thinking and foster intergenerational communication, Table 5 presents a set of implications of Italian Brainrot phenomenon for AI literacy as well as relevant design considerations. In relation to AI literacy, we map our findings to competencies from two global frameworks: UNESCO's *AI Competency Framework*, which provides an international perspective on student AI skills [63], and the *AILit Framework* developed by the OECD and the European Commission, which emphasizes structured competencies for critical engagement with AI [49]. We also outline a set of design considerations for HCI and CCI (Child–Computer Interaction) practitioners, referencing Long and Magerko's guidelines [38] and illustrating these considerations with examples from the literature. As shown in the Table, Brainrots can potentially offer situated examples that can support critical reflection on AI-generated content, digital culture, authorship, ethics, and copyright, while also underscoring the importance of involving educators and parents in social media literacy initiatives.

6 Conclusion

This research examined the experiences of young adolescents engaging with Italian Brainrot content and the dynamics of intergenerational communication around it. The findings indicate that such content is highly popular among youth, with its appeal often stemming from a combination of nonsensical elements, humorous content, and offensive language. This study focused on participants aged 12–14, a range considered particularly relevant due to the psychosocial development characteristic of early adolescence, including identity formation, peer influence, and emerging critical thinking skills, especially in relation to technology use [48]. Additionally, this age group is at the threshold of accessing social media platforms, which are the primary channels for (legally) engaging with social media content, making it a crucial period to investigate how young people encounter, interpret, and discuss such digital material. However, our results suggest that even younger children may be exposed to and consume this content, highlighting the need for future research to investigate younger populations.

Limitations. Our study focused on students who share the same language and cultural background, which may have influenced how they understood the content. Since Brainrot content often uses language-based jokes, expressions, and sometimes offensive words, these students may notice things that speakers of other languages would not. Future research should therefore explore more diverse populations to better understand the broader appeal, interpretation, and cross-cultural diffusion of this phenomenon. Although we complemented student responses with insights from teachers, the perspectives of parents were not included. Future work should investigate family dynamics and adult–child interactions related to online content consumption more systematically, particularly given the central role of caregivers and educators in mediating adolescents' digital experiences [72]. The recruitment procedures introduce some additional limitations. The participating classes were self-nominated by the institute based on internal criteria that were not disclosed to the researchers. Similarly, the teachers enrolled individually in the training program. These recruitment procedures may have introduced a selection bias, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings. A further methodological limitation concerns the procedure adopted during the teacher survey. To ensure that all participants shared a minimum level of familiarity with the phenomenon, teachers were shown a single Brainrot example ("*Prr Prr Pataapim* "). While this approach supported comprehension, it may also have biased teachers' perceptions by exposing them to only one type of Brainrot content.

Future Works. Despite these limitations, this study represents an effort to explore a viral phenomenon that combines AI-generated content with social media engagement, providing insight into how young users perceive and interact with such content. In this respect, we present indications on how Italian Brainrots could be used as a topic to capture students' attention, leveraging shared language and cultural references to encourage reflection on the implications of viral, AI-generated content. Rather than being stigmatized as has occurred with video games and social media [16, 32], these phenomena can be framed as potential educational resources to support AI literacy and the responsible, informed use of technology. As a research community, we therefore propose considering such trends that are ephemeral yet highly pervasive and shaped by AI-based technologies, as opportunities to bridge the intergenerational gap and support younger generations in adopting a more reflective and conscious approach to technology use.

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A List of Brainrots

Table A1: List of the 44 Italian Brainrots mentioned by respondents, ordered by frequency, with indications of explicit language (explicit) and violent or sensitive themes (violent). Creator codes are included to show cases where multiple Brainrots were originally created by the same author.

pr	Italian Brainrot Name	Language	Explicit	Violent	Creator code
1	*Tung Tung Tung Sahur*	Indonesian	no	no	a01
2	*Ballerina Cappuccina*	Italian	no	no	a02
3	*Tralalero Tralala*	Italian	yes	yes	a03
4	*Bombardiro Crocodilo*	Italian	yes	yes	a04
5	*Brr Brr Patapim*	Italian	no	no	a05
6	*Cappuccino Assassino*	Italian	no	no	a06
7	*Espressona Signora*	Italian	no	no	a07
8	*Chimpanzini Bananini*	Mix It/En	no	no	a06
9	*Lirili Larila*	Italian	no	no	a08
10	*Bombombini Gusini*	Italian	no	yes	a04
11	*Trippi Troppi, Troppa Trippa*	Italian	no	no	a09
12	*Matteo*	Italian	yes	no	a10
13	*Glorbo Fruttodrillo*	Italian	no	no	a11
14	*La Vacca Saturno Saturnita*	Italian	no	no	a12
15	*U Din Din Din Din Dun Ma Din Din Din Dun*	Indonesian	no	no	a01
16	*Trulimero Trulicina*	Italian	no	no	a13
17	*Boneca Ambalabu*	Indonesian	no	no	a12
18	*Frigo Camelo*	Italian	no	no	a12
19	*Ta Ta Ta Ta Ta Ta Ta Sahur*	Indonesian	no	yes	a14
20	*Špijuniro Golubiro*	Croatian	yes	no	a15
21	*Frulli Frulla*	Italian	no	no	a08
22	*Ballerino lololo*	Italian	no	no	a16
23	*Orangutini Ananasini*	Mix It/En	no	no	a06
24	*Bobrito Bandito*	Mix It/Sp	no	no	a17
25	*Bri Bri Bicus Dicus*	Italian	no	no	a18
26	*Burbaloni Lulililoli*	Italian	no	no	a06
27	*Giraffa celeste*	Mix It/Es/Fr	no	no	a12
28	*Polpo Andikappato*	Italian	yes	yes	NA
29	*Garamararam*	Indonesian	no	no	a01
30	*Cocofanto Elefanto*	Italian	no	no	a06
31	*Tostapalle*	Italian	no	yes	a19
32	*Blueberrinni Octopussini*	Italian	no	no	a06
33	*Orangutini Cocosini*	Mix It/En	no	no	a06
34	*Tigrrullini Watermellini*	Mix It/En	no	no	a06
35	*Tob Tobi tob tob tobi tob tob tobi tobi*	Indonesian	no	no	a01
36	*Andrea Cento*	Italian	no	yes	a20
37	*Alberto*	Italian	no	no	NA
38	*Bananitta Dolfinitta*	Italian	no	no	a06
39	*Piccione Macchina*	Italian	no	no	a06
40	*Bobrini Zucchini*	Mix It/En	no	no	a21
41	*Trenostruzzo Turbo 3000*	Mix It/En	no	no	a12
42	*Los Tralaleritos Dicen Tralala*	Spanish	no	no	a22
43	*Aspirapalle*	Italian	yes	yes	a22
44	*Roberto*	Italian	yes	yes	a10