Communication Strategies of Gaming Streamers on YouTube Vertical Live: A New Media Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the underexplored area of communication strategies in YouTube Vertical Live, focusing on gaming streamers and their real-time audience engagement. While prior research on live streaming often addresses technical aspects or horizontal formats, this study emphasizes the communicative dynamics unique to the vertical format—an emerging trend shaped by mobile-first viewing habits. Grounded in New Media theory, the research employs a qualitative design with in-depth interviews and live session observations of six active gaming streamers. The analysis reveals a distinct set of strategies that leverage the vertical interface: adaptive micro-interactions tailored to instantaneous audience feedback, integration of mobile-optimized interactive features to sustain participation, and strategic persona management to reinforce streamer identity. These findings demonstrate that the vertical format not only reshapes audience accessibility but also redefines parasocial interaction and community-building practices in digital spaces. The study's novelty lies in its identification of format-specific communication strategies that extend existing New Media discourse, offering both theoretical enrichment and practical implications for content creators and platform developers aiming to maximize engagement in mobile-dominated environments.

Keywords: audience engagement, communication strategies, gaming streamers, YouTube Vertical Live

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary Communication Studies, the digital transformation has redefined how messages are produced, distributed, and consumed. Media convergence, participatory culture, and the rise of user-generated content have shifted the traditional sender–receiver paradigm toward a more interactive and decentralized communication model (Jenkins, 2006; McQuail, 2010). Platforms such as YouTube have become not only channels of entertainment but also arenas for strategic communication, where content creators—particularly gaming streamers—actively manage audience relationships through real-time engagement. This phenomenon highlights the role of media as a social space in which meaning is co-constructed between producers and audiences, aligning with the theoretical discourse on New Media and parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Castells, 2000).

Despite the rapid growth of live streaming, particularly in mobile-oriented formats like YouTube Vertical Live, academic inquiry remains limited in addressing the communicative aspects that distinguish vertical streaming from its horizontal counterpart. The current reality shows gaming streamers increasingly adopt vertical formats to capture mobile-first audiences, integrating interactive tools such as live chat, polls, and virtual gifting. However, it calls for a deeper understanding of how such format-specific features influence audience engagement strategies and community-building practices. While technological affordances are often highlighted, less attention has been paid to the nuanced communication strategies that sustain viewer loyalty and interactivity in real time.

Prior studies have examined YouTube as a site for strategic audience engagement. Burgess and Green (2018) emphasized YouTube's hybrid role as both a cultural archive and a real-time communication platform, where creators use interactive features to strengthen audience bonds. Similarly, Nafis and Kristiyono (2023) analyzed live streaming practices on the popular Indonesian gaming channel *Windah Basudara*, finding that three modes of communication—one-way, two-way, and multi-way—enhance audience participation when used strategically during live sessions. These studies affirm that interactional variety can enhance user engagement, yet they focus primarily on horizontal formats.

Research on other platforms provides complementary insights. For instance, Kusumawati (2021) explored live streaming on Twitch, demonstrating that audience

engagement hinges on the streamer's ability to balance entertainment with social interaction, often mediated by chat moderation and symbolic cues like emotes. Meanwhile, Dimas Ariansyah et al. (2023) examined TikTok Live, identifying strategies such as audience segmentation, schedule consistency, and affiliate integration as critical to maintaining sustained participation. However, these studies do not address the implications of vertical framing in shaping interaction patterns and viewer retention.

From a strategic communication standpoint, live streaming also intersects with branding and identity management. Smith and Jones (2018) noted that streamers function as micro-influencers, where consistent persona presentation and responsiveness to audience feedback directly influence brand equity. Febri Fegan's case, analyzed by Tri Sulistia Ningsih (2023), illustrates how creative content structuring, such as cliffhangers and scripted humor, can strengthen emotional connection with viewers. Yet, even these creative strategies are rarely analyzed through the lens of vertical mobile experiences, leaving an analytical gap for this study to address.

The urgency of this research lies in the accelerated adoption of vertical live streaming as mobile devices dominate internet access patterns. According to Statista (2024), over 70% of global video consumption now occurs on mobile platforms, and vertical video formats have become the default for younger audiences. For gaming streamers, this shift represents both an opportunity and a challenge: they must adapt communicative techniques to maximize engagement in a constrained visual space while leveraging interactive features optimized for touch-based interfaces. Understanding these adaptations is crucial for advancing both the theoretical framework of New Media and the practical toolkit of digital content creators.

This study contributes to Communication Studies by specifically identifying communication strategies that are unique to the YouTube Vertical Live environment. While prior literature has addressed live streaming broadly, the vertical format's affordances—such as full-screen portrait orientation, thumb-accessible interaction panels, and enhanced comment visibility—reshape how streamers initiate, sustain, and conclude audience interactions. By focusing on the intersection of format design and communicative practice, this research advances the discussion beyond generalized engagement strategies.

The novelty also emerges from the integration of New Media theory with empirical observations of mobile-optimized live streaming. Unlike studies that treat interactivity as a universal affordance across formats, this research situates interactivity within the specific ergonomics and visual hierarchies of vertical live streams. This approach reveals how streamers employ adaptive micro-interactions—short, targeted acknowledgements and quick visual cues—that are facilitated by the interface design, thereby enhancing perceived closeness and responsiveness.

Furthermore, the study uncovers how vertical live streaming redefines parasocial relationships. The constrained frame intensifies visual focus on the streamer's face and gestures, potentially increasing intimacy and perceived authenticity. This contrasts with horizontal formats, where environmental context competes with the streamer's presence. Such observations add a new dimension to parasocial interaction theory by linking spatial framing to emotional proximity and audience loyalty.

In sum, this research addresses a critical gap in understanding how gaming streamers navigate the communicative affordances of YouTube Vertical Live to engage audiences effectively. By analyzing the interplay between format-specific features, strategic interaction, and identity management, the study enriches New Media scholarship and offers practical guidance for streamers aiming to thrive in mobile-dominated environments. The findings also hold value for platform developers and digital marketers seeking to optimize engagement strategies in emerging live streaming ecosystems.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Digital Communication and New Media

Digital communication refers to the process of exchanging messages via electronic platforms, utilizing internet-connected devices as the primary medium (McQuail, 2010). Unlike traditional mass media, which operate on a one-to-many model, digital communication fosters two-way and multidirectional interactions, allowing participants to engage in real time. In the gaming live streaming context, these interactions often combine verbal commentary, visual cues, and symbolic exchanges such as emojis or digital gifts, creating an immersive communication environment (Burgess & Green, 2018).

The evolution of communication technologies has given rise to *new media*, defined by their interactivity, decentralization, and convergence of multiple formats (Poster, 1995; Jenkins, 2006). These platforms blur the boundaries between producers and audiences, enabling viewers to act as co-creators of content. YouTube exemplifies this shift by combining broadcast capabilities with social networking features, especially in live streaming modes where the immediacy of audience feedback shapes content delivery (Castells, 2000).

New Media Theory provides a framework for understanding how technology-mediated environments facilitate connectivity, interactivity, and active participation. Pierre Lévy emphasizes the participatory nature of online platforms, while Jenkins' (2006) concept of *convergence culture* explains how audiences and creators collaborate in shaping media narratives. In YouTube Vertical Live, this manifests through chat responses, poll participation, and live reactions, which directly influence the streamer's communication flow.

A key element of digital communication in live streaming is *feedback*, which can occur instantaneously. Live chat enables the audience to voice opinions, ask questions, or provide encouragement, while the streamer can acknowledge these inputs verbally or through visual

gestures (Smith & Jones, 2018). The vertical format further enhances this process by placing the streamer's face and expressions at the center of the screen, increasing perceived intimacy.

However, these affordances also present challenges. Managing high volumes of comments, filtering inappropriate messages, and sustaining meaningful interactions require deliberate communication strategies. Research on other platforms, such as Twitch and TikTok Live, indicates that the combination of moderation tools and symbolic communication fosters a positive environment for sustained engagement (Kusumawati, 2021). This study extends such insights to the relatively underexplored context of YouTube Vertical Live.

2.2. Communication Strategies in Live Streaming

In strategic communication, streamers act as both content creators and relationship managers, deliberately crafting interactions to engage and retain audiences (Adams, 2019). Gaming streamers, in particular, leverage their gameplay as a backdrop for real-time dialogue, humor, and audience acknowledgment. Such strategies not only entertain but also establish the streamer's personal brand identity (Ningsih, 2023).

Previous studies have identified several core strategies in live streaming. Nafis and Kristiyono (2023) found that a mix of one-way, two-way, and multi-way communication modes increases participation on YouTube. Similarly, Ariansyah et al. (2023) documented nine effective practices on TikTok Live, ranging from audience segmentation to affiliate marketing integration. While informative, these studies primarily address horizontal or unspecified formats.

The vertical orientation of YouTube Live introduces unique interaction patterns. The interface places comments adjacent to the video feed, allowing streamers to maintain constant visual contact with the audience while monitoring feedback. This spatial arrangement facilitates *micro-interactions*—brief acknowledgments, quick visual cues, or short verbal responses—that can significantly enhance audience perception of responsiveness.

Branding is another critical element of strategic communication in live streaming. Consistency in visual style, language, and interaction tone reinforces the streamer's persona, encouraging viewer loyalty (Smith & Jones, 2018). In the vertical format, the constant close-up framing can intensify brand cues, such as facial expressions, attire, and backdrop design, which become prominent features in audience memory.

Despite growing adoption of vertical live streaming, there is a lack of empirical research on how format-specific affordances shape communication strategies. Most existing literature treats live streaming as format-neutral, overlooking the ergonomic and perceptual differences that influence engagement. This study fills that gap by examining the communicative adaptations employed by gaming streamers in YouTube Vertical Live, offering both theoretical contributions to New Media scholarship and practical insights for digital content creators.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the communication strategies of gaming streamers in YouTube Vertical Live. Qualitative research was chosen because it enables in-depth analysis of subjective experiences, interaction patterns, and contextual nuances that cannot be captured through quantitative measures (Creswell, 2014). The study adopts a *New Media* theoretical framework to interpret how platform-specific affordances shape communication practices.

3.2 Research Subject

The research subjects consist of six gaming streamers who actively use the YouTube Vertical Live feature. These participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that each had consistent streaming activity (at least twice a week) and direct interaction with viewers during live sessions. This sampling technique was employed to capture information-rich cases relevant to the study's objectives (Patton, 2015).

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through three primary methods:

3.3.1 In-depth Interviews
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each streamer, focusing on their strategies for audience engagement, content delivery, and self-branding.

3.3.2 Observation
The researcher observed live streaming sessions to document interaction styles, use of interactive features, and audience responses.

3.3.3 Document Review
Supporting materials such as chat logs, stream metadata, and promotional posts were reviewed to provide contextual understanding.

These methods were triangulated to enhance data credibility (Denzin, 1978).

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, and producing the final narrative. This method allowed the researcher to systematically interpret recurring patterns in communication strategies and relate them to the theoretical framework.

To ensure research validity, triangulation of methods (interviews, observation, document review) and sources (multiple streamers) was applied. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm accuracy. Reliability was maintained by documenting the research process and coding decisions, enabling transparency and replication (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Result

Figure 1 illustrates an example of YouTube Vertical Live streaming conducted by a gaming streamer. The screenshot captures a real-time broadcast of a Roblox gameplay session, where the streamer's camera feed appears in portrait format alongside the game interface. The vertical orientation is optimized for mobile viewing, allowing viewers to simultaneously observe the gameplay and the streamer's facial expressions, thereby enhancing perceived intimacy and responsiveness. Interactive elements such as live chat and in-game actions are visible, reflecting the dual-layered engagement between streamer and audience. This example underscores how platform design and interface layout in vertical live streaming can influence audience interaction and content delivery strategies.

Figure 1. YouTube Horizontal Live

Figure 2. YouTube Vertical Live

The analysis identified three primary communication strategies employed by gaming streamers on YouTube

Vertical Live: personalized audience interaction, strategic use of interactive features, and consistent self-branding. These strategies emerged from both observational data and direct statements from the participants.

4.1.1 Personalized Audience Interaction

All participants demonstrated a commitment to addressing viewers individually during live sessions. They responded to questions, acknowledged usernames, and incorporated audience suggestions into gameplay. As one streamer explained:

"Kalau ada penonton yang komen, saya usahakan untuk langsung jawab, biar mereka merasa diperhatikan dan betah nonton." (S1)

Such immediate responsiveness was observed to increase comment frequency and sustain audience presence throughout the stream.

4.1.2 Strategic Use of Interactive Features

Participants actively utilized YouTube's interactive tools—such as live chat polls, emoji reactions, and donation alerts—to encourage viewer participation. For example, one streamer highlighted the importance of polls in driving engagement:

"Polling itu membantu banget. Saya biasanya kasih pilihan ke penonton mau main game apa, jadi mereka merasa terlibat." (S3)

Observation data confirmed that streams incorporating polls and donation shoutouts experienced longer viewer retention and higher engagement peaks.

4.1.3 Consistent Self-Branding

Streamers maintained recognizable identities through consistent language style, visual presentation, and thematic content. One participant emphasized:

"Saya selalu pakai bahasa santai, tapi tetap sopan. Ini jadi ciri khas saya supaya penonton merasa nyaman." (S5)

The vertical format amplified these branding cues, as the constant close-up view reinforced facial expressions, attire, and on-screen background elements as part of the streamer's identity.

4.1.4 Challenges in Vertical Live Communication

Despite these strategies, participants noted challenges such as managing high comment volumes and moderating inappropriate remarks. As one streamer stated:

"Kadang kalau penontonnya rame, susah juga baca semua chat. Harus pintar pilih yang relevan." (S2)

This required selective engagement, balancing inclusivity with maintaining the flow of the broadcast.

4.2 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that personalized audience interaction lies at the heart of communication strategies in YouTube Vertical Live. This resonates with Jenkins' (2006) concept of *convergence culture*, which positions audiences not merely as consumers but as active contributors in shaping content. By directly

addressing usernames and incorporating viewer suggestions into gameplay, streamers foster an environment of participation that blurs the boundary between producer and audience. Such immediacy of feedback illustrates the interactivity and connectivity central to New Media Theory (McQuail, 2010; Poster, 1995), where real-time communication reduces the temporal and relational distance between sender and receiver.

Building on this foundation, the strategic use of interactive features such as polls and donation alerts further amplifies participation. While earlier work by Nafis and Kristiyono (2023) in horizontal-format streaming highlighted the value of combining one-way, two-way, and multi-way communication modes, the present study extends that understanding to vertical live streaming. The mobile-optimized interface of YouTube Vertical Live ensures that these features are highly visible and easy to access, increasing their potential to sustain viewer attention and retention. This indicates that the design of the platform is not a neutral backdrop but an active enabler of strategic communication, influencing both the form and effectiveness of audience engagement.

In parallel, the cultivation of a consistent personal brand emerges as another key pillar of successful communication. Streamers employ distinctive language styles, maintain coherent thematic content, and utilize visual cues to reinforce their identity. The vertical format, with its constant close-up framing, magnifies these brand signals—be it through facial expressions, attire, or on-screen background—thereby deepening the audience's sense of familiarity and attachment. This dynamic aligns with Horton and Wohl's (1956) theory of *parasocial interaction*, suggesting that vertical framing can intensify perceived intimacy compared to horizontal formats, where visual attention is shared with the surrounding environment.

However, the heightened interactivity of this format also brings its own challenges. The rapid influx of comments during high-traffic sessions creates a tension between inclusivity and maintaining the flow of the broadcast. This phenomenon reflects Shirky's (2010) notion of *filter failure*, in which the abundance of information risks overwhelming the communicator. Streamers in this study addressed the issue by selectively prioritizing relevant messages, balancing responsiveness with content continuity, and preserving the overall quality of interaction.

Taken together, these insights highlight that the strategic communication practices observed in YouTube Vertical Live are both shaped by and adaptive to the platform's affordances. The study contributes to New Media scholarship by demonstrating that interactivity, connectivity, and active participation are mediated not only by the communicator's skill but also by the interface's design and ergonomics. Practically, the findings suggest that gaming streamers and platform developers can enhance engagement in mobile-first environments by focusing on rapid, personalized micro-interactions, maximizing the visibility of interactive features, and maintaining a coherent and recognizable personal brand. In doing so, they can build more immersive, loyal, and participatory communities in the evolving landscape of live digital media.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the communication strategies of gaming streamers in YouTube Vertical Live, highlighting how the platform's mobile-first design shapes audience engagement. The findings show that three interconnected strategies—personalized audience interaction, strategic use of interactive features, and consistent self-branding—are central to fostering participation and sustaining viewer loyalty. These strategies are facilitated by the vertical format's unique affordances, such as enhanced visibility of interactive tools and intensified focus on the streamer's facial expressions and gestures, which together create a stronger sense of intimacy and authenticity.

Theoretically, this research contributes to New Media scholarship by demonstrating that interactivity, connectivity, and active participation are not uniform across formats, but are shaped by the specific ergonomics and interface design of the medium. This underscores the need to view platform architecture as an integral component of strategic communication practices, rather than a neutral backdrop.

Practically, the study offers actionable insights for gaming streamers and platform developers. Streamers can maximize engagement by implementing rapid, personalized micro-interactions, leveraging high-visibility interactive features, and maintaining a coherent brand persona. Platform developers, in turn, can enhance audience experience by optimizing interface elements that facilitate immediate feedback and sustained participation.

In an era where mobile-first consumption continues to grow, understanding the communicative adaptations required for vertical live streaming is crucial. By aligning strategic communication with the affordances of the platform, content creators can build more participatory, loyal, and interactive communities, strengthening both their personal brand and their audience relationships in the evolving digital media landscape.

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