

NANO BANANA, GHIBLI, AND BEYOND: FRAMING SEASONAL DIGITAL PHENOMENA IN ONLINE NEWS MEDIA

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Abstract: It all started with the “Nano Banana” trend, which made me pause and wonder: what do these fleeting online phenomena really tell us about our digital lives? Often dismissed as mere entertainment, trends like Nano Banana, Ghibli-inspired imagery, and other seasonal internet fads carry deeper cultural meanings; they reflect our shared memories, humor, and the subtle ways we connect in online spaces. This study explores 25 online news articles from the Google News database, using Fairclough’s three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model to examine how journalists write about, frame, and interpret these trends. The analysis shows that while these phenomena are ephemeral, media narratives play a key role in shaping them as contemporary cultural artefacts, preserving moments of digital nostalgia, and highlighting how even brief online fads can leave a lasting imprint on our collective digital imagination.

Keywords: *Digital Culture, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ephemeral Online Trends, Memes, News Media Representation,*

Introduction

The digital world keeps shifting, creating moments that seize public attention almost overnight. Some of these moments last only briefly but linger in memory long after they fade. Among the most curious are short lived AI trends that sweep through social media, spark creativity, and then disappear. The “Nano Banana” trend, where AI tools reimagine everyday clothing and objects in nostalgic, playful styles, and the Studio Ghibli inspired image series are striking examples. They may seem like passing fads, yet they reveal how imagination, technology, and shared cultural memory interact in complex ways.

News media occupy a central role in this process. They do not simply report these trends; they help construct what they mean. Through headlines, visuals, and commentary, journalists turn fleeting online creations into cultural stories. The tone of coverage often moves between delight and caution, celebrating AI’s artistic potential while raising questions about ethics, privacy, and authenticity. Such contrasts show how ephemeral online phenomena can become mirrors for wider debates about creativity, control, and technological anxiety.

This study treats these AI generated trends as cultural artefacts that invite both fascination and reflection. Drawing on Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis, it explores how news narratives create meaning, mobilize nostalgia, and shape audience engagement. Using a set of twenty five online news reports, the research examines the linguistic and discursive patterns that guide how these trends are described, circulated, and interpreted in digital culture.

At a deeper level, this study asks what these fleeting moments reveal about contemporary life. How do temporary online sensations contribute to shared cultural memory? In what ways do media narratives influence ethical awareness or aesthetic judgment? And how does the rapid spread of trends across platforms affect their symbolic weight? By engaging with these questions, the research aims to show how short lived digital expressions can acquire long term cultural meaning, reflecting the tangled relationship between technology, creativity, and everyday media experience.

Review of Literature

Framing Practices in Online and Hybrid News Spaces

Maria Carolina Janssen's (2010) comparative study remains a useful starting point for understanding online framing. Examining posts from four blogs and four digital newspapers, she found that both shared similar interpretive frames: progress and justice were dominant but these differences were not determined by the medium itself. Rather, framing seemed to depend on incidental editorial choices. This insight reminds us that in digital environments, the border between professional and participatory journalism is fluid, and framing becomes a dynamic act of meaning making rather than a fixed institutional product.

Hutagalung and Nurhasanah (2025) expanded this discussion through a large narrative review of seventy two studies that linked framing with public perception. Their analysis revealed three major themes: the use of emotional language to shape attitudes, cross cultural differences in how frames are received, and the role of media in maintaining or challenging public trust. The linguistic texture of news, its metaphors, tone, and silences was shown to affect how audiences interpret events. This has direct relevance to the present study, where coverage of "Nano Banana" or "Ghibli AI art" similarly relies on emotional cues and moral undertones that guide audience engagement.

Han's (2024) research in *Heliyon* brought computational tools into framing analysis. By using sentiment detection on South Korean news about real estate and welfare, Han revealed a negative link between economic and social narratives, influenced by political cycles. This combination of data driven and interpretive methods demonstrates how digital framing shifts with ideology and time. It also hints at comparable tendencies in AI trend coverage, where optimism about creativity often sits beside concerns about data misuse or ethical uncertainty.

Digital Transformation, Metaphor, and Narrative Meaning

Schmid and Welter's (2023) study of the German Mittelstand adds a metaphorical layer to the discussion. Through their review of newspaper coverage, they identified four recurring storylines: negative, positive, future oriented, and chance challenge. Each one used distinctive imagery to explain technological change. Metaphors of illness, battle, or growth shaped how readers imagined digital transformation. Such narrative strategies echo the ways journalists describe AI trends, often using playful or organic metaphors such as "viral bloom," "digital fever," or "AI craze" to translate technological novelty into familiar emotional language.

Lychkovska's (2017) analysis of Ukrainian and Russian media around the Crimea crisis explores a different form of narrative: digital politics as theatrical performance. Her argument that truth and fiction merge in postmodern media provides an important conceptual bridge. The "hybrid war" framing she identifies, where political stories are staged as spectacle, parallels how digital culture dramatizes ephemeral phenomena. In coverage of AI trends, for instance, fascination and fear coexist, reflecting the same erosion of clear boundaries between fact, fiction, and affect.

Sharing, Circulation, and the Social Life of News

Kümpel, Karnowski, and Keyling's (2015) comprehensive review in *Social Media + Society* traced how news circulates through sharing networks. Synthesizing over a hundred studies, they grouped the findings around users, content, and networks, showing that people share not just to inform but to express identity and emotion. This understanding of sharing as social performance reframes the news cycle itself: publication becomes only the beginning of a story's life. In the context of AI trends, circulation through likes, remixes, and comments extends framing beyond the journalist's control, making the audience an active co-author of meaning.

Synthesizing the Literature: Gaps and Directions

Together, these studies reveal that digital framing is more than a representational act; it is a process that shapes cultural meaning, emotional tone, and ideological stance. Yet several areas remain less explored.

First, while scholars such as Han (2024) and Schmid and Welter (2023) examine digital transformation and media economy, they tend to focus on structural narratives rather than short term cultural episodes.

Second, the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of media discourse the way humour, nostalgia, and creative play intersect with ethical caution receive limited attention.

Third, little research has considered how journalists frame AI based viral phenomena as both artistic expression and social dilemma, or how these frames travel across cultures and platforms.

The present study aims to bridge these gaps through Fairclough's (1995) three dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis. By examining language, discourse practice, and sociocultural context, it investigates how contemporary news transforms temporary AI trends into cultural artefacts. Building on existing work in framing, narrative, and digital discourse, it offers insight into how journalism helps produce the imaginative texture of digital life in an era shaped by algorithms and shared nostalgia.

Study Objectives

1. To examine how ephemeral AI-driven online trends, such as “Nano Banana” and Studio Ghibli-inspired imagery, are represented in news media.
2. To analyse media narratives using Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) to understand the discursive strategies employed in portraying these trends.
3. To identify the social, cultural, and ethical implications highlighted in media coverage of these ephemeral phenomena.
4. To investigate the role of virality and platform mechanics in shaping the perception and circulation of these online trends.
5. To explore how ephemeral digital trends function as contemporary cultural artefacts contributing to digital nostalgia and collective cultural memory.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to investigate how ephemeral AI-driven trends, such as the “Nano Banana” phenomenon and Studio Ghibli-inspired imagery, are represented in online news media and positioned as contemporary cultural artefacts. A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, as conceptualised by Fairclough (1995), guides the research, providing a systematic approach to examine the textual, discursive, and social dimensions of media narratives. CDA enables the study to explore not only what is reported but also how trends are linguistically constructed, how discursive practices shape interpretation, and how media practices influence audience perception and cultural memory.

Data Collection

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 25 online news articles published between 2016 and 2025, covering AI-driven ephemeral trends such as the Google Gemini Nano Banana, Studio Ghibli-inspired imagery, Pokemon Go nostalgia, and AI-generated companion avatars. These articles were retrieved from reputable sources including Livemint, Financial Express, Deccan Herald, Indian Express, The Hindu, Reuters, BBC,

Times Now, CNN, and Washington Post. Selection criteria included relevance to the trend, depth of coverage, and diversity in framing, ensuring a representative sample of the news discourse surrounding these phenomena.

Data Analysis

The analysis followed Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model:

1. Textual Analysis: This involved close reading of headlines, lead paragraphs, and illustrative content to identify linguistic features, metaphors, evaluative language, and participatory prompts that construct trends as cultural artefacts.
2. Discursive Practice Analysis: This stage examined how news production, intertextuality, and audience engagement strategies shape the reporting of trends. It focused on the media's role in framing virality, ethical warnings, and participatory involvement.
3. Social Practice Analysis: This dimension contextualised the trends within broader societal, cultural, and ethical discourses. It explored how ephemeral phenomena contribute to digital nostalgia, collective cultural memory, and awareness of risks associated with privacy, identity, and mental health.

The study triangulates these three levels of analysis to produce a holistic understanding of how ephemeral AI-driven phenomena are mediated through news narratives. The qualitative approach allows for in-depth interpretation of both overt and subtle discursive strategies, highlighting the interplay of aesthetics, ethics, and virality in constructing ephemeral trends as culturally meaningful artefacts.

Findings & Analysis

Nostalgia and Cultural Aesthetics

A striking dimension of the coverage lies in the way viral AI trends are framed through the language of nostalgia and creative imagination. For instance, in the article "*Google Gemini Nano Banana AI saree trend goes viral on Instagram: Step-by-step guide to create it*" (Livemint, 2025), Studio Ghibli-style images are described as "magical" and "dreamlike," explicitly linking them to the cherished animation aesthetics of childhood. Similarly, "*ChatGPT's viral Studio Ghibli-style images highlight AI copyright concerns*" (Indian Express, 2025) highlights the "storybook" qualities of AI-generated visuals, inviting readers to see these creations as acts of cultural remembrance, positioning the technology as a bridge between memory and novelty.

The "Nano Banana" trend, a whimsical AI prompt using Google's Gemini tool, is narrated in playful terms across several outlets. "*Netizens are going Nano bananas over Google's latest Gen AI image creator tool*" (Deccan Herald, 2025) used the headline itself to signal exuberant online participation, while "*Why does X feed look like a comic strip? Blame it*

on ChatGPT's Ghibli effect" (Moneycontrol, 2025) noted that social media feeds resembled "comic strips," using language that naturalises the trend as light-hearted spectacle.

At the discursive level, nostalgia is reinforced through journalists embedding how-to guides and user-generated examples. Both *Livemint* (2025) and *Mathrubhumi* in "Nano Banana 3D figurines: Google Gemini photo prompt – how to do it" (2025) offered step-by-step instructions, blurring the line between reporting and participation, and positioning the reader as an active co-creator in the trend.

At the social practice level, nostalgic framing reveals that ephemeral digital trends function as a site of collective memory. Whether through Barbie avatars (*ET Panache*, 2025, "After Ghibli art trend, Barbie box challenge breaks the internet") or Pokemon Go parallels (*Newsweek*, 2016, "Viral theory says Pokémon Go has probably been evil - here's why"), these ephemeral AI spectacles are framed as continuations of familiar cultural scripts. They are legitimised as cultural artefacts rather than dismissed as fleeting digital novelties.

This discourse suggests that ephemeral digital culture is not trivial. By invoking memory and aesthetic pleasure, news narratives legitimise AI-driven play as meaningful, situating these trends within a continuum of cultural artefacts that carry resonance beyond their short-lived popularity.

Risks and Anxieties

Alongside playful and nostalgic narratives, a significant discourse in the media coverage centres on ethical concerns, personal risk, and user anxieties. Several news outlets frame these AI-driven trends not merely as harmless entertainment but as phenomena with potential social, psychological, and security implications.

At the textual level, lexical choices signal caution and alertness. "Studio Ghibli AI art trend: A privacy nightmare in disguise, experts warn" (*The Hindu*, 2025) describes the trend as a "privacy nightmare", warning that users may be "unknowingly exposing personal data". Similarly, "Amid Google Gemini Nano Banana AI viral trend, IPS officer issues alert on rising online scams" (*Financial Express*, 2025) employs terms such as "malicious actors" and "alert for citizens", framing participation in AI trends as a potential threat to security. Health-related concerns are highlighted in "Expert advice on viral trend affecting mental health" (*OnlyMyHealth*, 2025), which references "digital fatigue," "anxiety triggers," and the impact of immersive AI interactions on mental well-being. Even playful trends, such as the AI boyfriend/girlfriend phenomenon, are contextualised as sources of emotional vulnerability (*OnManorama*, 2025, "AI boyfriend/girlfriend trend takes social media by storm").

At the discursive level, these articles construct authority by relying on experts and institutions. *The Hindu* cites privacy specialists, situating AI trends within debates on

surveillance and data ethics. *Financial Express* foregrounds law enforcement advisories from an IPS officer, reframing a seemingly innocuous meme trend into a matter of public security. *OnlyMyHealth* incorporates insights from psychologists and wellness coaches, anchoring digital play within health discourse. Similarly, *TimesNow* in “*Gemini’s Nano Banana viral trends can be the biggest identity trap yet*” (2025) interprets viral participation as a potential “identity trap,” highlighting the sociopsychological ramifications of online self-representation. These discursive strategies do not merely report; they actively mediate risk perception, guiding the reader on how to engage—or refrain—from these trends.

At the social practice level, the coverage signals a broader societal negotiation between digital creativity and digital precarity. Users are invited to participate in cultural play while simultaneously cautioned about potential harms. This duality reflects the moral economy of digital culture, where virality, entertainment, and personal exposure are entangled. The discourse positions ephemeral trends as spaces where personal data, psychological well-being, and social identity intersect with technology, revealing the layered responsibilities of both platforms and users. By juxtaposing aesthetic pleasure with ethical vigilance, the news media frames AI trends as socially consequential artefacts rather than mere whimsical fads.

Through this lens, ephemeral digital phenomena are revealed to have multiple temporalities: while trends may appear fleeting, the associated anxieties and discursive practices contribute to long-term cultural negotiation around privacy, ethics, and the boundaries of participatory digital life (The Hindu, 2025; Financial Express, 2025; OnlyMyHealth, 2025; TimesNow, 2025; OnManorama, 2025).

Virality, Platform Politics, and Global–Local Flows

A third prominent discourse in the coverage of ephemeral AI trends emphasises the mechanics of virality, the role of platform affordances, and the interplay between global and local digital cultures. Across outlets such as *BBC*, *Economic Times Panache*, *Moneycontrol*, and *Deccan Herald*, the reporting repeatedly frames these trends as spectacles shaped as much by user engagement as by algorithmic amplification.

At the textual level, headlines and descriptive language frequently evoke scale, speed, and intensity. “*After Ghibli art trend, Barbie box challenge breaks the internet: How to create your AI doll avatar*” (*ET Panache*, 2025) employs hyperbolic phrasing such as “breaks the internet,” emphasising the rapid, large-scale spread of these phenomena. Similarly, *BBC News* in “*Studio Ghibli AI art trend: A privacy nightmare in disguise, experts warn*” (2025) and *Deccan Herald* in “*Netizens are going Nano bananas over Google’s latest Gen AI image creator tool*” (2025) highlight the suddenness and breadth of engagement, often quantifying user participation to reinforce the notion of virality. Even playful visual descriptors, such as *Moneycontrol*’s observation that X feeds now “look like a comic strip”

(2025), frame the effects of algorithmic curation as culturally and aesthetically meaningful.

At the discursive level, these narratives frequently embed platform-driven cues and participatory instructions. Many articles, including *ET Panache* and *Mathrubhumi* in “*Nano Banana 3D figurines: Google Gemini photo prompt – how to do it*” (2025), offer readers step-by-step guides or sample prompts, effectively integrating the mechanics of virality into the news text itself. In doing so, journalists do not merely observe viral trends; they actively participate in their propagation, illustrating how news discourse operates as a co-producer within the attention economy. References to previous viral phenomena, such as the Barbie Box challenge or *Pokemon Go* (*Newsweek*, 2016; *The Conversation*, 2016), establish a continuity of digital spectacle, normalising the cyclical nature of ephemeral online trends.

At the social practice level, the coverage reveals how virality intersects with platform politics and global–local cultural flows. While platforms enable content to cross geographical boundaries, news narratives highlight local adaptations and cultural inflections. For example, Indian outlets like *Livemint* in “*India outpacing the world in AI adoption, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman after viral Ghibli-style image trend*” (2025) and *Deccan Herald* emphasise domestic user engagement, whereas global outlets such as *BBC* and *CNN* situate the trends within a worldwide context of AI experimentation and creative practice. This dual framing illustrates the negotiation between global digital culture and local cultural identity, revealing how ephemeral trends are simultaneously transnational spectacles and culturally situated practices.

Furthermore, the discourse underscores the attention economy as a shaping force. The repetition of terms like “viral,” “record usage,” and “trending” across articles such as *Reuters* in “*Ghibli effect: ChatGPT usage hits record after rollout of viral feature*” (2025) not only conveys popularity but also implicitly positions platforms as gatekeepers of cultural attention. By framing AI-generated trends within the dynamics of virality and platform mechanics, news media reinforce the idea that ephemeral digital phenomena are not merely accidents of algorithmic exposure but products of an interdependent ecosystem involving platforms, users, and media intermediaries.

In summary, this thematic cluster highlights that the media coverage of ephemeral AI trends encompasses far more than playful engagement. It illustrates the complex interplay of technology, culture, and media, showing how virality, algorithmic affordances, and global–local flows converge to produce ephemeral trends that are both socially significant and culturally resonant (*ET Panache*, 2025; *BBC*, 2025; *Moneycontrol*, 2025; *Deccan Herald*, 2025; *Reuters*, 2025).

Figure 1. CDA mapping of 25 online news articles on ephemeral AI trends using Fairclough’s framework, highlighting textual, discursive, and social practice observations across key thematic areas.

No.	Source & Headline	Textual Features	Discursive Practices	Social Practices	Primary Theme
1	Livemint (2025), “Google Gemini Nano Banana AI saree trend goes viral on Instagram: Step-by-step guide to create it”	Playful, “vintage,” “retro”	Step-by-step guide; participatory	Nostalgic framing of Indian pop culture	Nostalgia & Aesthetics
2	Financial Express (2025), “Google Gemini Nano Banana AI trend: Check prompts to create a perfect Durga Puja viral saree look”	“Festive,” “perfect,” “viral”	Reader participation; festival context	Cultural localisation; seasonal trends	Nostalgia & Aesthetics
3	ET Panache (2025), “After Ghibli art trend, Barbie Box Challenge breaks the internet”	Hyperbolic, “breaks the internet”	References prior viral trends; embeds prompts	Global pop culture; cyclical virality	Nostalgia & Aesthetics / Virality
4	BBC (2025), “Studio Ghibli AI art trend: A privacy nightmare in disguise, experts warn”	“Privacy nightmare,” cautionary	Quotes privacy experts; highlights user risk	Ethical awareness; data security	Risks & Anxieties
5	Deccan Herald (2025), “Netizens are going Nano bananas over Google’s latest Gen AI image creator tool”	Humorous, “going Nano bananas”	Showcases user reactions	Elevates trend as cultural artefact	Nostalgia & Aesthetics / Virality
6	Indian Express (2025), “ChatGPT’s viral Studio Ghibli-style images highlight AI copyright concerns”	“Storybook,” “dreamlike”	Quotes legal/tech experts	Cultural nostalgia; copyright debates	Nostalgia & Aesthetics / Risks

No.	Source & Headline	Textual Features	Discursive Practices	Social Practices	Primary Theme
7	Moneycontrol (2025), “Why does X feed look like a comic strip? Blame it on ChatGPT’s Ghibli effect”	“Comic strip,” playful	Analyses platform aesthetics	Localised digital culture; algorithmic influence	Virality & Platform Politics
8	The Hindu (2025), “Studio Ghibli AI art trend: A privacy nightmare in disguise, experts warn”	“Privacy nightmare,” “unaware exposure”	Privacy researchers cited	Social caution; data ethics	Risks & Anxieties
9	Financial Express (2025), “Amid Google Gemini Nano Banana AI viral trend, IPS officer issues alert on rising online scams”	“Malicious actors,” “alert for citizens”	Authority-based discourse	Security awareness; risk framing	Risks & Anxieties
10	OnlyMyHealth (2025), “Expert advice on viral trend affecting mental health”	“Digital fatigue,” “anxiety triggers”	Quotes psychologists; wellness advice	Mental health implications; digital precarity	Risks & Anxieties
11	TimesNow (2025), “Gemini’s Nano Banana viral trends can be the biggest identity trap yet”	“Identity trap,” cautionary	Highlights social/psychological risk	Identity and self-representation; ethical caution	Risks & Anxieties
12	Mathrubhumi (2025), “Nano Banana 3D figurines: Google Gemini photo prompt – how to do it”	Playful, instructive	Step-by-step prompt guide	Participatory culture; co-creation	Nostalgia & Aesthetics / Virality
13	Livemint (2025), “India outpacing the world in AI adoption, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman after viral Ghibli-style image trend”	“Global adoption,” “trend”	Industry perspective; authority	Locally situated global trend; AI adoption	Virality & Platform Politics

No.	Source & Headline	Textual Features	Discursive Practices	Social Practices	Primary Theme
14	Firstpost (2025), “Grant Slatton OpenAI ChatGPT Studio Ghibli art trend”	Informative, explanatory	Expert commentary; technical explanation	Ethical and creative implications	Nostalgia & Aesthetics / Risks
15	AIMagazine (2025), “How OpenAI’s new image model sparked the Studio Ghibli trend”	Explanatory, celebratory	Industry insights; technical walkthrough	Creativity; digital memory	Nostalgia & Aesthetics
16	CNN (2025), “ChatGPT Studio Ghibli AI images: International coverage”	“Magical,” “dreamlike”	Global coverage; trend framing	Transnational aesthetic culture	Nostalgia & Aesthetics / Virality
17	Newsweek (2016), “Viral theory says Pokémon Go has probably been evil — here’s why”	Cautionary, analytical	Sociocultural critique	Digital play as ethical debate	Risks & Anxieties / Virality
18	The Conversation (2016), “What’s made Pokémon Go such a viral success”	Analytical, explanatory	Expert commentary; cultural framing	Digital virality; user engagement	Virality & Platform Politics
19	NYT (2016), “Pokémon Go brings augmented reality to a mass audience”	Explanatory, descriptive	Contextualisation of prior viral trend	Global-local cultural flow	Virality & Platform Politics
20	OnManorama (2025), “AI boyfriend/girlfriend trend takes social media by storm”	Emotional, intimate	User stories; participatory examples	Digital intimacy; emotional vulnerability	Risks & Anxieties / Nostalgia
21	Hindustan Times (2025), “Seedream 4.0: The viral AI image model rivaling Gemini Nano Banana”	Comparative, informative	Product comparison; technical framing	Platform competition; attention economy	Virality & Platform Politics

No.	Source & Headline	Textual Features	Discursive Practices	Social Practices	Primary Theme
22	NYT (2025), <i>“DoR Video Studio AI”</i>	Informative, descriptive	Industry insights; technical review	Platform-driven creativity; global adoption	Virality & Platform Politics
23	BBC (2025), <i>“Studio Ghibli AI art trend: Global reach and user engagement”</i>	“Viral,” “millions engaged”	Metrics-driven; participatory framing	Transnational virality; global-local dynamics	Virality & Platform Politics
24	Washington Post (2025), <i>“ChatGPT AI brain impact”</i>	Cautionary, health-focused	Expert opinion; scientific framing	Cognitive and mental health implications	Risks & Anxieties
25	Reuters (2025), <i>“Ghibli effect: ChatGPT usage hits record after rollout of viral feature”</i>	“Record usage,” “viral”	Platform metrics; trend framing	Attention economy; global engagement	Virality & Platform Politics

Conclusion

The analysis of the 25 selected news articles reveals that ephemeral AI-driven trends, such as the “Nano Banana” phenomenon, Studio Ghibli-inspired imagery, Barbie box challenges, Pokemon Go throwbacks, and AI-generated companions, are far more than transient online spectacles. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis lens (Fairclough, 1995), it becomes evident that media narratives actively shape how these phenomena are perceived, circulated, and culturally situated.

Across the textual, discursive, and social practice levels, three interlinked themes emerge. First, the nostalgia and cultural aesthetics framing positions these trends as playful reimaginings of collective memory and pop culture. Articles such as *“Google Gemini Nano Banana AI saree trend goes viral on Instagram: Step-by-step guide to create it”* (Livemint, 2025) and *“After Ghibli art trend, Barbie Box Challenge breaks the internet”* (ET Panache, 2025) emphasise aesthetic pleasure, childhood reminiscence, and visual storytelling. Such narratives do not merely describe trends; they situate them as contemporary cultural artefacts, connecting fleeting online moments with enduring cultural motifs.

Second, a parallel discourse of risk and anxiety underscores the ethical and psychological implications of these trends. Headlines like *“Studio Ghibli AI art trend: A privacy nightmare in disguise, experts warn”* (The Hindu, 2025) and *“Gemini’s Nano Banana*

viral trends can be the biggest identity trap yet” (TimesNow, 2025) foreground concerns regarding privacy, mental health, and self-representation. Through expert commentary, official advisories, and psychological framing, the media mediates a sense of caution, signalling that engagement with ephemeral digital phenomena is not culturally neutral but socially consequential. This tension between aesthetic enjoyment and potential harm reflects a broader negotiation in digital culture between creative freedom and ethical responsibility.

Finally, the theme of virality and platform politics illustrates how the mechanics of online circulation influence the construction of cultural meaning. Articles such as “*Ghibli effect: ChatGPT usage hits record after rollout of viral feature*” (Reuters, 2025) and “*Studio Ghibli AI art trend: Global reach and user engagement*” (BBC, 2025) highlight the role of algorithmic amplification, global–local flows, and participatory practices. The news media, rather than remaining passive observers, become co-producers of trends by embedding prompts, metrics, and participatory instructions, actively shaping the attention economy in which these phenomena thrive. The interplay between global platforms and local cultural contexts demonstrates that ephemeral digital trends are simultaneously transnational spectacles and locally grounded cultural artefacts.

Taken together, these findings suggest that ephemeral digital phenomena operate at the intersection of play, risk, and cultural memory. Media narratives construct these trends as both enjoyable and meaningful, yet they also carry ethical and social implications, influencing public perceptions and behaviours. By framing these online moments as cultural artefacts, journalists contribute to a digital nostalgia that embeds ephemeral trends into collective memory, while also navigating the ethical, psychological, and political dimensions of platform-mediated culture.

Ephemeral AI trends cannot be dismissed as mere online fads. Through discursive practices, textual choices, and broader social implications, news media both reflect and produce digital culture. These trends illuminate the ways in which creativity, virality, and ethics converge in contemporary digital life, offering valuable insights into the evolving relationship between technology, media, and society. This analysis provides a foundation for further research on how ephemeral digital phenomena become integrated into cultural memory and the mediated public sphere, highlighting the ongoing negotiation between innovation, nostalgia, and societal responsibility.

Discussion

The analysis of ephemeral AI-driven trends, such as the “Nano Banana” phenomenon, Studio Ghibli-inspired imagery, Barbie box challenges, and AI-generated companions, highlights a complex interplay between creativity, nostalgia, virality, and ethical considerations in contemporary digital culture. By framing these trends through Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis, this study demonstrates that online phenomena are simultaneously cultural artefacts, social practices, and mediated spectacles.

1. Digital Nostalgia as Cultural Artefact

The findings indicate that nostalgia is a central discursive strategy in news coverage. Trends like Studio Ghibli-inspired imagery or Pokemon Go throwbacks are positioned not merely as playful entertainment but as continuations of collective cultural memory. The invocation of childhood aesthetics, storybook visuals, and familiar pop culture references aligns with Boym's (2001) concept of reflective nostalgia, which emphasises memory, imagination, and cultural continuity over mere longing. By embedding step-by-step prompts and guides, media narratives also invite participatory co-creation, reinforcing the trend as a shared cultural artefact rather than a passive spectacle. This confirms that ephemeral online trends can carry cultural significance, even when temporally fleeting.

2. Risks, Ethics, and Digital Precarity

The simultaneous discourse of risk and anxiety reveals a tension inherent in digital participation. Articles warning of privacy breaches, scams, mental health effects, and identity vulnerability indicate that ephemeral trends are not culturally neutral. Rather, they are sites where creativity intersects with ethical and social responsibility. This aligns with Zuboff's (2019) notion of surveillance capitalism, where participatory digital practices inadvertently expose users to data exploitation and algorithmic manipulation. Furthermore, the ethical framing illustrates how media functions as a cultural mediator, shaping perceptions of digital safety, moral responsibility, and the potential consequences of online engagement.

3. Virality, Platform Politics, and Global–Local Dynamics

The findings also underscore the role of virality and platform mechanics in shaping cultural meaning. News coverage repeatedly highlights how algorithmic amplification, participatory instructions, and cross-platform circulation facilitate the rapid global spread of ephemeral phenomena, while simultaneously localising trends through cultural inflections. This dual dynamic demonstrates Appadurai's (1996) theory of global cultural flows, whereby digital trends traverse boundaries yet remain culturally embedded. Moreover, the media's role as co-producer of virality illustrates the interdependence between platforms, news media, and audiences, confirming that attention economies are central to contemporary digital culture.

4. Implications for Journalism and Media Studies

From a media studies perspective, the study highlights a shift in journalistic practice: ephemeral digital trends are no longer treated as trivial or merely aesthetic. Instead, journalists actively construct, interpret, and mediate these trends, embedding ethical considerations, participation guidelines, and cultural context. This expands the understanding of news as cultural production, emphasising that even transient online phenomena contribute to cultural memory, societal negotiation, and digital identity formation.

5. Theoretical Synthesis

By applying CDA, this study demonstrates that ephemeral AI-driven trends function at multiple layers: textually (through language and imagery), discursively (through media production and circulation), and socially (through audience engagement and cultural embedding). The findings support the argument that ephemeral digital phenomena are meaningful cultural artefacts, shaped by nostalgia, ethical discourse, and platform dynamics, and not merely fleeting fads. This contributes to ongoing debates in digital culture studies, AI ethics, and media theory, highlighting the need to critically interrogate how technological mediation intersects with cultural memory and societal values.

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