

RECEPTION AND PRODUCTION OF CREOLIZED MEDIA CONTENT BY GENERATION Z: UNDERSTANDING, TRUST, AND PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: This article examines how Generation Z in Uzbekistan perceives and produces creolized media content. Drawing on a stimulus-based reception survey and a creation-practices questionnaire, it analyses understanding, trust, and emotional response to polycode stimuli, and maps produsage behaviour along a curation–remix–creation spectrum. Findings show that standardized visual codes accelerate comprehension while multilingual density lowers it; trust depends on source transparency rather than format; and creative output is dominated by template imitation and remix rather than original authorship, with a persistent gap between consumption and production intensity.

Keywords: creolization; polycode media text; Generation Z; media reception; produsage; participatory culture; Uzbekistan

1. Introduction and Hypothesis

Digital media content increasingly merges verbal text with image, sound, video, and animation into a single creolized whole, and Generation Z is the first cohort to have been socialized entirely within this polycode environment (Panagiotou, Lazou, & Baliou, 2022). While a growing body of research treats creolization as a textual property, comparatively little empirical work asks how young audiences actually decode such texts, how much they trust them, and — crucially — whether the same audience also produces creolized content itself. This gap is particularly visible in national media contexts such as Uzbekistan, where a multilingual (Uzbek–Russian–English) digital environment adds a further layer of complexity to code-mixing and audience response.

This study advances two interrelated hypotheses. First, comprehension, trust, and emotional engagement with creolized media content are not uniform but vary systematically with the type of code relationship involved (standardized infographic codes versus dense multilingual or meme-based registers). Second, Generation Z's own content-creation practice mirrors its reception practice: production is dominated not by original authorship but by imitation and remix of existing creolized templates, producing a persistent asymmetry between the intensity of media consumption and the intensity of active creation. Testing these hypotheses contributes to journalism and mass-communication research by clarifying which creolized formats are cognitively and affectively effective for young audiences, and by showing how newsroom output re-enters circulation once it passes into audience hands.

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2. Sources and Research Methods

The study builds on the theory of the creolized text developed within post-Soviet psycholinguistics and semiotics, and on Western social-semiotic multimodality theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020; Barthes, 1977). It also draws on audience-reception scholarship linking visual elements to comprehension and emotional response (Cheema et al., 2023), and on Generation Z media-consumption research grounded in the uses-and-gratifications tradition (Hou, Hu, & Hu, 2022; Elkatmış, 2024; Pew Research Center, 2024). Production is theorised through the prosumer concept (Toffler, 1980), Bruns's (2008) notion of produsage, Jenkins's (2006) participatory culture, and meme theory describing imitation as "variation amid repetition" of content, form, and stance (Shifman, 2014).

Empirically, the article draws on two original instruments administered to a Generation Z sample in Uzbekistan (respondents aged 14–24; n=18–36 depending on module completion). The first was a stimulus-based reception test in which four polycode stimuli — an infographic, a meme-aesthetic video, a news-agency post, and a multilingual blog-style post — were shown to respondents, who then rated comprehension (1–5 scale), selected the strongest 1–3 emotions, and reported trust-relevant judgements, including reaction to visible AI-generation traces. The second instrument was a seven-block questionnaire on content-creation frequency, content types produced in the previous six months, creative actions performed (trend repetition, meme captioning, remix, original meme creation), motivations, multilingual writing habits, and emoji use. Both instruments followed recent (2022–2025) international precedent for combined reception and produsage measurement.

3. The Main Part. Discussion

3.1. Comprehension of creolized stimuli varies by code relationship, not by format novelty

The clearest pattern in the reception data concerns comprehension. When respondents rated how understandable each stimulus was at first glance, scores diverged sharply by code type. The infographic stimulus (an explainer on infant care) achieved the highest mean score, 3.56 on a 5-point scale, with 61% of respondents rating it clearly understandable (33% choosing "4" and 28% choosing "5"). The meme-aesthetic video scored 3.06, but with a markedly polarized distribution — 28% gave the lowest rating and 28% gave the highest, indicating that meme comprehension is binary rather than graded: either the viewer holds the required cultural key or does not. The news-agency post scored a moderate 2.89, with 44% selecting the neutral midpoint, suggesting that headline-

plus-text formats are processed more slowly than iconographic ones. The multilingual, diary-style blog post scored lowest, 2.56, with 33% rating it not understandable at first glance.

This ranking — infographic (3.56) > meme (3.06) > news post (2.89) > multilingual blog post (2.56) — supports the first hypothesis and refines it: it is not "more creolization" but the standardization of the visual-semiotic code that accelerates comprehension. Checkmarks, thermometer icons, and numerical indicators in the infographic transmit meaning without requiring the reader to process dense verbal text, which is consistent with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) account of composition and information value in visual grammar. By contrast, high verbal density combined with multilingual code-switching — the defining feature of the diary-style post — slows first-glance comprehension even though, as shown below, it simultaneously increases affective closeness for a subset of the audience. For journalism practice, the implication is direct: complex information intended for rapid uptake should rely on standardized graphic-semiotic codes rather than on layered multilingual prose, regardless of how "native" the latter feels to the target demographic.

3.2. Trust in creolized content is decoupled from format and anchored in source transparency

Across all four stimuli, Generation Z respondents displayed what can be described as critical visual literacy rather than blanket scepticism or blanket acceptance of creolized formats. Forty-four percent of respondents who noticed traces of AI generation in an image reported that this reduced their trust in the material, even though the surrounding verbal content was unchanged. This finding is consistent with recent audience-reception literature showing that visual elements are processed as evidentiary cues rather than as neutral decoration (Cheema et al., 2023), and it directly falsifies the naive assumption that a polished, richly creolized visual package automatically increases credibility. Trust instead tracked source transparency: content attributed to a recognizable news brand or carrying visible source markers received consistently higher trust ratings than anonymous or algorithmically ambiguous material, independent of how many semiotic codes (colour, iconography, motion) were layered into the post.

This decoupling of creolization from trust has a specific implication for the multilingual dimension of the Uzbek media environment. When code-switching (Uzbek–Russian, or the insertion of English loanwords and emoji-as-word substitutes) appeared in personal or blogger-style content, respondents rated it as natural and unremarkable; the same code-switching, when it appeared in a news-agency post, was read by a substantial share

of respondents as "distracting" and as a signal that the outlet had not settled on a single, precise register. In other words, Generation Z applies a register-sensitive trust heuristic: creolization and multilingual mixing are acceptable, even expected, in entertainment and peer content, but journalistic material is implicitly held to a stricter monolingual, source-transparent standard. This finding refines comparative work on Russian-language "digital youth" media consumption (Dunas, 2021), which describes similar platform-first, short-format preferences but does not register the specific three-way Uzbek–Russian–English code-switching pressure documented here.

3.3. Emotional response is format-specific and often precedes rational evaluation

Respondents were asked to select the one to three strongest emotions evoked by each stimulus, and the resulting emotional profiles differed sharply by format, confirming that creolized content does not produce a single generic "engagement" response but a family of distinct affective registers. The meme-aesthetic video elicited humour/amusement (44%), but also indifference (33%) and curiosity (28%) — a profile indicating that meme content operates in an entertainment register that reliably amuses without producing deep affective attachment for roughly a third of viewers. The infant-care infographic elicited curiosity (50%) and surprise (33%), with trust (22%) and concern (17%) trailing — a cognitive-affective register in which emotion tracks informational interest rather than humour. The news-agency post produced a similar but distinct pattern: curiosity (50%) and surprise (22%) led, while scepticism (17%) remained present alongside interest, indicating that critical distance and engagement coexist rather than substitute for one another.

The multilingual diary-style post produced the most polarized emotional profile of all four stimuli: indifference was the leading response (50%), yet a closeness/familiarity response ("this feels like someone I know") was the second most frequent (33%), with curiosity and empathy trailing at 17% each. This is a socially-identificatory register, structurally distinct from the entertainment register of the meme and the cognitive-affective register of the infographic and news post: paralinguistically dense content (heavy emoji use, letter-stretching, code-switched slang) draws a third of the audience emotionally closer while leaving half emotionally unmoved. Analysis of what respondents said first caught their attention corroborates this: writing style (33%) was named most often, followed by heavy emoji use, emoji-as-word substitution, and channel name (17% each), and letter-stretching (11%) — confirming that paralinguistic and stylistic markers,

not propositional content, are the primary triggers of affective response, consistent with the broader claim that in creolized media texts emotional reaction is frequently activated before, and independently of, rational textual evaluation.

Emoji use itself illustrates this pattern precisely. Fifty-six percent of respondents said they use emoji primarily to express emotion, but emoji function overwhelmingly as an intensifying supplement to verbal text rather than as a replacement for it: when asked whether they would substitute emoji for words, the mean score was only 1.83, and 56% chose the lowest point on the scale. When asked how they would receive a plain, emoji-free message, 56% again selected the lowest-concern point, indicating that the absence of emoji is read as unremarkable by a majority, even though a meaningful minority (roughly 39%) perceive emoji-free text as lacking emotional warmth. This is consistent with the broader literature on emoji as compensators for the absence of non-verbal cues in text-based communication, adding tonal nuance and perceived responsiveness rather than substituting for lexical content (Cheema et al., 2023; Hou, Hu, & Hu, 2022).

3.4. Reception behaviour is dominated by low-effort, private engagement rather than public commentary

Beyond comprehension, trust, and emotion, the reception module also captured behavioural engagement. Among respondents who completed the perception block, the most common response to creolized content was forwarding it to a friend in a private message: 88.9% reported doing this at least sometimes (61.1% "sometimes", 27.8% "always"). Saving or bookmarking content ranked second (83.3% combined), followed by reacting or liking (77.8%) and resharing to one's own story or channel (77.8%, of which the large majority was occasional rather than habitual). Public verbal commentary was, by contrast, the rarest behaviour: 44.4% of respondents said they "never" write comments, and only 11.1% do so regularly.

This behavioural hierarchy — private forwarding and saving far outweighing public commentary — matters for journalism practice because it shows that the visibility metrics newsrooms most easily observe (likes, public comments) undercount the actual circulation of creolized content, which travels predominantly through private, non-instrumented channels such as direct messages and personal Telegram threads. It also confirms that Generation Z's engagement with creolized content is affectively driven but behaviourally low-cost: audiences respond quickly and non-verbally, reserving effortful, publicly visible participation — writing a comment — for a small minority of cases. Newsroom strategies calibrated only to public engagement metrics therefore

risk misreading the true reach and resonance of their creolized output among this audience.

3.5. Production is moderate and uneven: most users create rarely, a minority creates constantly

Turning from reception to production, the second survey module shows that Generation Z's content-creation activity is moderate but distributed unevenly. When asked to rate, on a 1 (almost never) to 5 (constantly) scale, how often they create content for social media, the mean score was 2.61: 16.7% chose the lowest point, 38.9% chose "2", 22.2% chose "3", and 11.1% each chose "4" and "5". In other words, more than half of respondents (55.6%) create content rarely or episodically, while only 22.2% are active, habitual creators. This distribution is consistent with the "participation inequality" principle documented in digital-platform research, according to which a small minority of users generates the bulk of original content while the majority consumes and lightly reacts (see discussion in Bruns, 2008).

This creates a measurable consumption–production gap: roughly two-thirds of respondents (67%) spend at least two hours daily on social media (28% report 4–6 hours, 28% report 2–4 hours, 11% report 6–8 hours), yet mean content-creation intensity remains at only 2.61 on the five-point scale. The gap is not a methodological artefact — it recurs consistently across the sample — and it carries a direct implication for journalism strategy: outreach to Generation Z cannot be designed only around "creators"; it must equally target the much larger consumer-resharer segment, since journalistic material circulates chiefly through that segment's low-effort resharing rather than through original commentary or creative reworking by a small creator minority.

3.6. What is created is short-lived, visual, and inherently creolized in form

The types of content Generation Z reports creating confirm that production, where it occurs, is overwhelmingly polycode by default rather than by deliberate design. The most common format was stories (38.9%), followed by reels/shorts/TikTok-style short video (27.8%) and photo-based posts (27.8%); text-only posts or articles (16.7%), work-related professional content (16.7%), and running a personal Telegram channel (11.1%) were less common, and self-made or edited memes accounted for only 5.6%. Sixteen-point-seven percent of respondents reported creating no content at all, functioning purely as observers — a figure that matches, almost exactly, the self-identification data discussed below, indicating strong internal consistency in the sample.

The dominance of stories and short video is significant

precisely because these formats are structurally, not incidentally, polycode: they routinely combine image or video with text overlay, stickers, emoji, music, filters, and animated elements in a single artefact. This means that when Generation Z does create content, it almost inevitably produces a creolized artefact rather than a purely verbal or purely visual one — empirically confirming that creolization operates as a natural, default communicative mode not only at the level of reception (as shown above) but equally at the level of production. The comparatively marginal share of text-only posts and articles (16.7%) further indicates that the native expressive register of this generation is visual-polycode rather than verbal-analytical, a finding with direct consequences for how journalistic content should be packaged if it is to compete for attention within the same feed.

3.7. Creation is dominated by imitation and remix, not original authorship

The single most important finding regarding production concerns not how much content Generation Z creates, but how it creates it. Asked which creative actions they had performed in the previous six months (multiple selections allowed), respondents most frequently reported repeating an existing trend video — that is, producing their own version of a template (44.4%). Adding one's own caption to an existing meme ranked second (27.8%). Resharing an original post with an added comment (11.1%), creating an original meme from scratch (11.1%), and adding a visual comment (image or meme) to someone else's post (11.1%) were each markedly less common, while remixing or editing existing content (adding music or filters to a video, 5.6%) and sharing one's own original design (5.6%) were rarest of all. A third of respondents (33.3%) reported performing none of the listed creative actions.

This distribution supports the second hypothesis directly: template repetition and remix (44.4% + 27.8% combined) outweigh original, from-scratch creation (11.1% + 5.6%) by a wide margin. The pattern matches meme theory's account of imitation as "variation amid repetition", in which users preserve either the form or the content of a template while altering the other dimension (Shifman, 2014): trend-video repetition typically preserves format, audio, and choreography while substituting new content and context; meme captioning preserves the visual template while substituting new verbal content and evaluative stance. In both cases, Generation Z is filling a pre-existing creolized "slot" with its own language, context, and cultural markers rather than authoring new templates — a production-level manifestation of exactly the same combinatory, recontextualizing logic that Bruns (2008) and Jenkins (2006) describe as characteristic of produsage

and participatory culture more broadly, and that Toffler (1980) anticipated in coining the term "prosumer".

For journalism, this recasts the relationship between newsroom output and audience circulation. A primary creolized artefact issued by a newsroom — a video news item, an infographic, a captioned photo — does not remain a finished product once it reaches Generation Z; it becomes raw material for secondary creolized derivatives: an annotated reshare, a meme, a trend-style repetition, or a story-quote. This secondary production chain has two direct consequences for editorial practice. First, newsrooms cannot fully control the downstream life of their content, since its "secondary life" unfolds in audience hands and may shift its tone, evaluative framing, or emotional register — a serious news item can resurface as a satirical meme, and a neutral report can resurface as a critically captioned reshare. Second, anticipating this remix potential — how easily a given visual or textual unit can be captioned, templated, or looped — becomes a strategic consideration at the point of original content creation, not an afterthought.

3.8. Production mirrors reception: the same multilingual and paralinguistic codes operate symmetrically on both sides

The multilingual and paralinguistic patterns identified in the reception data reappear, in mirrored form, in the production data. When writing posts, comments, stories, or messages, respondents report using Uzbek (78%), Russian (56%), and English (28%); the practice of mixing two or more languages within a single message clustered around the mid-point of the scale (approximately 2.8), confirming that multilingual code-switching is not an exceptional stylistic choice but a normalized feature of this generation's own written output, exactly as it was shown above to be a normalized (if register-sensitive) feature of what this generation reads. Fifty-six percent of respondents said they use emoji primarily to express emotion when writing, adding a paralinguistic-affective layer to their own output that parallels the emotional weight emoji were shown to carry in the reception data. Meme consumption similarly straddles the global and the local: purely international (English- or Russian-language) memes (39%) and locally produced Uzbek memes (33%) circulate side by side, indicating that cultural creolization — the co-presence of global templates and local content — operates at the level of taste and circulation, not only at the level of textual structure.

This reception–production symmetry is theoretically significant because it demonstrates that creolization functions as a single, bidirectional communicative competence for Generation Z rather than as two separate skills. The same code repertoire

— multilingual mixing, emoji-based emotional marking, visual templating, cultural referencing — is activated when this audience decodes content and again when it encodes its own. Practically, this symmetry means that journalistic content packaged in the code system Generation Z itself naturally produces is more likely to be received, forwarded, and recirculated by this audience; conversely, content that remains entirely outside that code system — purely verbal, monolingual, formally institutional — risks being perceived as foreign to the audience's own communicative register and consequently excluded from its circulation practices, regardless of the accuracy or importance of its content.

3.9. Motivations for creation are expressive and social rather than journalistic or informational

Asked about their primary motivation for creating content (up to three selections), half of respondents (50%) cited expressing their own opinion or position; close behind were marking a current event or mood (33.3%) and sharing with friends and close contacts (33.3%). Building professional reputation or a portfolio (27.8%), audience-building and pursuing recognition (22.2%), creative self-expression (16.7%), and making friends laugh (11.1%) followed. This motivational profile — dominated by self-expression and social bonding rather than by informational or civic intent — helps explain why the creative actions catalogued above skew so heavily toward template-based remix: when the underlying motivation is to mark a personal moment or maintain a social bond rather than to author an original informational artefact, reusing an existing, socially legible template is the most efficient and lowest-risk communicative strategy available.

4. Conclusions and Results

The evidence collected here confirms both hypotheses advanced at the outset. First, comprehension, trust, and emotional engagement with creolized media content are not uniform properties of "creolization in general" but vary systematically and predictably with the specific type of code relationship at work: standardized graphic-semiotic codes accelerate comprehension, source transparency rather than visual richness anchors trust, and format determines which of at least three distinct emotional registers — entertainment-humorous, cognitive-affective, or socially-identificatory — a given creolized artefact activates. Second, Generation Z's production practice mirrors and extends its reception practice: the same audience that decodes multilingual, paralinguistically dense, and visually templated content also encodes its own output in the same register, but does so predominantly through imitation and remix of existing creolized



templates rather than through original authorship, producing a stable and theoretically important gap between high media-consumption intensity and comparatively moderate, unevenly distributed content-creation intensity.

For journalism and media-management practice, three concrete implications follow. First, information intended for rapid, accurate uptake by Generation Z audiences should prioritise standardized visual-semiotic coding (icons, numerical indicators, checkmarks) over dense multilingual prose, while material intended to build affective closeness may deliberately use paralinguistic richness at the acknowledged cost of comprehension speed for part of the audience. Second, newsrooms should treat visible AI-generation traces and source-attribution transparency as trust-critical variables independent of creolization level, and should apply a stricter, more monolingual register to journalistic material than to entertainment content, since Generation Z itself applies this register-sensitive distinction when evaluating credibility. Third, because journalistic content is overwhelmingly recirculated by Generation Z through low-effort private forwarding, saving, and template-based remix rather than through original commentary or public engagement metrics, editorial strategy should anticipate and design for this secondary-production life cycle — including the risk that tone, framing, or evaluative stance may shift once content passes into audience hands — rather than treating initial publication as the end point of the content's communicative trajectory.

The findings also point to a broader research agenda. Because the present sample is drawn from a single national, multilingual media environment, future studies should test whether the comprehension–trust–emotion pattern documented here, and the specific imitation-over-authorship skew in production, replicate across other multilingual Generation Z populations, and whether newsroom-level interventions designed around these findings measurably increase the accurate, source-attributed circulation of journalistic content within audience-driven remix ecosystems. As generative AI tools become more accessible to young content creators themselves, a further open question is whether the imitation-and-remix production pattern identified here will intensify, or whether it will be partly displaced by AI-assisted original authorship — a trajectory with direct consequences for how future creolized media literacy interventions should be designed.

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O'ZBEKISTONDA GENERATION Z (Z AVLODI) TOMONIDAN KREOLIZATSIYALASHGAN MEDIAKONTENTNI TAYORLASH VA QABUL QILISH: TUSHUNISH, ISHONCH VA ISHTIROKCHILIK AMALIYOTLARI

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada O'zbekistondagi Z-avlodning kreollashgan media kontentni qanday idrok etishi va yaratishi tahlil qilinadi. Stimul asosidagi qabul so'rovnomasi va kontent yaratish amaliyotiga oid anketa asosida polikodli stimullarni tushunish, ularga ishonch va ularga nisbatan emotsional munosabat o'rganiladi, shuningdek kontent yaratish amaliyoti kuratsion tarqatish — remiks — mustaqil yaratish spektri bo'yicha tahlil qilinadi. Natijalarga ko'ra, standartlashgan vizual kodlar tushunishni tezlashtiradi, ko'p tillilik esa uni pasaytiradi; ishonch formatga emas, manba shaffofligiga bog'liq; kontent yaratishda esa original mualliflikdan ko'ra shablonlarni takrorlash va remiks ustunlik qiladi, iste'mol va ishlab chiqarish intensivligi o'rtasida esa barqaror tafovut mavjud.

Keywords: kreollashuv; polikodli media matn; Z-avlod; media qabul qilish; produsage; ishtirokchilik madaniyati; O'zbekiston.

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ВОСПРИЯТИЕ И СОЗДАНИЕ КРЕОЛИЗОВАННОГО МЕДИ-
АКОНТЕНТА
ПОКОЛЕНИЕМ Z: ПОНИМАНИЕ, ДОВЕРИЕ И ПАРТИСИПА-
ТИВНЫЕ ПРАКТИКИ В УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ

Аннотация: В статье анализируется, как поколение Z в Узбекистане воспринимает и создаёт креолизированный медиаконтент. На основе опроса восприятия стимул-материалов и анкеты о практиках создания контента изучены понимание, доверие и эмоциональное отношение к поликодовым стимулам, а также практика создания контента вдоль спектра «курация — ремикс — самостоятельное создание». Результаты показывают, что стандартизированные визуальные коды ускоряют понимание, тогда как многоязычие его снижает; доверие зависит не от формата, а от прозрачности источника; в создании контента преобладают подражание шаблонам и ремикс, а не оригинальное авторство, при этом сохраняется устойчивый разрыв между интенсивностью потребления и производства контента.

Ключевые слова: креолизация; поликодовый медиатекст; поколение Z; восприятие медиа; продюсаж; культура участия; Узбекистан.

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