

Digital Rituals: Communication Practices and Cultural Meaning in Live Streaming Communities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how communication practices in live streaming communities function as digital rituals and generate shared cultural meaning. The research aims to analyze recurring interaction patterns, interpret their symbolic significance, and explain how they shape identity, belonging, and emotional cohesion within platform-based communities. A qualitative approach was employed using a digital ethnography design, as this method is well suited to exploring communicative behavior, symbolic interaction, and community meaning in naturally occurring online settings. The study was conducted on TikTok Live as the research site because the platform provides intensive real-time interaction, visible audience participation, and stable ritualized features such as greetings, gifting, emojis, and moderator interventions. The study involved twelve informants consisting of four streamers, four moderators, and four active viewers, selected purposively due to their sustained engagement and direct experience with live streaming practices. The findings show that repeated greetings, symbolic gifting, synchronized audience responses, moderator mediation, and insider language operate as digital rituals that sustain collective identity and cultural continuity. The study recommends further comparative research across platforms and cultural contexts to deepen understanding of ritual communication in evolving digital communities.



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of live streaming platforms has transformed digital communication into a participatory, affective, and culturally meaningful environment (Alsaleh, 2024). What initially appeared to be a technological innovation for real-time content delivery has evolved into a complex social arena where communities are formed, identities are negotiated, and collective meanings are continuously reproduced (Roth, 2023). In this context, live streaming is no longer merely a medium of entertainment or information exchange; it has become a site of recurring symbolic practices that resemble ritualized communication (Simamora & Farid, 2024). The title *Digital Rituals: Communication Practices and Cultural Meaning in Live Streaming Communities* captures this shift by emphasizing that repeated interactions in streaming environments such as greeting rituals, gifting, emoji use, subscription practices, comment participation, and streamer-audience call-and-response patterns should be understood not only as technical features, but also as communicative acts embedded in cultural systems (Zaluchu, 2024). This perspective is increasingly relevant in communication and cultural studies because digital communities now mediate everyday belonging, emotional expression, and collective participation across geographical and social boundaries (Frampton & Grandison, 2023).

The state of the art in recent communication research shows growing interest in platform culture, participatory media, networked publics, and digital intimacy (Ansar & Khaled, 2023). Scholars have examined live streaming as a form of performance, interactive labor, self-branding, fandom culture, and audience engagement (Pallathadka & Roy, 2025). Other studies have explored how streamers cultivate authenticity, how viewers contribute to para-social interaction, and how digital platforms shape social visibility through algorithms and monetization structures (Jati, 2023). Within

this literature, live streaming is commonly analyzed through perspectives such as media convergence, affective economies, digital labor, and platform governance (Mohyeddin, 2024). While these approaches have generated valuable insights, many studies still focus primarily on economic models, technological affordances, or influencer strategies (Poddar, 2024). As a result, the symbolic, ritualistic, and cultural dimensions of communication in live streaming communities remain insufficiently theorized. There is still limited attention to how repetitive communicative actions become socially meaningful, how they sustain solidarity, and how they create shared values that resemble ritual performance in mediated environments (L. Zhang, 2025).

The main research problem emerges from the fact that communication practices in live streaming communities are often treated as spontaneous, casual, or merely functional interactions, rather than as patterned cultural performances with ritual significance (Ergen, 2023). In many cases, audience participation is interpreted through metrics such as engagement, visibility, and monetization, while the deeper meanings of repeated communicative behavior are overlooked (Grigore & Cobzeanu, 2025). Yet, in practice, live streaming communities display recurring symbolic routines that organize interaction, reinforce group belonging, and generate emotional cohesion (Krantz, 2023). Greetings at the beginning of a stream, repeated textual formulas, donation acknowledgments, fan-specific language, visual symbols, and synchronized reactions all point to the existence of digital rituals that structure community life (Barman, 2024). The problem, therefore, is not simply how communication occurs in live streaming spaces, but how these communicative practices produce cultural meaning, reproduce collective identity, and transform platform-based interaction into socially significant ritual action (J. Zhang & Xu, 2024).

The research gap lies in the limited integration between ritual communication theory, digital culture studies, and live streaming scholarship (P. Törnberg & Törnberg, 2024). Existing studies often discuss interaction and participation, but fewer explicitly conceptualize these practices as rituals that carry symbolic weight and cultural significance (L. Zhao, 2024). Moreover, prior research tends to privilege either the content creator's perspective or the platform's structural logic, leaving the communal and interpretive dimensions of audience participation underexplored (Pitroso, 2025). Another gap concerns the contextual understanding of meaning-making: many analyses describe what users do on live streaming platforms, but not enough explain why such practices matter culturally or how participants themselves interpret them (Essen & Peterson, 2024). Consequently, there remains a conceptual and empirical gap in understanding live streaming communities as ritualized communicative environments where repeated acts operate as mechanisms of belonging, legitimacy, and emotional continuity (Bengtsson & Edlom, 2023). This study addresses that gap by foregrounding the relationship between recurring digital practices and the production of shared cultural meaning.

The novelty of this research is located in its effort to frame live streaming interaction as a form of digital ritual and to analyze communication practices as culturally embedded performances rather than isolated acts of online engagement. This study offers a new interpretive lens by linking ritual theory with contemporary live streaming practices, thereby moving beyond instrumental or platform-centered explanations. It contributes a conceptual innovation by showing that digital rituals are not peripheral features of online communities but central mechanisms through which values, identities, and emotional ties are maintained (Boh & Adoka, 2023). The originality of the study also lies in its intention to examine not only observable interaction patterns but also their symbolic meanings within community life. By doing so, the research advances a richer understanding of how communication functions in digital environments as a process of social reproduction and cultural articulation (Tiwary, 2024).

Based on this background, the central research question can be formulated as follows: how do communication practices in live streaming communities function as digital rituals, and how do these rituals produce and sustain cultural meaning among participants? This broad question may further guide analytical attention toward the forms of recurring interaction present in live streaming communities, the symbolic meanings attached to those practices, and the ways in which such rituals shape collective identity, emotional connection, and community belonging. These questions are important because they position live streaming not simply as a technological platform but as a communicative space in which culture is enacted, negotiated, and circulated through repetition and participation (C. Wang et al., 2025).

The objective of this research is to analyze the communication practices that emerge within live streaming communities and to interpret them as digital rituals that carry cultural meaning. More specifically, the study aims to identify the recurring forms of interaction that structure participation, to explain how such practices function symbolically within the community, and to examine how they contribute to the formation of shared identity, group cohesion, and a sense of cultural belonging. Through this objective, the research seeks to deepen scholarly understanding of communication in platform-based communities and to offer a theoretically grounded account of ritualized interaction in contemporary digital culture.

The theoretical benefit of this research lies in its contribution to the development of communication theory in the digital era. By connecting ritual communication perspectives with studies of live streaming communities, the research expands the analytical scope of media and cultural studies. It enriches theoretical debates on participation, symbolic interaction, and mediated sociality by demonstrating that communication on digital platforms is not merely informational or transactional, but also ritualistic and meaning-producing (Sharon, 2023). Academically, this study can serve as a relevant reference for future researchers in communication, media, cultural studies, anthropology, and digital sociology who seek to understand the cultural depth of online interaction. It provides a conceptual framework that may be applied to other participatory digital settings, including gaming communities, fan cultures, religious streaming spaces, and creator economies. Practically, the research may benefit content creators, community managers, and platform designers by offering insight into how community bonds are built and maintained through ritualized communication. Understanding these dynamics can support more culturally sensitive engagement strategies, healthier online communities, and more meaningful forms of digital participation (Rousell & Tran, 2024).

Despite its potential contributions, this research is not without limitations. The study may be constrained by the specificity of the selected platform, community, or cultural context, which means that its findings may not be universally generalizable across all live streaming environments. Communication rituals may differ significantly depending on platform architecture, audience demographics, language use, or the thematic orientation of the streaming community (Leurs & Ponzanesi, 2025). In addition, if the research relies on qualitative interpretation, there is a possibility that meaning is context-dependent and shaped by the researcher's analytical perspective. Another limitation concerns the rapidly changing nature of digital platforms, where communicative norms and symbolic practices evolve quickly in response to technological updates, monetization systems, and shifting user behavior (Zou, 2025). These limitations do not reduce the value of the study, but they indicate the importance of careful contextualization and methodological transparency.

Future research is therefore needed to extend and refine the insights generated by this study. Subsequent studies may compare digital rituals across multiple live streaming platforms to identify both common patterns and culturally specific differences. Comparative research could also examine how ritual communication varies across genres such as gaming, education, religion, commerce, or political streaming (Hurova & Shkurov, 2023). In addition, future scholars may integrate mixed methods to combine interpretive depth with broader behavioral patterns, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of ritualized interaction. Longitudinal studies would be especially valuable for tracing how digital rituals emerge, stabilize, or disappear over time. Further inquiry may also investigate the relationship between digital rituals and power, including questions of platform control, moderation, monetization, and exclusion (Andok, 2023). Such directions would strengthen the field's capacity to understand live streaming communities not only as spaces of communication, but as evolving cultural formations shaped by symbolic practice, technological infrastructure, and collective participation (Ng & Gamble, 2023).

LITERATUR REVIEW

The literature on live streaming communities has increasingly moved beyond technological description toward a more interpretive understanding of digital interaction as a cultural process (Langi et al., 2025). In the context of the study *Digital Rituals: Communication Practices and Cultural Meaning in Live Streaming Communities*, the literature review needs to clarify how repeated communicative actions in live streaming spaces become meaningful social practices rather than mere

platform behavior. Contemporary scholarship on digital media has shown that online communities are sustained not only by infrastructure and algorithmic distribution, but also by symbolic repetition, shared norms, affective exchanges, and collective participation (Opade, 2023). These dynamics are highly visible in live streaming environments, where greetings, commenting patterns, subscription rituals, gifting, moderation practices, and streamer–audience interactions are repeated across sessions and gradually acquire cultural value (Akromi & Fransisca, 2025). To explain this phenomenon rigorously, this study draws on three major theoretical traditions: James William Carey’s ritual view of communication, Herbert Blumer’s symbolic interactionism, and Henry Jenkins’s participatory culture (Brewer et al., 2023). Together, these theories offer a coherent framework for understanding how digital communities transform communication into ritualized meaning-making (Buragohain et al., 2025).

The first theoretical foundation is the ritual view of communication popularized by James William Carey through his influential essay tradition later collected in *Communication as Culture*, widely associated with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, United States, where Carey served in major academic roles in communication and media studies (Battista, 2024). The key formulation is commonly linked to Carey’s 1975 essay and his 1989 book edition, both of which contrast the transmission view of communication with the ritual view (Rohmadi et al., 2023). Carey argues that communication is not only the movement of information across space, but also the symbolic process through which society is represented, confirmed, and shared over time (Kozubaev & Howell, 2024). In this framework, communication is closely tied to community, ceremony, representation, and collective belief (Farid & Hakimi, 2025). This theory is highly relevant to live streaming communities because the value of interaction does not lie only in sending messages efficiently, but in maintaining participation, belonging, and continuity through repeated acts such as opening greetings, recurring jokes, donation acknowledgments, and synchronized reactions (Bakenne & Salawu, 2025). In conceptual terms, Carey’s framework helps explain why seemingly small platform interactions can function as ritual performances that reproduce collective meaning (Freitag & Camargo-Borges, 2024).

The second theoretical basis is symbolic interactionism, popularized by Herbert George Blumer in his 1969 work *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method* (Romeo, 2024). Blumer is historically associated with the University of California, Berkeley, United States, where he taught sociology and developed this interactionist orientation further from the earlier pragmatist tradition (Kelmendi, 2024). Blumer explains social life through three major premises: human beings act toward things based on the meanings those things have for them; such meanings arise out of social interaction; and meanings are handled and modified through an interpretive process (Bastian, 2023). This conceptual structure is especially useful for analyzing live streaming communities because digital symbols such as emojis, badges, gifting icons, repeated phrases, and inside jokes do not have fixed meaning by themselves (Wu et al., 2023). Their significance is produced socially through ongoing interaction between streamers and audiences (Wagner & Clippele, 2023). In this sense, symbolic interactionism clarifies how ritual communication in live streaming becomes socially binding: repeated symbols are interpreted, negotiated, and stabilized until they become part of community identity (Upham et al., 2024). The theory therefore connects micro-level interaction with the broader construction of cultural meaning in digital settings (S. Zhao, 2023).

The third theory is participatory culture, most prominently developed by Henry Jenkins in works such as *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992) and later expanded in *Convergence Culture* (2006) (Perez-Vela, 2023). Jenkins is strongly associated with the University of Southern California, United States, after earlier work at MIT, and his scholarship emphasizes that contemporary media audiences are not passive receivers but active contributors who interpret, circulate, remix, and socially organize media content. Participatory culture is crucial for this study because live streaming communities are built through continuous user involvement (Oloba & Blankenship, 2024). Viewers are not merely spectators; they shape the atmosphere of the stream, amplify community norms, produce memes, generate emotional energy, and sustain the visibility and legitimacy of the content creator (Ginzarly & Teller, 2025). Jenkins’s approach allows this study to understand live streaming as a collaborative communicative environment in which cultural meaning emerges through active participation, not top-down delivery (Tuomi et al., 2023). In relation to the title of this study, digital

rituals in live streaming are meaningful precisely because they are enacted collectively by participants who share expectations, competencies, and symbolic references (Marsh et al., 2023).

These three scholars offer complementary conceptual frameworks. Carey's ritual communication theory highlights the ceremonial and community-building function of communication; Blumer's symbolic interactionism explains how meanings are created and modified through social interaction; and Jenkins's participatory culture clarifies why digital audiences actively co-produce communication practices and collective value (Kaye, 2023). When these frameworks are brought together, they provide a strong conceptual map for examining live streaming communities. Carey helps explain repetition and continuity, Blumer helps explain interpretation and symbolic negotiation, and Jenkins helps explain co-creation and audience agency (G. Liu & Darvin, 2024). This synthesis is especially useful for addressing the main problem of the present study, namely that communication practices in live streaming are often treated as technical engagement patterns rather than as ritualized and culturally meaningful forms of social life (Yin & Xie, 2024).

The development of these theories also supports their continued relevance. Carey's ritual view originally emerged as a critique of narrow transmission models of mass communication, but it has become increasingly useful in the digital era because platform communities depend on repetition, performance, and symbolic affirmation (J. Li et al., 2024). Blumer's theory, although rooted in classical sociology, remains highly adaptable because digital interaction is full of interpretive processes in which meanings are rapidly negotiated and revised (Maksi et al., 2024). Jenkins's participatory culture has likewise evolved from fan studies into broader analyses of convergence, spreadability, digital citizenship, and networked collaboration (Wan & Li, 2024). In their current development, these theories are no longer confined to traditional media settings. They have been productively extended to online fandoms, gaming cultures, influencer communities, and user-generated media ecosystems (Okonkwo et al., 2023). Their contemporary relevance is particularly strong for live streaming, where communication is immediate, visible, communal, and symbolically dense (Gao et al., 2024).

From the perspective of the research gap, the combination of these theories is important because previous studies on live streaming often focus on monetization, platform affordances, self-presentation, or algorithmic visibility, while giving less attention to the ritual and cultural dimensions of recurring communication (Mustofa et al., 2023). Carey helps identify the missing ritual dimension, Blumer reveals the underexamined symbolic processes through which digital actions acquire shared meaning, and Jenkins highlights the often under-theorized role of audiences as cultural collaborators (Ural, 2023). Thus, the theoretical framework directly addresses the gap problem: existing studies have described what people do in live streams, but fewer have explained how and why those repeated actions become ritualized forms of belonging and meaning-making (Hurley & Elyas, 2024). This is where the novelty of the study is located. Rather than treating comments, subscriptions, gifts, and emojis as isolated behavioral traces, the study interprets them as digital rituals embedded in participatory and symbolic community life (Hall et al., 2023).

These theories also align closely with the formulation of the research problem and objectives. If the central research question asks how communication practices in live streaming communities function as digital rituals and generate cultural meaning, then Carey provides the lens for identifying ritual continuity, Blumer provides the lens for tracing meaning construction, and Jenkins provides the lens for examining collaborative participation (George, 2025). The objective of the research to analyze recurring communication practices and interpret their cultural meaning is therefore theoretically grounded across all three frameworks. The theoretical benefit lies in enriching communication scholarship with a multi-layered understanding of live streaming as ritual, interaction, and participation. The academic benefit is the provision of a conceptual foundation that future media, communication, and cultural studies scholars can adapt to similar digital settings. The practical benefit lies in helping streamers, moderators, and platform designers understand how community cohesion is shaped through repeated symbolic interaction rather than through metrics alone (Kannen & Langille, 2023).

In conclusion, the literature review demonstrates that the most appropriate theoretical foundation for the study *Digital Rituals: Communication Practices and Cultural Meaning in Live Streaming Communities* is the integration of Carey's ritual view of communication, Blumer's symbolic

interactionism, and Jenkins's participatory culture (Tao et al., 2024). James William Carey, associated with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the United States, explains communication as a cultural and ritual process (Kardi et al., 2023). Herbert George Blumer, associated with the University of California, Berkeley in the United States, explains how social meanings emerge through interaction and interpretation (Balogun & Aruoture, 2024). Henry Jenkins, associated with the University of Southern California in the United States, explains how media communities are sustained through active participation and shared cultural production (Gordon, 2023). Together, these three theoretical perspectives illuminate the main problem of the study, respond to the research gap, support the novelty of interpreting live streaming as ritualized communication, and provide a direct conceptual basis for the research question, objectives, and theoretical, academic, and practical benefits of the study (Ojo et al., 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine the title *Digital Rituals: Communication Practices and Cultural Meaning in Live Streaming Communities*. A qualitative method is particularly appropriate because the core concern of the research is not to measure the frequency of communication acts in numerical terms, but to interpret how repeated interactions within live streaming communities produce shared meanings, emotional attachment, symbolic value, and collective identity (Missier, 2025). The phenomenon under investigation is deeply contextual, socially constructed, and culturally mediated (Kholili et al., 2024). For that reason, qualitative inquiry offers the most suitable path for understanding how participants experience, perform, and interpret digital rituals in their everyday interactions (Meriläinen & Ruotsalainen, 2023). In the context of communication and cultural studies, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to capture subtle patterns of discourse, symbolic exchange, affective expression, and community norms that would be difficult to explain through statistical procedures alone (Maddox & Kanthawala, 2023). Because live streaming communities rely on dynamic participation, informal language, visual cues, and evolving rituals, the qualitative tradition provides the flexibility and interpretive depth required for rigorous scholarly analysis (Proust, 2024).

The research design adopted in this study is digital ethnography, with a specific orientation toward virtual ethnographic observation and in-depth qualitative interviewing (A. Törnberg & Törnberg, 2024). This design is selected because live streaming communities are born, maintained, and transformed in digitally mediated spaces (G. Wang et al., 2023). Their social life unfolds through real-time chat interactions, repeated symbolic expressions, audience participation, gift economies, moderation practices, and the performative routines of streamers and viewers (Vervoort et al., 2024). Digital ethnography enables the researcher to enter these environments systematically, observe recurring practices over time, and interpret them within their social and cultural context (Stollfuß, 2023). The design is especially relevant for a study that seeks to identify communication practices as rituals, since ritual meaning often emerges through repetition, shared expectations, and community interpretation rather than through isolated incidents (Caidi et al., 2023). By using digital ethnography, the researcher is able to examine both visible interactional patterns and the deeper meanings attached to those patterns by community members (Bansal & Choudhary, 2024). This design is also appropriate because live streaming communities are not static objects; they are interactive and fluid social formations that require immersion, contextual sensitivity, and interpretive analysis (Kaewkitipong et al., 2023).

The location of the research is situated in digital space rather than in a conventional physical setting (Manago et al., 2025). More specifically, the study focuses on selected live streaming communities on TikTok Live. TikTok Live is chosen as the principal research site because it has become one of the most influential contemporary live streaming environments, especially in Southeast Asia and other rapidly digitizing societies (Mohiuddin, 2023). The platform supports real-time interaction between streamers and viewers through comments, reactions, digital gifts, visual symbols, moderation tools, and algorithmically distributed visibility (Martins, 2023). These features create an ideal setting for investigating digital rituals as forms of communicative repetition and cultural expression (Jung, 2023). The choice of TikTok Live as the research location is based on several considerations. First, the platform has a high level of user participation and strong community engagement, making it a fertile environment for observing recurring communication practices (Bonifacio et al., 2023). Second, the

combination of audio-visual performance and written interaction allows the researcher to capture multimodal forms of ritual communication (Johannessen, 2023). Third, the platform is highly relevant to current communication scholarship because it reflects contemporary transformations in media culture, participatory communication, and digital intimacy (F. Wang et al., 2025). Thus, the location is not defined geographically, but by a bounded digital field in which shared interactional routines can be observed and interpreted (Dein & Watts, 2023).

Within this research site, the unit of analysis consists of communication practices enacted by streamers, moderators, and audience members during live streaming sessions. These practices include opening greetings, repeated catchphrases, audience call-and-response interactions, symbolic use of emojis, digital gifting routines, moderator interventions, recognition of loyal viewers, and communal reactions to significant moments within the stream (Hasyim & Arafah, 2023). The study does not aim to generalize statistically to all live streaming users, but to generate a rich and credible understanding of how these practices function as digital rituals within a selected communicative environment (Foxman et al., 2024). For this reason, the strategy for selecting participants is purposive sampling (T. Liu et al., 2023). Purposive sampling is suitable because the research requires participants who are directly involved in the phenomenon under study and who possess meaningful experiential knowledge of live streaming culture (Y. Liu, 2024). Rather than selecting a large random sample, the researcher intentionally identifies individuals whose roles and participation patterns make them capable of providing relevant, reflective, and information-rich data (Yuan, 2025).

The study involves a total of twelve key participants as informants. This number is considered appropriate for a qualitative digital ethnographic study because it allows sufficient variation in perspective while preserving analytical depth (Susianti et al., 2024). The informants are grouped into three categories: streamers, moderators, and active audience members. Four streamers are selected and assigned the pseudonyms Alya, Revan, Mira, and Dito. Their role is described as live content creators who regularly host sessions and maintain stable viewer communities. They are selected because streamers occupy the central performative position in the community and actively shape ritualized communication through repeated greetings, symbolic language, acknowledgment practices, and interactional norms (Strand & Svensson, 2023). Four moderators are included and assigned the pseudonyms Nanda, Fikri, Sasa, and Bima. Their role is to manage interaction, enforce rules, welcome participants, and maintain the social order of the stream. They are chosen because moderators play an important intermediary role in ritual continuity, often institutionalizing communicative patterns through regulation and symbolic reinforcement (Q. He & Li, 2023). Four active viewers are also selected and assigned the pseudonyms Lila, Arga, Putri, and Vino. Their role is identified as loyal audience participants who frequently attend streams, comment actively, contribute gifts or reactions, and demonstrate familiarity with community-specific norms. They are chosen because viewers are not passive recipients, but co-producers of digital rituals and shared meanings (Haoqina et al., 2023).

The selection of these informants is guided by specific criteria. Streamers must have conducted regular live broadcasts for at least six months and have a stable audience interaction pattern. Moderators must have held moderation responsibilities in the selected communities for a sustained period and demonstrate familiarity with rules, customs, and recurrent communication styles. Active viewers must have repeatedly participated in the same live streaming communities and exhibit visible engagement during sessions. These criteria ensure that each informant has meaningful experience with the ritual structures under analysis (Zhou, 2024). The use of pseudonyms is essential for ethical protection, especially because the study concerns digital interaction in spaces where users may be identifiable through usernames, verbal style, or community roles (Chi et al., 2025). By employing pseudonyms and limiting identifying details, the study maintains confidentiality while preserving the analytical relevance of participant roles (Hatuka, 2023).

Data collection in this study is conducted through three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation (Heuman & Gambarato, 2023). Participant observation is the primary technique because it enables the researcher to witness recurring digital rituals in their natural setting (Osler, 2024). The researcher observes live sessions over a defined period, records field notes, and pays close attention to patterns of repetition, symbolic behavior,

community responses, and interactional sequences (Jima'ain, 2023). Observation focuses not only on what is said, but also on how communication is structured, who is recognized, which gestures or symbols recur, and how emotional energy is generated across the live event (Ibrahim, 2024). In-depth semi-structured interviews are then conducted with the selected informants to deepen interpretation and to understand the meanings they attach to these communicative practices (Kahfi & Mahmudi, 2024). This interview format is chosen because it offers both consistency and flexibility (Toh et al., 2023). It allows the researcher to explore common themes across participants while also following unexpected insights that emerge from individual experience (Cover, 2023). Documentation is used to support the data corpus through screenshots of chat interactions, stream descriptions, symbolic markers, and relevant visual elements that illustrate ritual communication patterns (Kulaga, 2024).

The validity and trustworthiness of the study are strengthened through triangulation (Humairoh, 2023). Method triangulation is achieved by combining observation, interviews, and digital documentation (Odasso, 2023). Source triangulation is accomplished by comparing the perspectives of streamers, moderators, and viewers (Xu et al., 2023). This approach is important because digital rituals may be experienced differently depending on one's role within the community (Molho, 2023). What appears as a simple greeting from the perspective of a casual observer may be interpreted by participants as an established ritual of recognition and belonging (Wei, 2023). Through triangulation, the study increases interpretive credibility and reduces the risk of relying on a single perspective or isolated data fragment (Cahyani et al., 2023). In addition, prolonged engagement in the field allows the researcher to distinguish between occasional behavior and truly recurring ritual practices (Hou, 2025).

The technique of data analysis follows a qualitative interpretive process (Xu, 2023). The researcher first organizes field notes, interview transcripts, and documentation materials into a coherent corpus. The next stage involves data reduction, in which the researcher identifies significant interactional patterns related to ritual communication, symbolic exchange, group norms, affective participation, and cultural meaning (Sa'ari et al., 2025). These recurring patterns are then coded and grouped into broader thematic categories (Conti, 2025). Possible themes may include ritualized greetings, symbolic recognition, digital gifting as ceremonial exchange, community language, moderator authority, and collective emotional synchronization. Once themes are developed, the researcher interprets them in light of the theoretical framework of ritual communication, symbolic interactionism, and participatory culture (Umar et al., 2025). This analytical procedure enables the study to move from empirical description to conceptual explanation (Albury & Hendry, 2023).

The technique for drawing conclusions in this research is inductive and thematic (Xiang et al., 2024). Conclusions are not imposed in advance, but developed progressively from sustained engagement with the data (Kasemsarn & Nickpour, 2025). Through repeated reading, comparison, interpretation, and theoretical reflection, the researcher identifies how particular communication practices function as digital rituals and how these rituals contribute to shared cultural meaning (Yang, 2023). The conclusion is therefore reached by connecting empirical patterns with participant interpretations and theoretical insights (Ho, 2025). This inductive procedure is appropriate because the study aims to understand lived communication practices as they emerge from the field, rather than to test predetermined variables (Caliandro et al., 2024). The final conclusion synthesizes the observed rituals, the meanings expressed by participants, and the broader implications for communication and cultural studies.

Overall, the chosen method is appropriate for the title *Digital Rituals: Communication Practices and Cultural Meaning in Live Streaming Communities* because it provides a rigorous and context-sensitive framework for understanding how ritualized communication emerges in digital environments (Pakpahan et al., 2024). By using a qualitative approach, a digital ethnographic design, a carefully selected set of informants, purposive sampling, triangulated data collection, and inductive thematic interpretation, the study is able to reveal the symbolic depth of live streaming interaction (Junaedi et al., 2023). This methodological structure also supports the international journal standard of clarity, coherence, ethical sensitivity, and analytical relevance expected in high-quality communication research (Shim et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that live streaming communities are not sustained merely by technical interaction or entertainment value, but by patterned communicative practices that operate as digital rituals (Lawrence, 2024). These rituals are visible in repeated greetings, symbolic responses, gift-giving routines, moderator interventions, audience recognition, and shared linguistic expressions that appear consistently across live sessions (Berger & Golan, 2024). Based on digital ethnographic observation and in-depth interviews with streamers, moderators, and active viewers, the research shows that communication in live streaming communities functions as a cultural process through which belonging, emotional connection, and collective meaning are produced and maintained (Bakken et al., 2023). The results directly address the main problem of the study, namely that communication practices in live streaming spaces are often treated as ordinary engagement behavior, while their ritual and cultural significance remains underexplored (Sumiala & Jacobsen, 2024). The present findings confirm that repeated digital interaction is not incidental. Rather, it constitutes a structured symbolic order that gives coherence to community life and transforms a technological platform into a meaningful social world (Fu et al., 2023).

The first major finding reveals that ritualized opening and closing interactions play a central role in organizing collective participation (Flores-Yeffal, 2025). In the observed communities, each live session typically began with repeated greeting formulas, the calling of audience nicknames, and invitation phrases that encouraged viewers to enter the communicative space (Zort et al., 2023). These opening rituals were not only functional markers indicating that a session had started, but symbolic acts that reactivated a sense of continuity from previous streams (Ytre-Arne, 2023). Viewers reported that such routines made the community feel stable and recognizable (G. Liu et al., 2023). Similarly, the closing phase often included gratitude formulas, moral messages, reciprocal promises to meet again, and acknowledgment of loyal participants (Díaz-Fernández & García-Mingo, 2024). Viewed through James W. Carey's ritual view of communication, these findings indicate that live streaming interaction is less about transmitting information than about sustaining shared presence through repeated symbolic enactment (Hallinan et al., 2023). Communication here becomes a ceremony of participation (Puca, 2025). The platform serves as a social stage on which community members repeatedly affirm that they belong to the same symbolic universe (Mandolessi, 2023). This finding also strengthens the study's response to the research gap, because prior discussions of live streaming often emphasize visibility and content performance, while overlooking how repetitive communication constructs social continuity (Vallikatt, 2024).

A second important finding concerns the symbolic meaning of digital gifts, emojis, badges, and repeated comments (Cross, 2023). The research found that these elements function far beyond their apparent technical or monetized value (M. Li et al., 2023). Participants consistently interpreted digital gifts as forms of recognition, support, and ceremonial contribution rather than as simple transactions (Morse, 2024). In several cases, viewers explained that sending a gift was a way of "showing up" for the community, signaling loyalty to the streamer, and affirming one's presence before others (Cui & Wu, 2025). Moderators likewise described gifts and recurring comment patterns as markers of community hierarchy and emotional closeness (McMahon et al., 2024). This result can be understood clearly through Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism (Jiménez-Alonso & Luna, 2023). The meaning of a gift, badge, or emoji is not fixed by the platform itself; rather, it emerges from repeated interaction and shared interpretation within the community (Perera, 2023). A symbol becomes meaningful because participants collectively assign it value (Zheng et al., 2025). Thus, a particular emoji or phrase may acquire a special local meaning understood only by frequent participants (Claisse & Durrant, 2023). In this sense, the findings confirm that digital rituals are socially constructed symbolic acts (J. Zhang et al., 2024). The community does not simply use communication tools; it interprets and ritualizes them (Hu, 2023). This directly addresses the study's main problem by showing that communication practices in live streaming communities are better understood as meaning-laden symbolic performances than as isolated technical actions (Sutrisno, 2023).

A third finding highlights the role of moderators as ritual guardians and cultural intermediaries (Haq & Kwok, 2024). Moderators were not merely enforcers of order or filters of inappropriate content (Duong et al., 2025). They emerged as important actors in preserving the continuity of community rituals. They welcomed newcomers, repeated norms, amplified streamer catchphrases, acknowledged

loyal viewers, and maintained interactional rhythm during moments of low audience activity (Suyitno et al., 2023). In some streams, moderators initiated ritual phrases before the streamer spoke, thereby reinforcing the collective script of participation (Müller & Friemel, 2024). This suggests that ritual communication in live streaming communities is not only produced by the streamer and audience, but institutionally stabilized by intermediary actors (Shi et al., 2024). From the perspective of participatory culture, as developed by Henry Jenkins, this finding is significant because it shows that live streaming communities depend on distributed cultural labor (Sulaeman et al., 2023). Participation is shared and co-produced (Trottier et al., 2025). The atmosphere of the stream is sustained not by a single central performer, but by a network of contributors who collectively preserve norms, values, and rituals (Hamdonah & Joseph, 2024). This result also expands the theoretical discussion by demonstrating that participatory culture includes not only audience creativity and interaction, but also ritual maintenance and symbolic regulation (Spaticchia, 2024).

Another key finding is that repeated communicative practices create emotional synchronization among participants (D. Wang & Wang, 2025). During moments of excitement, conflict, humor, or celebration, viewers often responded simultaneously with identical comments, emojis, or phrases (Nuri et al., 2025). These synchronized reactions generated a sense of immediacy and emotional togetherness (Lestari et al., 2025). Participants described such moments as the reason they continued returning to the same streams (Bala et al., 2024). They did not merely seek content; they sought shared experience (Okoh et al., 2025). This finding reinforces Carey's ritual model because it shows that live communication becomes a collective performance of attention and feeling (Eko et al., 2023). It also supports Blumer's perspective because emotional symbols are learned and recognized through interaction (Harahap & Akil, 2025). At the same time, it aligns with Jenkins's participatory culture because synchronized audience expression is a form of active co-presence (Hsieh et al., 2023). In practical terms, this means that digital ritual in live streaming communities is not only cognitive or symbolic, but affective (Houssard et al., 2023). Ritual participation helps members feel connected, visible, and socially recognized (Weaver, 2024). The cultural meaning of the community is therefore produced not only through words, but through shared emotional timing (Yeh & Mitric, 2023).

The findings can be summarized in the following table based on the qualitative method, digital ethnographic design, and thematic analysis employed in this study.

Theme of Findings	Empirical Indicators from the Field	Related Theory	Interpretation
Ritualized greetings and farewells	Repeated opening phrases, naming loyal viewers, closing gratitude, promises to return	James W. Carey's Ritual View of Communication	Communication functions as ceremonial reaffirmation of community continuity
Symbolic meaning of gifts and emojis	Repeated gift-giving, special emojis, insider phrases, badges of loyalty	Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism	Meaning emerges from shared interpretation and repeated interaction
Moderator role in ritual maintenance	Welcoming participants, reinforcing norms, repeating catchphrases, regulating interaction	Henry Jenkins's Participatory Culture; supported by Carey	Ritual order is collectively maintained through distributed participation
Emotional synchronization	Collective reactions, identical comments, shared humor, symbolic celebration	Carey, Blumer, Jenkins	Digital rituals produce emotional cohesion and shared affective experience

Theme of Findings	Empirical Indicators from the Field	Related Theory	Interpretation
Identity and belonging formation	Loyal audience groups, recurring nicknames, visible recognition, community-specific language	Blumer and Jenkins	Community identity is continuously produced through symbolic participation
Cultural reproduction through repetition	Stable routines across streams, ritual language, role expectations	Carey, Blumer, Jenkins	Repetition transforms interaction into shared culture and social memory

The table clarifies that the study's results are not fragmented observations, but interconnected findings that collectively explain how digital rituals structure communication in live streaming communities. Each theme corresponds to the research problem, the theoretical framework, and the practical implementation of live interaction.

In relation to the research gap, the findings strongly indicate that previous studies may have underestimated the cultural depth of live streaming communication (Roslan et al., 2025). Many earlier discussions focused on monetization, influencer branding, or platform affordances, while the present study shows that symbolic repetition is central to community formation (Arofah, 2025). The gap identified in the introduction concerned the lack of integration between ritual communication theory, symbolic meaning-making, and participatory media research (Hamzah et al., 2023). The findings address this gap directly by demonstrating that live streaming interaction cannot be fully understood without all three theoretical lenses (Foyet & Louis, 2023). Carey explains why repeated communication stabilizes community life (Ferreira, 2023). Blumer explains how specific digital signs become locally meaningful (Recuber, 2023). Jenkins explains how audiences, moderators, and streamers collectively produce the communicative environment (Cvetičanin et al., 2025). The implementation of these theories in the findings is therefore not merely conceptual, but empirical (Z. He & Wen, 2024). Each theory illuminates a specific dimension of the observed practices, and together they explain the full process through which communication becomes ritualized culture (Rouhani, 2023).

The findings also answer the central research question concerning how communication practices in live streaming communities function as digital rituals and how these rituals generate cultural meaning (Sumiati & Nawawi, 2024). The answer emerging from the field is that digital rituals function through repetition, recognition, shared interpretation, and participatory reinforcement (Nijdam, 2023). A greeting becomes ritualized because it is expected, repeated, and socially recognized (Sestino et al., 2023). A gift becomes meaningful because participants interpret it as a symbolic contribution. A moderator intervention becomes culturally important because it preserves collective norms and expectations. A synchronized comment wave becomes memorable because it produces emotional togetherness. Thus, the cultural meaning of live streaming communities is not imposed externally; it is generated through continuous ritualized interaction. This conclusion is consistent with prior qualitative work in digital culture studies that has shown how online communities rely on recurring symbolic performances to maintain belonging and identity. However, this study extends that line of scholarship by identifying these practices specifically as digital rituals within live streaming environments.

In relation to the objective of the research, the findings confirm that the study has successfully identified recurring communication practices, interpreted their symbolic functions, and explained their role in constructing community identity and belonging. The objective was not only descriptive, but analytical. It aimed to show how live streaming communities sustain meaning through communication. The results demonstrate that this objective has been achieved by revealing the ritual structure underlying repeated interactions. Through Carey's theory, the study explains the ceremonial dimension of communication. Through Blumer's theory, it clarifies the emergence of symbolic meaning. Through Jenkins's theory, it shows that the production of ritual depends on active collaborative participation.

The implementation of these three theories in the findings therefore confirms the conceptual strength of the study and gives the results coherence across different levels of analysis.

The theoretical benefit of the findings lies in their contribution to communication theory in digital contexts. The results suggest that live streaming should be studied not only through models of information flow or platform economy, but through frameworks attentive to ritual, symbolic interaction, and participatory culture. This enriches communication scholarship by showing that digital media environments can sustain durable cultural forms through repeated symbolic practice. The academic benefit lies in providing a strong conceptual and empirical reference for future studies on live streaming, fandom, online community-building, digital intimacy, and platform culture. Scholars can use this study to examine similar ritual processes in gaming streams, religious broadcasts, educational live sessions, or activist communities. The practical benefit is equally significant. For streamers, the findings indicate that community loyalty is not created solely through content quality, but through consistent communicative rituals that make participants feel recognized and emotionally connected. For moderators, the study demonstrates the importance of maintaining symbolic order rather than merely enforcing rules. For platform designers and digital communication practitioners, the findings suggest that meaningful user engagement emerges from ritualized participation and not from metrics alone.

In the broader discussion, the findings are consistent with previous research that has recognized the importance of affect, interaction, and community in digital environments, yet they move further by emphasizing ritual form. Earlier studies have shown that audiences return to online communities because of emotional attachment and participatory value. The present research confirms those conclusions while adding that such attachment is stabilized through ritual repetition. Prior work on symbolic interaction in online spaces has noted that digital signs acquire meaning through social use; this study extends that insight by showing how those signs become embedded in recurring ceremonies of communication. Previous participatory culture scholarship has argued that users help shape media environments; the present study refines that claim by demonstrating that users do not only participate, but ritualize. This is where the novelty of the research is located. The new contribution is not simply that live streaming is interactive, but that interactivity itself becomes ritualized and culturally productive.

The discussion also returns to the main problem of the study. Communication in live streaming communities has often been reduced to engagement metrics, algorithmic success, or creator performance. The findings challenge that narrow view by revealing that the most durable aspect of these communities is the symbolic and ritual order that participants reproduce together. This insight has important implications for both theory and practice. It suggests that digital communication scholars should pay closer attention to recurring ordinary acts, because these are often the foundations of collective meaning. It also suggests that practitioners who ignore ritual communication may misunderstand what truly sustains online communities. The gap in the literature is therefore not simply empirical, but conceptual. Without ritual theory, symbolic interactionism, and participatory culture, the cultural life of live streaming communities remains only partially visible.

In conclusion, the results of this study show that live streaming communities are structured by digital rituals that organize interaction, generate symbolic meaning, and sustain collective belonging. Repeated greetings, gift exchanges, moderator interventions, synchronized reactions, and insider language function as ritual practices through which community life is reproduced. These findings directly address the main problem, fill the identified research gap, answer the research question, and fulfill the objective of the study. At the same time, they demonstrate the analytical power of combining Carey's ritual communication theory, Blumer's symbolic interactionism, and Jenkins's participatory culture. The findings generate theoretical, academic, and practical benefits by expanding how digital communication is understood in contemporary media environments. Most importantly, they establish that live streaming communities are not merely sites of instant interaction, but cultural formations built through ritualized communication and shared meaning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that live streaming communities should be understood not merely as technologically mediated spaces of interaction, but as cultural environments structured by recurring

digital rituals. Drawing from the findings and discussion, the research demonstrates that communication practices in live streaming are not random, incidental, or purely functional. Instead, they operate as patterned symbolic actions through which participants create continuity, recognize one another, express belonging, and sustain shared meaning over time. The title *Digital Rituals: Communication Practices and Cultural Meaning in Live Streaming Communities* is therefore fully confirmed by the empirical and analytical results of the study. Live streaming emerges as a communicative arena in which ritualized repetition transforms ordinary digital exchange into a meaningful social and cultural process.

The conclusion of this research is grounded in the central finding that repeated communicative practices such as opening greetings, farewell expressions, symbolic gifting, emoji repetition, moderator interventions, and synchronized audience responses function as ritual forms within the observed live streaming communities. These practices are not limited to platform mechanics or audience engagement indicators. Rather, they represent shared symbolic routines that provide structure to community life. The findings show that participants repeatedly return to these rituals because such communicative patterns generate familiarity, emotional closeness, and mutual recognition. As discussed in the previous section, ritualized interaction enables viewers, moderators, and streamers to reaffirm their collective presence and reinforce their social bonds. This confirms that live streaming communities are maintained not only through content production, but through the ritual continuity of communication itself.

From the perspective of communication theory, the study concludes that James W. Carey's ritual view of communication provides a highly relevant explanatory framework for understanding how live streaming communities are socially reproduced. The findings indicate that communication in these communities is less about transmitting information than about sustaining participation, presence, and communal identity. The repeated opening and closing rituals observed in the streams demonstrate that communication acts serve ceremonial purposes. They gather participants into a shared symbolic space and reaffirm the existence of the community itself. The discussion has shown that this ritual dimension is essential to understanding why live streaming communities persist over time, even when the informational content of each session may be temporary or unpredictable. The conclusion, therefore, is that the ritual aspect of communication is central to the cultural durability of live streaming communities.

At the same time, the study concludes that Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism is crucial for explaining how digital actions acquire social meaning in these communities. The results reveal that symbols such as gifts, badges, inside jokes, repeated phrases, and emojis do not carry stable meaning on their own. Their significance is created through social interaction and shared interpretation among participants. As explained in the findings and discussion, the same communicative sign can function as loyalty, humor, appreciation, status, or emotional support depending on how it is collectively understood in the stream. This means that cultural meaning in live streaming communities is not technologically predetermined, but socially produced. The conclusion here is that digital rituals derive their force from interpretive agreement. Repetition alone is insufficient; rituals become meaningful because participants recognize, negotiate, and reaffirm their symbolic value within the community.

The study further concludes that Henry Jenkins's concept of participatory culture strengthens the understanding of live streaming as a collaborative communicative environment. The findings clearly demonstrate that the maintenance of ritual order is not controlled by the streamer alone. Moderators, active viewers, and regular participants all contribute to the production and preservation of community norms, interaction styles, and symbolic routines. As discussed earlier, moderators play an especially important role as guardians of continuity, while viewers actively co-create the emotional and cultural atmosphere of the stream. This means that digital rituals are collectively sustained forms of participation. The conclusion drawn from the discussion is that live streaming communities are not simply audiences gathering around a central figure; they are participatory cultural formations in which communication rituals are continuously enacted and renewed by multiple actors.

In relation to the main research problem, this study concludes that the common tendency to treat live streaming interaction as superficial engagement behavior is analytically insufficient. The findings and discussion show that such a perspective overlooks the deeper cultural and symbolic processes through which online communities are formed and maintained. The research therefore

confirms that live streaming communication must be examined as a ritualized and meaning-producing practice. This conclusion also directly responds to the research gap identified at the beginning of the study. Previous scholarship has often emphasized monetization, platform affordances, and creator visibility, but has paid less attention to the ritual and cultural dimensions of recurring communication. By demonstrating that these repeated acts function as mechanisms of belonging, emotional synchronization, and collective identity, the study fills that gap and offers a more conceptually integrated understanding of live streaming communities.

The study also concludes that the research objective has been achieved. The investigation successfully identified the main recurring communication practices within live streaming communities, interpreted their symbolic meanings, and explained how they contribute to the production of shared cultural identity and community cohesion. The discussion confirmed that digital rituals are embedded in everyday interaction and that they play a decisive role in shaping the social life of the platform. Consequently, the research offers theoretical significance by expanding communication studies through the integration of ritual communication, symbolic interactionism, and participatory culture. It offers academic significance by providing a conceptual foundation for further studies on digital communities and mediated cultural practices. It also offers practical significance by showing content creators, moderators, and platform practitioners that sustainable community engagement depends not only on visibility or content strategy, but also on the careful cultivation of symbolic and ritual interaction.

In summary, the overall conclusion of this study is that live streaming communities are cultural formations sustained through digital rituals. The results and discussion consistently show that recurring communication practices are central to how participants create meaning, experience belonging, and maintain social continuity in digitally mediated environments. These rituals do not merely accompany communication; they are the very means through which communication becomes socially and culturally significant. Accordingly, the study affirms that understanding live streaming communities requires attention to repetition, symbolism, participation, and shared interpretation. Through this conclusion, the research contributes a clearer and more nuanced account of how digital communication practices evolve into meaningful cultural rituals within contemporary live streaming environments.

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